

= John Babcock =

John Henry Foster " Jack " Babcock (July 23 , 1900 ? February 18 , 2010) was , at age 109 , the last known surviving veteran of the Canadian military to have served in the First World War and , after the death of Harry Patch , was the conflict 's oldest surviving veteran . Babcock first attempted to join the army at the age of fifteen , but was turned down and sent to work in Halifax until he was placed in the Young Soldiers Battalion in August 1917 . Babcock was then transferred to the United Kingdom , where he continued his training until the end of the war .

Having never seen combat , Babcock did not consider himself a veteran and moved to the United States in the 1920s , where he joined the United States Army and eventually became an electrician . In May 2007 , following the death of Dwight Wilson , he became the last surviving veteran of the First World War who served with the Canadian forces . From that point he received international attention , including 109th birthday greetings from Queen Elizabeth II , the Governor General of Canada and the Canadian Prime Minister , until his death on February 18 , 2010 .

= = Early life = =

Babcock was born into a family of thirteen children on a farm in Frontenac County , Ontario . According to Babcock , the barn where he was born (which no longer exists) was located off Highway 38 in South Frontenac Township . His father died in 1906 after a tree @-@ cutting accident , when Babcock was only six years old . As described in his account given to Maclean 's , while his father was cutting down one tree , another dead tree fell on his shoulder . Although he was brought into the house on bobsleigh , he only survived another two hours . Babcock said that this was an " awful blow " to the family .

School was never a concern for Babcock , and he did not earn his high school diploma until the age of 95 . On growing up in the area , Babcock claims that he " didn 't do very much , " although he admits that " [i] t was a fun place to grow up . " Babcock partook in fishing , hunting , and swimming ? especially around the local Sydenham Lake ? in order to pass the time with the other kids his age . He would return to the area in 1919 , after his wartime experiences , but soon after left for the United States . Nevertheless , Babcock 's relatives continue to work at the Crater Dairy farm (named after the Holleford crater , a remnant of a meteor strike) and the community grew to greatly respect John .

= = World War I = =

At the age of fifteen and a half , Babcock was impressed at Perth Road by two recruiting officers , one a lieutenant and one a sergeant , who quoted from the poem " The Charge of the Light Brigade " . He was also enticed by the offered salary , which was \$ 1 @.@ 10 per day , as opposed to the 50 cents he could have made through physical labour . Babcock was recruited in Sydenham , Ontario and joined the 146th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force . He was then sent to Valcartier , Quebec . There Babcock underwent a physical , where it was discovered that he was underage . He was designated status A @-@ 4 : physically fit , but underage . At the time , the minimum age for combat was eighteen . Babcock was turned down , but managed to make it all the way to Halifax by train before he was stopped by the company commander .

In Halifax he was sent to Wellington Barracks , the city 's peacetime barracks , where he wrestled freight onto large army vehicles and dug ditches . Tired of the work , Babcock took the opportunity to volunteer for the Royal Canadian Regiment when fifty recruits were called on , claiming that his age was 18 . Officials quickly discovered that he was only 16 , however , and they placed him in a reserve battalion known as the Boys (or Young Soldiers) Battalion in August 1917 . Babcock then undertook an ocean voyage to England and , in Liverpool , he was stationed with the 26th Reserve and sent to Bexhill @-@ on @-@ Sea where he trained with about 1 @,@ 300 others , about a third of whom were veterans from battles in France .

The Young Soldiers Battalion trained the recruits for eight hours a day . In his spare time Babcock

went on leave to Scotland , where he met his first girlfriend , a woman from the Women 's Army Auxiliary Corps . He was also introduced to the pleasures of beer and the horrors of war that some of the older veterans had come across . Babcock asserts that he would have fought in the conflict , given the chance , but the war ended before he could be brought to the front lines . For this reason , Babcock claims that he never felt like " a real soldier " and rarely talked of his experiences until his centenary . He also never joined any veterans associations .

= = = Experiences = = =

Babcock 's brother Manley enlisted after John and served with the engineers as a sapper . Manley suffered a nervous breakdown after the war . This , in Babcock 's eyes , was one of many psychological problems that occurred during and after the war . He recalls at least one instance where a soldier shot himself with a .45 after his comrades discovered that he had emigrated from Germany , while another ran himself through with a bayonet after a pack drill . Babcock also recounted the importance of honesty in the Canadian Army . In one case , one of his comrades stole a dollar watch and received nine months in prison and Babcock cites that as an example of the strict discipline in the military structure . By March 1918 he had been promoted to acting corporal , but was reduced to the rank of private for neglect of duty . By October of that year , however , he had been restored to acting lance corporal . Soldiers holding acting ranks in the Canadian forces receive the salary and allowances of the rank , but can be restored to a previous rank at any time due to their lack of the necessary training or experience to hold that position permanently . In Canada during wartime , individuals could be promoted to acting ranks in order to meet service requirements .

= = After the First World War = =

With relatives in the United States , Babcock paid the \$ 7 head tax and moved there in 1921 . He received a Canadian Army pension that totaled \$ 750 shortly after the conflict and took advantage of veteran vocational training in his native country to become an electrician . He ran a small light plant in his home neighborhood of Sydenham , and later had a career as an industrial supply salesman in the United States .

He became a United States citizen in 1946 after serving in the United States Army and achieving the rank of sergeant . In so doing , he lost his Canadian citizenship , as Canadian law prior to 1977 limited dual citizenship . After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 , 1941 he attempted to sign up for active duty with the army 's flying service (the United States Air Force was not formed until 1947) , but was turned down for being too old . He therefore spent World War II in the United States Army and among his duty stations was Fort Lewis , located in Tacoma , Washington .

At the age of 65 , Babcock became a pilot . As of 2006 he was in good mental and physical health , displayed by his ability to quickly recite the alphabet backwards , spell out his name in Morse Code , and take daily walks with his wife to keep in shape . At the age of 100 he wrote an autobiography titled Ten Decades of John Foster Babcock . It was distributed only to family and friends .

Babcock was married twice , first to Elsie , then to Dorothy , a woman nearly thirty years his junior whom he met when she was taking care of his first wife while she was dying . Babcock had one son (Jack Jr .) , one daughter (Sandra) , eight grandchildren , and five great @-@ grandchildren . One grandchild , Matt , was an army dentist in Iraq during the Iraq War . John and Dorothy resided in Spokane , Washington , where Babcock lived from 1932 until his death . Babcock was not the only centenarian in his family ; his younger sister Lucy died in July 2007 at the age of 102 .

= = Last surviving Canadian veteran = =

From the death of Dwight Wilson on May 9 , 2007 , Babcock was the last known Canadian veteran of the First World War . He was proud of his status as the last surviving Canadian World War I veteran , although he did not feel the need to be honoured in a specific state funeral . Instead , he

was of the opinion that " they should commemorate all of them , instead of just one . " He was also quoted as saying " I 'm sure that all the attention I 'm getting isn 't because of anything spectacular I 've done . It 's because I 'm the last one . "

Nevertheless , Babcock received much attention on the occasion of his 107th birthday , with wishes from Queen Elizabeth II as Queen of Canada (who Babcock joked is a " nice looking gal ") , Governor General Michaëlle Jean , Prime Minister Stephen Harper , and Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay . James Moore , a Member of Parliament from British Columbia , visited Babcock personally to deliver gifts and greetings . For his birthday , Babcock and his wife went to Rosauers for his favourite meal of hamburgers and French fries . Among the gifts he received was a necktie adorned with a poppy pattern , a symbol of the First World War . In his hometown of South Frontenac , mayor Gary Davison sent a letter of congratulations , while the local coffee shop named their local blend , " The Jack , " after him .

Babcock was invited to the opening of a Pentagon exhibit on March 6 , 2008 , featuring photos of nine First World War veterans , but was unable to attend . At the time he was one of only two of the veterans pictured to be alive , along with American Frank Buckles , who did participate in the event . In 2008 , he was visited by Canadian officials and wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper that he was interested in regaining his Canadian citizenship in a letter that was hand @-@ delivered to him in a cabinet meeting . The request was approved by the Prime Minister and the paperwork was signed by Governor General Michaëlle Jean , after which officials from Citizenship and Immigration Canada were flown to Spokane to complete the swearing in ceremony . That same year , Babcock participated in the Canadian Remembrance Day ceremonies , appearing via video to symbolically pass the torch of remembrance , urging people to " hold it high " . Babcock credited his longevity to the intense physical training that he received in both the United States and Canadian armies .

Babcock died on February 18 , 2010 , at the age of 109 , having been housebound since October 2009 following a case of pneumonia . He was cremated and his remains were scattered across the Pacific Northwest . Governor General Jean and Prime Minister Harper made statements of condolence shortly after his death and , on the anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge (April 9) , Canada 's monarch , Queen Elizabeth II , issued a statement marking the two events , stating : " As proud and grateful Canadians , we pause today to mark not only the ninety @-@ third anniversary of this Nation 's victory at Vimy Ridge but also to pay tribute to the passing of a truly remarkable generation who helped to end the most terrible conflict the world had ever known . " The local Royal Canadian Legion in Sydenham , Ontario has a collection of First World War items on display , including a roll call with Babcock 's name on it , in his honour .