

Sergeant Francis Yates McLauchlan

Regimental Number: 21967

27th Squadron, Royal Air Force

born: 1898 - died: 23 May 1918

Francis Yates McLauchlin, born in the spring of 1898, was the son of Ducan McLauchlan (born in 1869)¹ and Barbara Ellen (Helen) Lee (born in 1872)² of Leeds, Yorkshire. In 1911, Duncan was a compositor (linotype operator) and, in 1911, was living at 8 Autumn Terrace, Leeds.³ Francis was born in the spring of 1898⁴ – the first son to survive childhood. He had an older brother, Duncan, born in 1893, but he died the following year.⁵ The first daughter, Margaret Yates was born the next year⁶ and another daughter, Barbara Ellen McLauchlan was born about 1909.⁷ They had another child who did not survive until 1911.⁸

Francis enlisted in the Royal Flying Corp on 23 March 1916, when he was just 18.⁹ He was appointed Acting Corporal on 1 September 1917. On 20 December 1917 he was declared “Fit as Obs [Observer and Air Gunner], unfit as Pilot, Requires Dental Treatment.”¹⁰ On 31 December he was sent to the No 1 School of Military Aeronautics, a Royal Flying Corps training school in Reading,¹¹ and then, on 14 January 1918, he was posted to No 3 School of Air Gunnery. On 19 March 1918 he was promoted to Sergeant. He began his service in France on the same date, but he spent a couple of weeks in hospital in early April.¹²

The Royal Flying Corp combined with the Royal Navy Air Service to form the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918.¹³

... the newly independent RAF fought effectively from 1 April 1918 over the Western Front in direct support of the ground forces. It also took the war to Germany and exploited the offensive potential of air power ... The RAF's performance over the Western Front was crucial, both in the part it played in blunting the German offensive and in the final counter-attacks of the Allied Armies which led to the surrender of the German forces in November 1918. The bitterness and scale of air fighting remained undiminished from April until November. For example, RAF Communiqué No 1 records that 57 enemy aircraft were brought down, 37 were driven out of control, 7 lost to anti-aircraft fire while RAF losses were 43; and 85 tons of bombs were dropped, 380,173 rounds fired at ground targets and 3302 photographs were taken.¹⁴

Unfortunately, one of the RAF losses was the plane in which Francis McLauchlan and his pilot, George Edward Ffrench, were flying. “No 27 Squadron lost DH9 D5616 on 23 May 1918, 2nd Lt George Edward Ffrench and Cpl Francis Yates McLauchlan both being killed.”¹⁵

Francis had been flying in a DH9, made by de Havilland – a plane that did not have a good track record. “The DH.9's performance in action over the Western Front was a disaster, with heavy losses incurred, both due to its poor performance and to engine failures, despite the prior de-rating of its engine.”¹⁶ The account of their accident reflects the aircraft failure:

From Henshaw's "The Sky Their Battlefield" [George Edward Ffrench] was piloting his DH9 No: D5616 with Cpl F Y McLaughlan as his observer when the engine fell off at about 6:10 a.m. near Maria Aeltre, having left the aerodrome at Fournueil, where Number 27 squadron was based at the time. His observer was also killed.¹⁷

As the observer, Francis would have been in the rear cockpit firing a rotatable automatic .303 Lewis machine gun with a 97 round pan.¹⁸

The plane crashed near Sains-lè-Pernes¹⁹ and Francis was already dead when he was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 23 May 1918. He was buried four days later in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row C, Grave 44), with the chaplain, J. K. Tibbits, presiding.²⁰ He was just 20 years old. His pilot, 2nd Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench, was also admitted to the 1st CCCS and buried in Pernes British Military Cemetery next to Francis.²¹

Francis was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).²²



Francis Y. McLaughlan in Pernes British Military Cemetery
(Source: Author, July 2015)

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¹ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Duncan McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 432

² "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Barbara Helen Lee, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 491

³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2015), entry for Francis Yates McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Registration District Number: 500, Sub-registration district: Kirkstall, ED, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 27066

⁴ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Duncan McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 561

⁵ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2015), entry for Duncan McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 514. "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2015), entry for Duncan McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 390

⁶ England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2015), entry for Margaret Yates McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 515

⁷ England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 24 January 2015), entry for Barbara Ellen McLaughlan, Registration district: Leeds, Inferred County: Yorkshire West Riding, Volume: 9b, Page: 474

⁸ 1911 England Census," entry for Francis Yates McLaughlan

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- ⁹ "British Royal Air Force, Airmen's service records 1912-1939," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Frank McLauchlan, Archive reference: AIR 79/232
- ¹⁰ "AIR 79 - Air Ministry: Air Member for Personnel and predecessors: Airmen's Records," The National Archives, entry for McLauchlan, F Y, Catalogue reference: AIR 76/324/107
- ¹¹ "No 1 School of Military Aeronautics," Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_1_School_of_Military_Aeronautics: accessed 8 February 2015)
- ¹² "British Royal Air Force, Airmen's service records 1912-1939," entry for Frank McLauchlan
- ¹³ "A Short History of the Royal Air Force: Chapter 1 - The Early Years of Military Flight," (<http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/shorthistoryoftheroyalairforce.cfm>: accessed 24 January 2015), p. 26
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 28 - 29
- ¹⁵ "The Aerodrome Forum," <http://www.theaerodrome.com/forum/showthread.php?t=57730>: accessed 24 January 2015. Note: McLauchlan was actually a Sergeant by this date.
- ¹⁶ "Wikipedia: Airco DH.9," (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airco_DH.9: accessed 24 January 2015)
- ¹⁷ "Great War Forum: FFRENCH, GEORGE EDWARD. Died 1918 RAF" <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=123958>: accessed 25 January 2015
- ¹⁸ "Airco DH.9," Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airco_DH.9#Specifications_.28D.H.9_.28Puma_Engine.29.29: accessed 25 January 2015). Note: this was an advanced machine gun for the period.
- ¹⁹ "The Aerodrome Forum" (<http://www.theaerodrome.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-20888.html>: accessed 27 January 2015)
- ²⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 523
- ²¹ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 524
- ²² "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Frank McLauchlan