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Colonel James Ballantine and his family arrive at the Georgetown Fairgrounds (the Old Armoury is in the background) to a hero's welcome.

Georgetown is home to WW1 hero

By **JOHN McDONALD**
Halton Sketches Revisited

One of the war heroes of the Georgetown area was Colonel James M. Ballantine.

James McNab Ballantine, better known locally as 'Colonel Jim' was born Sept. 3, 1876 in Ashgrove. Always interested in the militia, James received his military training in Toronto and Hayland Island, Hythe and Aldershot in England. On April 4, 1894 Ballantine graduated from a military school in Toronto.

When the Boer War broke out in South Africa in 1899, Ballantine, a member of the Halton's 20th Rifles, was one of the first men in the area to enlist. The Georgetown school principal had all the students stand on a hill at the rear of the school waving hundreds of flags as Ballantine's train went past. He acknowledged the ovation from the railroad car steps.

During World War One, he served as the temporary commander of the 4th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. While taking command during some fierce fighting at St. Julien, Belgium, Ballantine was badly wounded in both shoulders by the bursting of a shrapnel shell. Also he had been hit in the left upper arm and spinal nerve and his left arm was temporarily paralyzed.

Bulletins were posted on Georgetown's Main St. giving Ballantine's condition on a regular basis. In this terrible battle, 20 out of 24 officers of the battalion were lost.

His gallantry won him the Distinguished Service Order and he was received at Buckingham Palace on May 20, 1915 by George V.

The DSO document, still in the family, is signed by Winston Churchill, whose title reads "Principal Secretary of State, having Department of War for the time being."

When Ballantine returned home wounded a crowd estimated at 2,000 greeted him at

the Georgetown station. A large procession headed by Glen Williams Band, school children with flags, the 20th Regiment Band, Boy Scouts and members of the 4th Battalion in training, marched to the Georgetown Park (Fairgrounds) for a gala reception.

Edward Fleck, Reeve of the village, drove Ballantine and his wife (the former Minnie Barber, whom he had married in 1905) and his proud parents in his automobile in the parade.

He was an invalid at home in Georgetown for only a short time, Sir Sam Hughes offering Ballantine the command of the 76th Battalion. He accepted and organized and trained the men in Camp Borden. President Bryan of Colgate University, New York, who was seeking a military man to head the Military Sciences Department, visited Camp Borden and became acquainted with Ballantine, who in turn was hoping to secure such a position. In 1917, he was appointed Director and remained on the teaching staff for 16 years where he also coached lacrosse, soccer and boxing teams. He returned to Georgetown in the mid-'30s.

The Colonel wrote a book outlining the history of the 76th Battalion, which he helped organize. Ballantine was also honoured by Lord Baden Powell for introducing scouting to Georgetown.

He died at his estate near Silvercreek on Jan. 7, 1948. A full military funeral took place with three volleys by a firing party of Lorne Scots. Members of his regiment placed a poppy on his casket and a lament and Reveille were sounded.

John McDonald's fascinating book, Halton Sketches Revisited— Historical Tales of People and Events in North Halton, is available from Reeve & Clarke Book Store in Glen Williams or from Halton Sketches Publishing.com or directly from haltonsketches@sympatico.ca

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