

Transcript for Black Soldiers from Guelph in the Great War

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University of Guelph ENG2130 Fall 2020 Students

This video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfUGSLJ91z4>

Title Card

[Text on screen – “The Guelph Black Heritage Society presents: Black Soldiers from Guelph in the Great War”]

[Text on screen – “A film by Dr. Jade Ferguson and University of Guelph students in English 2130 (Fall 2020)”]

Historical Context



[The voices of students from the English 2130 course narrate]

[Troupe of primarily Black soldiers in uniform organized into 5 rows captioned “November 1916”, one sitting on the ground in the front row holds a drum]

The Number Two Construction Battalion, also known as the Black Battalion, was formally authorized on July 5th 1916. During World War One the Number Two was a segregated labor unit - the first and only all-Black unit in Canadian military history.

[Crowded platform at a train station, banner hanging from overpass reads “Recruits Wanted For War”]

Following the outbreak of the war, Black Canadian men eager to serve their king and the country were routinely rejected by commanding officers who did not view Black Canadians as suitable soldiers for a white man’s war.



[Handwritten letter addressed to the Minister of Defense dated 1914]

Black Canadians petitioned the Canadian government to remove this informal colour line that denied them the opportunity to prove they were dedicated citizens willing and capable of upholding the British empire in its time of need.

[Newspaper clipping. Headline reads "Willing to fight for his country. Seeing opportunity, offers services"]

After two years of political struggle for inclusion in the Canadian military,

[Newspaper clipping. Headline reads "No. 2 Construction Battalion for Coloured men of Canada: Men required for all kinds of Construction Work"]

Black men from across Canada were recruited to serve in the Number Two.

[Newspaper clipping. Headline reads "Wanted at once 300 men for No. 2 construction battalion"]

During the nine months between the battalion's formation and its departure for England,

[5 Black soldiers in uniform shown from the waist up, smiling slightly looking into camera]

some 670 volunteers came forward including volunteers from Guelph - Henry Francis Courtney, Gordon Goines, Victor Goines and Tom Mallott.

Soldiers' Stories

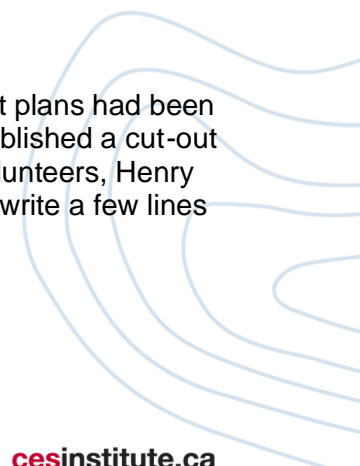
[Henry Francis Courtney's attestation paper; printed form filled out in handwriting]



Born on the 7th of November 1886 in Owen Sound, Henry Francis Courtney joined the Number Two Construction Company within weeks of its formal authorization. At the time of his enlistment Henry resided with his sister Esther and her husband John Carter in Guelph.

[Newspaper clipping. Headline reads "Call for recruiting: Are you doing your bit?"]

Henry tried to enlist several times before he joined the Number Two.

In January of 1916 J.B. Whitney, the editor the Canadian Observer, reported that plans had been approved to raise a company composed of coloured members. The Observer published a cut-out information slip for volunteers to return to Whitney. In response to this call for volunteers, Henry wrote a letter to Whitney stating: "If you can please find the time to sit down and write a few lines to let me know if I can join, I will be deeply in love with you."





[Two images of a Black man dressed in soldier's uniform; on the left, he stands in front of a house. On the right, a portrait.]

Henry had previously submitted his name to the Observer, and in his letter to Whitney included photographs of his older brother Jacob training with 157th Battalion in Collingwood. Jacob was one of an estimated 2000 Black Canadians serving in units alongside white volunteers. Whitney responded to Henry's passionate letter in the Canadian Observer with the following headline: "HF Courtney Loyal to his Country. Brother Training. Wants to do his bit."

[Nine Black soldiers in uniform stand at attention with rifles at their right sides]

Henry finally got his opportunity to serve, enlisting with the Number Two in Toronto on August 30th 1916.

[Print form completed in handwriting indicating promotions, transfers, discharges, etc. for Henry Francis Courtney]

Before leaving Halifax for Liverpool, Henry was promoted from private to corporal.

[Dozens of soldiers on a battlefield advance towards smoking explosions]

When the Number Two arrived in France in May 1917, Henry was seeing for the first time what his older brother Jacob had written about in his letters to his son, sister and brother in Guelph. The Courtney brothers survived the war. On the 3rd of October 1947 Henry Francis Courtney passed away at the age of 57.

[Victor Goines' attestation paper; printed form filled out in handwriting]

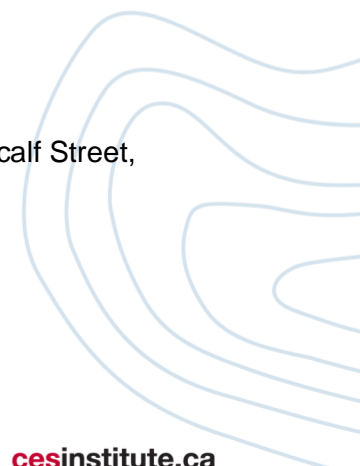
On the 27th of November 1916 in Welland, Ontario Victor Goines, the son of John Goines and Lucinda Palmer, enlisted in the Number Two. Born in Guelph on July 1, 1893 Victor's family had deep roots in Wellington County.



[Historical map of south-western Ontario, depicting the Queen's Bush settlement located north of Guelph]

His grandparents John Goines and Matilda Williams were freedom runners who escaped slavery in Maryland and became Black pioneers in the Queen's Bush settlement.

[Victor Goines' attestation paper; printed form filled out in handwriting]

At the time of his enlistment, Victor named his mother Lucinda Goines at 73 Metcalf Street, Guelph as his next of kin.





[A group of soldiers stand at ease at an encampment in the forest with trees, tents and a cabin in the background]

In the Jura mountains of France, Victor served in the Number Two, reorganized as the Number Two Construction Unit and attached to the Canadian Forestry Corps.

[Six men stand in a forest surrounded by large piles of cut lumber and logs]

For two years the men of Number Two were labourers mending roads cutting trees stacking lumber and loading trains.

[A number of soldiers scattered throughout a site processing lumber, including outbuildings, stacks of lumber, and logs]

While many were eager for the chance to fight, they were not posted to the front lines. They remained unarmed and confined to labour.

[Victor Goines' certificate of service, dated September 27, 1939]

Upon his discharge in February 1919, Victor was noted to have acted with very good character and conduct and was awarded the British War and Victory Medals. On the 14th of May 1958 Victor Goines passed away at the age of 65.

[Two Black men in soldier's uniforms face the camera; the man on the left sits in a chair holding a thin cane, while the man on the right stands]

Many of the volunteers in the Number Two enlisted with other family members.

[Tom Mallott's attestation paper; printed form filled out in handwriting]


In November 1916 Victor joined the Number Two with his nephew Tom Mallott. Victor and Thomas were very close. They grew up in the same home in Guelph and at the time of enlistment they were both single and working as heaters in Welland.



[Portrait of a Black man from the shoulders up looking into camera with a serious expression]

As men in their early 20s they may have volunteered in hopes to prove their manhood, [earn] a steady wage with room and board or search for adventure.

[Tom Mallott's form of will; printed form filled out in handwriting]

On his attestation papers, Tom listed his mother Mary Mallott at 69 Metcalf Street in Guelph as his next of kin. The witnesses on Tom's Form of Will speak to the diverse backgrounds and





nationalities of the Number Two. Ancil Bennett was a labourer from Shelburne Nova Scotia and E.L. Cross was a journalist from San Fernando Trinidad.

[Typewritten Medical Board form regarding Tom Mallott]

Two weeks before the Number Two embarked to Liverpool on the Southland the medical board recommended that Private Tom Mallott be discharged after the examination and reporting of a medical injury on his hand.

[Print list of members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion, including rank, name, former corps and information on their next of kin]

While Victor and Tom would not end up serving together overseas, Victor's brother Gordon Goines was on board the Southland that left Pier 2 in Halifax for Europe in March 1917.

[Gordon Goines' attestation paper; printed form filled out using a typewriter]

Two months earlier, Gordon had enlisted in the Number Two in Windsor.

[A group of men sit and stand atop large piles of stacked logs and lead horses pulling carts stacked high with cut logs]

On his attestation papers he's listed as an animal trainer - a profession of particular value given the large number of horses used by the Canadian Forestry Corps to transport the logs from the forest down the logging roads to the mills.

[Gordon Goines' attestation paper; printed form filled out using a typewriter]

At the time of his enlistment Gordon lived at his mother's home on Metcalfe Street, his sister Mary his neighbour.

[A man, woman, and two small children stand in front of a wooden building. The man is holding one child in his arms. The other stands in front of the woman.]


The Goines and Mallotts lived among Italian residents in the working class district of The Ward.

[1921 census data including the Goines' family shown on a long, handwritten list]

In the 1921 census the Goines' spoken languages include Italian and

[Gordon Goines' attestation paper; printed form filled out using a typewriter]





in his attestation papers Gordon is listed as belonging to an active militia - the 187th Italian Battalion.

[Gordon Goines' military record, handwritten]

In the Jura mountains of France, Gordon was hospitalized with influenza in November 1917. Soon after leaving the hospital he was transferred to 37 Company Canadian Forestry Corps.

[Soldiers in uniforms, helmets and overcoats walk single-file down a wet and muddy road carrying packs. There is an overturned cart in the mud on the right side of the road, tree stumps on the left.]

The men from the Number Two posted to 37 Company found themselves to the rear of the British lines in the lakes and forests of the Sommes valley. This was the closest some of the men from the Number Two got to the front line. Here, the men found themselves in the path of an all-out push by German forces to regain the initiative late in the war. The men attached to 37 Company came perilously close - two kilometers - from the advancing German troops.

[Gordon Goines' record of service; print form completed using a typewriter]

Upon his discharge in February 1919 Gordon was awarded the British War and Victory Medals. On the 24th of December 1956 Gordon Goines passed away at the age of 71.

[Troupe of primarily Black soldiers in uniform organized into 5 rows captioned "November 1916", one sitting on the ground in the front row holds a drum]



Conclusion

The men of the Number Two Construction Battalion demonstrated their loyalty and bravery to a country that initially denied most Black men the opportunity to prove they were dedicated citizens. We remember the service and sacrifice of the men of the Number Two. Patriotic soldiers who served their country with dignity and valour. We remember them as heroes who had to fight two wars, at home and abroad, in order to make a more just world. Victor Goines, Tom Mallott, Gordon Goines, Henry Francis Courtney - Black Canadian men born and residing in Guelph are an important part of Guelph's Great War story.

Credits

[Text on screen – "Credits"]

[Text on screen – "Directed by Jade Ferguson"]



[Text on screen – “Screenplay by Nicole Eres, Rebecca Grzetic-Muffo, Blair Gwarzman, Paige Kemper, Stefanie Kuizenga, Brett Norman, Nicole Sawrantschuk, Swathy Sethuaman, Miira Soukenik, Adam Tripp, Elyssa Trotter”]

[Text on screen – “Voiceover by Swathy Sethuraman, Jade Ferguson, Rebecca Grzetic-Muffo”]

[Text on screen – “Thanks to Tim Clarke, Kathy Grant, Samantha Brennan, Martha Nandorfy, Melissa Tanti, Amia Kholsa, Denise Francis, Kween Gerber”]

[Logos – Guelph Black Heritage Society, U of G College of Arts, Community Engaged Scholarship Institute]