

## Sapper William Victor Demery®

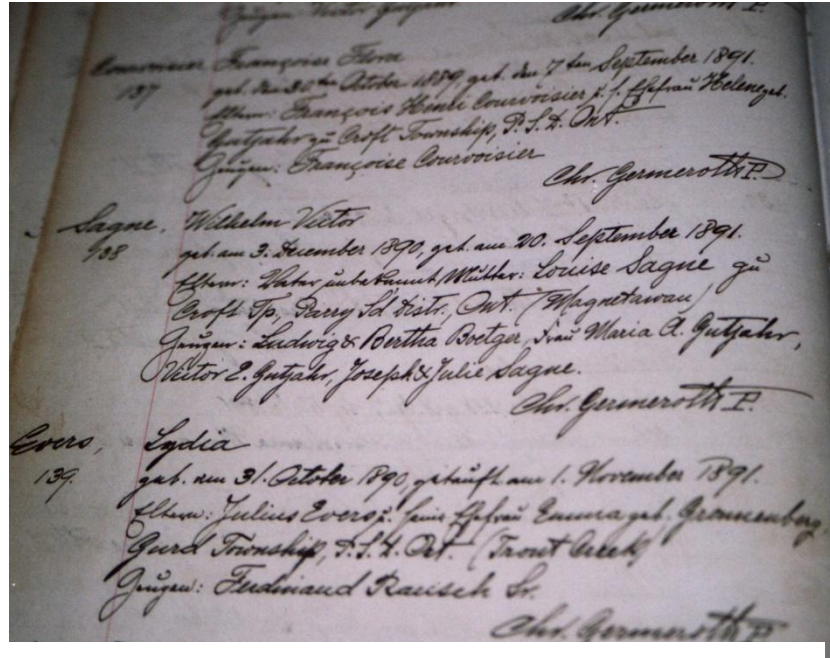
Regimental number: 657921

2nd Divisional Pontoon Bridging Transport Unit, Canadian Engineers, Canadian Expeditionary Force

born: 3 December 1890 – died: 23 January 1919

Wilhelm (William) Victor Sagne was born on 3 December 1890 in Magnetawan, Ontario—60 kilometres northeast of Parry Sound—and was baptized at the Ontario Lutheran Church in Magnetawan on 21 September 1891.<sup>1</sup> His mother, Louisa Sagne, was born about 1864 in St. Imier, near Berne in Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> The baptismal certificate indicates that his father was “unknown.”

Louisa and her parents, Jules and Juliana (Wulhamier) Sagne (both born in Switzerland about 1830)<sup>3</sup> had been pioneers in the Magnetawan area.



Wilhelm Victor Sagne's baptismal record, written in old German (Family source)

The Sagne family was part of a larger settlement of Swiss immigrants to the area in the mid to late 1870's. The initiative for Swiss settlement in northern Ontario came from Baroness Elise de Koerber, who recruited immigrants on behalf of the Canadian government, particularly in the Bern, Liestal, and Saanen areas. Swiss agriculturalists had explored the Nipissing region to find suitable land. By the end of 1875 the baroness had sent some four hundred immigrants to Canada. Some of them settled in the Magnetawan area, where they formed a small Swiss colony. . . . Mme de Koerber had hoped to create two concentrations of Swiss, one for the French-speaking at Doe Lake and the other for German speakers at Magnetawan. . . . The hardships of settlement discouraged many, and by 1881 only about 200 Swiss remained in this region. . . . The name of the location on the Magnetawan River where the Sagne family settled became known as Poverty Bay, a reflection of the 'hardscrabble' existence many of the settlers experienced.<sup>4</sup>



Mary and William Demery (Family source)

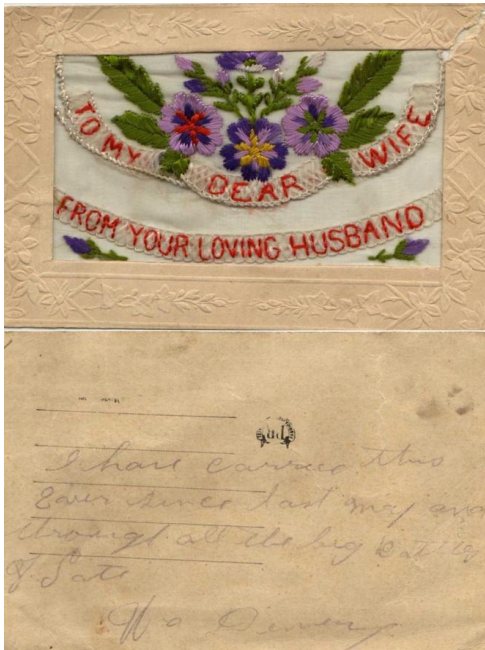
Louisa Sagne married William Demery in the early 1890's at Biscotasing Station/Michipicoton Station in northern Ontario.<sup>5</sup> William was born in about 1857 in Ontario, the son of Francis and Caroline Demery.<sup>6</sup> In 1894, William and Louisa had a son, Orville George Demara, who was born on 22 September 1894 in Bracebridge, Ontario.<sup>7</sup>

Less than a year later, Louisa died. She drowned accidentally on 17 June 1895, at the age of 31,<sup>8</sup> leaving behind William Senior, a labourer in Bracebridge, and two sons. In 1901, young William was living with his grandmother, Julia, then a widow, in Croft Township, near Parry Sound. No trace has been found of where William's father was living after 1895, until 1911



Last known photograph of Sapper William Demery (Family source)

when he was living with his parents in Bracebridge.<sup>9</sup> His son Orville was living with his paternal uncle and aunt in Scugog, Ontario in 1901.<sup>10</sup>



Post card sent by William to Mary (Family source)

In 1909, William, who was then a railway conductor, married Mary Elizabeth Paul, who was born on 15 September 1883 in Ontario.<sup>11</sup> They married on Mary's 21st birthday—15 September 1909—in Ahmic Harbour, Ontario. Mary had two children prior to her marriage to William: Myrtle Octave (born on 20 May 1905)<sup>12</sup> and Dave (born 20 February 1908).<sup>13</sup> She and William had five more children: Nella Louise (born 19 September 1910, Irene Mae (born 6 August 1912), Effie Inez (born 25 December 1913), Paul William (born 27 May 1915) and Jean Carolyn (born 5 January 1917).<sup>14</sup>

William enlisted, at the age of 26, in the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 24 April 1916 in Burks Falls, Ontario.<sup>15</sup> He was a lumberman, 5' 5" tall and had a medium complexion and brown hair and eyes. On 1 November 1916, he embarked with the 162nd (Parry Sound) Battalion for Europe from Halifax—two months

before the birth of his last child. He arrived in Liverpool on 11 November and two weeks later he transferred to the 2nd Pioneer Battalion. On 29 November he went to the Western Front.

On 28 August 1917, he was admitted to the 5th and then the 10th Canadian Field Ambulance with an inflammation of the connective tissue in his left leg. He recovered and rejoined his unit on 15 September. In mid-December of that year he had two weeks leave.

In June 1918 he joined the 2nd Divisional Pontoon Bridging Transport Unit of the Canadian Engineers. These units were formed when the Canadian Engineers were reorganized in 1918 and were relatively small units. Each unit "was composed of three officers and 69 other ranks and each was equipped with six pontoons, three trestle wagons and 225 feet of "medium bridge". They performed both bridging and field park duties."<sup>16</sup>

Extract from chaplains' journal, No. 1 CCCS  
Source: BIFHSGO

In January 1919, the unit was stationed in Troisdort, about 15 kilometres northeast of Bonn, Germany. The men were involved mainly in exercising and grooming the animals and caring for equipment—bridges and wagons.<sup>17</sup> On 15 January, William was admitted to the 14th Canadian Field Ambulance with pyrexia

(fever) of unknown origin. Two days later, when he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, the diagnosis was changed to bronchial pneumonia. He died a week later and the cause of death was identified at the time as influenza.<sup>18</sup> He was buried in Popplesdorfer Cemetery (Grave 5, Plot B, Row A), with the Canadian chaplain, W. Fisher, presiding.

His death clearly marked the men of this small unit. His death and funeral were noted in the unit's war diaries—exceptional for an ordinary soldier. On 24 January, the diary notes "Word in by late runner of death of T/VR Demery W. V. from pneumonia, Bonn 1st Cdn CCS, arranging for funeral."<sup>19</sup> The next day "2 officers & 40 O.R.s [Other Ranks] attend funeral of T/VR Demery W. V. at Bonn. This is first funeral of the unit since formation."<sup>20</sup>

His wife Mary, as his next of kin, was notified of his death. At some later point, his body was exhumed and interred in Brussels Town Cemetery (Grave Reference: Plot X, Row 9, Grave 11).

After the war, Mary and their five children were living in the townships of Spence and Croft, near Parry Sound.<sup>21</sup> She continued to live in the Parry Sound area until her death in 1963.<sup>22</sup>

William's brother Orville also enlisted in the Great War. He was living in Toronto when he enlisted in the 216th Overseas Battalion (Regimental number: 273392) on 7 April 1916, at the age of 22.<sup>23</sup> He was a cook and married—he had married Ottoline McDonagh (age 17) in Gravenhurst, Ontario, on 15 October 1913.<sup>24</sup> As the time of his enlistment, Ottoline was living in Scugog. However, Orville was discharged on 18 November as "not likely to become an efficient soldier." No specific information was found to explain why Orville was discharged. However, recruits had to be at least 5' 5" tall<sup>25</sup> and Orville did not meet this requirement—he was just 5' tall. His conduct and character

during his very short service was “good.” He died in 1960 and is buried in Bracebridge United Cemetery in Bracebridge.<sup>26</sup>

© 2017 BIFHSGO

---

Special thanks are extended to Andrew Houser for his assistance in developing this biography and providing access to family documents.

<sup>1</sup> Family source. William’s attestation form and the 1901 census indicate that he was born in 1888 but it is assumed that the baptismal certificate is correct.

<sup>2</sup> Family source

<sup>3</sup> “1881 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 8 January 2017), entry for Julie Sine [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District number: 131, District: Muskoka, Sub-district number: V, Sub-district: Joly and Strong and Chapman

<sup>4</sup> “A Little Sketch of the Life of William Victor Demery,” by Andrew Houser, family source

<sup>5</sup> Family source

<sup>6</sup> “1871 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 January 2017), entry for William C Demeria [*sic*], Province: Ontario, District: Ontario North, District number: 49, Sub-district: Scugog, Sub-district number: b

<sup>7</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 January 2017), entry for Orville Demara; “Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 January 2017), entry for Orville [*sic*] George Demara. The family name may originally have been Demera or Demara, but was changed to Demery over the years.

<sup>8</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869–1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939–1947,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 3 January 2017), entry for Louisa Demara

<sup>9</sup> “1911 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 January 2017), entry for William Demery, Province: Ontario, District: Muskoka, District number: 98, Sub-district: Bracebridge, Sub-district number: 19

<sup>10</sup> “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 January 2017), entry for Orval Demera, Province: Ontario, District: Ontario (south/sud) , District number: 98, Sub-district: Scugog, Sub-district number: D-1

<sup>11</sup> “Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 3 January 2017), entry for Mary Elizabeth Paul Demery

<sup>12</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Births, 1869–1913,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 January 2017), entry for Myrtle Octave Paul. Myrtle was brought up by her maternal grandparents after William and Mary married. (Family source; “1901 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 12 January 2017), entry for Myrtle O Paul, Province: Ontario, District: Perry [*sic*] Sound, District number: 108, Sub-district: 10 - Croft Township, Ahmic Harbor, Sub-district number: 10)

<sup>13</sup> Family source; “1921 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 3 January 2017), entry for Mary Demares [*sic*], Province or territory: Ontario, District: Parry Sound, District number: 114, Sub-district: Spence and Croft (Townships), Sub-district number: 10, City, Town or Village: Spence & Croft

<sup>14</sup> Family source

<sup>15</sup> “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 23 December 2017) entry for Demery, William Victor, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2280 - 29, Item number: 346307, Digitized service file - PDF format: [B2280-S029](#). Unless otherwise indicated, all information about William’s military career comes from this source.

- 
- <sup>16</sup> “Guide to Sources Relating to Units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force: Pontoon Bridging Transport Units, Canadian Engineers,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/005/f2/005-1142.29.007-e.pdf>: accessed 3 January 2017)
- <sup>17</sup> “War Diaries - 2nd Pontoon Bridging and Transport Unit, Canadian Engineers,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 3 January 2017), File: RG9-III-D-3. Volume/box number: 5007, File number: 701, Copied container number: T-10855
- <sup>18</sup> “No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station,” *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 16 December 2017), entry for Demery, W. Later, a death certificate provided to the family identified broncho-pneumonia as the cause of death.
- <sup>19</sup> “War Diaries - 2nd Pontoon Bridging and Transport Unit, Canadian Engineers,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 3 January 2017)
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> “1921 Census of Canada,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 3 January 2017), entry for Mary Demares [sic]
- <sup>22</sup> “Canada, Find a Grave Index, 1600s–Current,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 3 January 2017), entry for Mary Elizabeth Paul Demery
- <sup>23</sup> “Service Files of the First World War, 1914–1918 - CEF,” *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/first-world-war-1914-1918-cef/Pages/search.aspx>: accessed 23 December 2017) entry for Demara, Orville, Reference: RG 150 Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2280 - 29, Item number: 346307, Digitized service file - PDF format: [B2280-S029](#). Unless otherwise indicated, all information about Orville’s military career comes from this source.
- <sup>24</sup> “Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801–1928,” *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 January 2017), entry for Orville George Demara
- <sup>25</sup> “The Canadian Great War Soldier,” *Historica Canada* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-canadian-great-war-soldier/>: accessed 12 June 2017)
- <sup>26</sup> *Northern Ontario Gravemarker Gallery* (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~murrayp/>: accessed 12 January 2017), entry for Orville Demara