Billy Bishop Museum's 2026 Honouring Our Local Veterans

Corporal Henry Francis Courtney
No. 2 Construction Battalion

Family Life

Henry Francis Courtney was born in Owen Sound on November 7, 1886 and according to a family history lost both his mother and father at a young age.

Coming from a large family Henry was raised by his older siblings listing his sister, Esther Carter of Guelph, Ontario, as his next of kin on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Attestation Paper.

Henry Courtney married Ellen 'Ella' Malott in 1906, at Guelph, but unfortunately, she died not long after their wedding.

At the time of his enlistment, he declared himself as single and was working as a teamster.

Decorations

- British War Medal
- Victory Medal

Military Service

On August 30, 1916 at age 29, Henry Francis Courtney enlisted for service with the No. 2 Construction Battalion at Toronto. With the Battalion, he embarked from Halifax on the S.S. Southland and arrived in England on April 7, 1917.

In order to proceed to France, the No. 2 Construction Battalion had to downgrade their status from a battalion to a company. As the No. 2 Construction Company, they landed at Boulogne, France, on May 17, 1917, and made their way to Lajoux, a small community in the French Department of Jura, in the foothills of the French Alps. It was a heavily forested area, and they would help harvest this timber for the war effort. They were assigned tasks including forestry operations, digging trenches, and building and repairing roads and railway tracks.

As his Discharge Certificate indicates, Henry Courtney served the duration of the No. 2 Construction Battalion's time in England and France. In January of 1918, he was hospitalized for a week with influenza but returned to the field. He was also docked five days of pay for "making away with iron rations," perhaps a view into the treatment of soldiers in the company.

It is evident that Henry Courtney possessed leadership abilities as he was promoted to Corporal on May 16, 1917. Non-commissioned officers were critical to the smooth running of military organizations. All of the senior officers of the No. 2 Construction Battalion were white with the exception of Captain William 'Andrew' White, who was the unit's chaplain.

After the end of the First World War, Henry Francis Courtney was demobilized and returned to Owen Sound to live out the remainder of his life. In October of 1947, Henry died from pneumonia and was interred at Greenwood Cemetery. Corporal Courtney and his fellow soldiers deserve much credit for enduring the racism, prejudice and hate they faced while serving their country. A Formal Apology was made to the No. 2 Construction Battalion by the Federal Government on July 9, 2022.