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# COLONEL E. E. S. WHEATLEY

A short biography of Colonel Edward Eric Spencer WHEATLEY, C.B.E., D.F.C., T.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., C.B.E., an officer in the British Army between 1916 and 1932, and again between 1938 and 1950.

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## Colonel Edward Eric Spencer WHEATLEY, C.B.E., D.F.C., T.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

The careers of Army officers of this period was extremely varied, but few were as varied as that of Colonel Edward Eric Spencer WHEATLEY, C.B.E., D.F.C., T.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.. Commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery, he was seconded to the Royal Flying Corps; being seriously injured in Salonika but being awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in North Russia. WHEATLEY had to leave the embryonic Royal Air Force in 1919, and then served with an Indian mountain battery. He then transferred to the Royal Army Pay Corps but left the Army in 1932. He qualified as a doctor, joined the Royal Army Medical Corps Territorial Army in 1938 where during the Second World War he served in North Africa, being awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire. After the war, WHEATLEY had to have his injured leg removed, and then dedicated his life to helping other amputees.

Born into an Army family, his father was Henry Spencer WHEATLEY and his mother Lilley Mary WHEATLEY (nee STEWART). Henry WHEATLEY was a senior officer in the British Indian Army, serving with the Bengal Cavalry, so all his four children were born in India. They were all born in Bengal, India, and their dates of births were:

- 21 October 1883 – Mary Esme Spencer WHEATLEY;
- 9 September 1886 – Arthur Haldane Spencer WHEATLEY;
- 20 January 1892 – Dorothy Irene Spencer WHEATLEY;
- 29 October 1898 – Edward Eric Spencer WHEATLEY.

In the 1911 census, Colonel Henry WHEATLEY, C.B., and his family were living at The Knoll, Lower Bourne, Farnham in Surrey, to where he had moved following his retirement from the British Indian Army. As was usual in this period, they employed two domestic servants, a cook and a parlour maid, who lived in the house with them. Later, they moved to Springhayes, Woodbury, near Exeter in Devon, which is where Henry died on 27 December 1932. He left an estate of £2,504 18s to his widow, Lilley. Their daughter Mary, who had married and become Mary MASEFIELD, continued to live in Springhayes until her death on 28 September 1955, when her estate of £7,460 6s 7d passed to her sister Dorothy, who had married Reginald RODWELL.

Edward was baptized on 7 January 1889 in Lansdowne, Bengal, India, but as was common with British officers in the Indian Army, he was sent to a school in the United Kingdom that specialised in preparing young men for a career in the Army. Edward (who also known as Kerry WHEATLEY) was sent to Wellington College in Berkshire, which was founded to receive the sons of Army officers, and to educate and prepare them for their own Army career.

From Wellington College, WHEATLEY gained entry to the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich as a Gentleman Cadet. Whilst at Woolwich, he represented the academy at rugby union. The Great War (or First World War) started while WHEATLEY was still at school. He was commissioned on 10 May 1916 (still short of eighteenth birthday) in the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery (service number 5995). He was soon transferred to the newly formed Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) (Military Wing) with effect from 19 December 1916. WHEATLEY qualified as an observer with the R.F.C. and was posted to France.

After service in France, WHEATLEY was posted to Salonika in Greece. It was whilst serving in Salonika that he was shot down sustaining a serious injury to his right leg that was to plague him for the rest of his life. From Salonika, he was posted to North Russia during the 1918 and 1919 campaign against the Bolsheviks. WHEATLEY was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his gallantry during this campaign. His award was published in the London Gazette on 18 November 1919, and the citation read: *'Observer Officer Edward Eric Spencer Wheatley (Roy. Arty.). Has rendered valuable services in artillery observation from low altitudes, having been mentioned several times for this work. During the operations on the Dwina in June, 1919, he carried out many contact patrols, flying very low over the heads of the enemy, keeping our headquarters constantly and accurately informed as to the position.'*

Meanwhile, on 1 April 1918 the Royal Flying Corps had become the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.), and with the end of the First World War the embryonic R.A.F. was significantly reduced in size. WHEATLEY was one of the several Army officers who found themselves redundant and relinquished his commission on 9 October 1919. Effectively unemployed, but still an Army officer, he managed to obtain a secondment to the Indian Ordnance Department on 30 July 1920. He was placed on half pay however; he was restored to full pay on 13 June 1923. WHEATLEY served with a mountain battery of the Indian Army. In India, he boxed for the Army despite developing chronic osteomyelitis (infection of the bone) in his right leg. In addition, he also served for a period as Aide-de-Camp to the Viceroy of India, a prestigious appointment.

On 20 June 1924, WHEATLEY transferred from Extra Regimental Employed List to the Royal Army Pay Corps in the rank of Lieutenant. He qualified as a Paymaster and was posted from India to Aldershot Command in the United Kingdom. His leg and the chronic osteomyelitis continued to cause him problems, with him being placed on the half pay list on 16 September 1927 on account of his ill-health. Realising that his Army career was over due to his poor health and the cutbacks of the 1920's, WHEATLEY began to study medicine at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

1932 was an important year in WHEATLEY's life, as he qualified in that year with a conjoint medical degree as a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons (M.R.C.S.) and the diploma of the Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians (L.R.C.P.). Then on 16 September 1932, having spent five years on the half pay list, WHEATLEY retired from the Army on the grounds of ill-health.

Kerry WHEATLEY started his new life as a General Practitioner in Reading, and as usual in that period he also undertook surgery as well. He joined the Territorial Army on 30 April 1938 being granted a commission in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the rank of Major. On 24 April 1939, WHEATLEY raised and commanded the 11<sup>th</sup> Motor Ambulance Convoy. He took the unit to France following the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. He also served with the 6<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station on being promoted Acting Lieutenant Colonel on 7 March 1940; and with the fall of France he returned successfully to the United Kingdom. On his return to the United Kingdom, WHEATLEY was promoted Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 7 June 1940, and then on 6 August 1942, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Colonel. He assumed command of the 69<sup>th</sup> British General Hospital, mobilizing and preparing the unit for service overseas. The hospital was allocated to the 1<sup>st</sup> Army in preparation for the forthcoming invasion of North Africa.

Now promoted to the rank of Temporary Colonel, WHEATLEY landed at Bougie in Algeria on 11 November 1942 under command of 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Unfortunately, the ship carrying all the stores and equipment was sunk, so WHEATLEY had to improvise in establishing the British General Hospital ashore. His work was rewarded with the award of the degree of Commander of Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.) on 5 August 1943. His citation states:

*Colonel Wheatley landed at Bougie on 11 Nov in command of 69 Gen Hospital which lost all its stores and equipment on that date. During the three following days by leadership of a high order he provided a hospital service for wounded and shipwrecked in considerable numbers. His untiring devotion to duty and his unfailing cheerfulness in very difficult circumstances during these days were a fine example.*

He was recommended for this award by the Commander of the Bougie Area, supported by Major General CLARK who was the General Officer Commanding the Lines of Communication for the Allied Forces in North Africa and Major General GALE the Chief Administrative Officer. After the end of the campaign in Tunisia, WHEATLEY continued to serve with the Central Mediterranean Forces until the end of the war. In September 1945, WHEATLEY was posted to Singapore as the Assistant Director of Medical Services. The injury to his leg was continuing to cause WHEATLEY serious problems, so in 1946 he returned to the United Kingdom to enter Millbank Hospital in London where his leg was amputated above the knee.

When he recovered from the operation, WHEATLEY began work at the Ministry of Pensions Artificial Limb Service at Roehampton. Queen Mary's Hospital at Roehampton in South West London began specialising in the making and fitting of artificial limbs in the early 1900's and treated most of the servicemen who lost limbs in the First World War. After the Second World War, the hospital treated some twenty-thousand servicemen and women, and some two-thousand civilians injured during the war. The hospital also offered training and physiotherapy for the recovering patients.



On 28 March 1950, WHEATLEY ceased to belong to the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers having now exceeded the age limit of fifty years. He was granted the rank of Honorary Colonel, his substantive rank being Major. Later that year, on 21 April he was awarded the Territorial Army Efficiency Decoration (T.D.) (shown left) for twelve years' service in the Territorial Army.<sup>1</sup>

WHEATLEY continued to work at Roehampton until his retirement in 1963. He died on 22 June 1967 at Kingston Hospital, Surrey; at the age of sixty-eight years.

His obituary was published in the British Medical Journal of 26 August 1967 where a colleague describes WHEATLEY's significant contribution to the Limb Service. Having suffered himself from a wound later requiring amputation, also being a soldier and engineer, he had a particular affinity with the amputees he worked with.

<sup>1</sup> In 1949, the period of qualification for this award was reduced from twenty years to twelve years. Each year of war service counted for two years' service.

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