

June 3, 1927: Private Alphonsus P. Decoste



Date of Birth: September 11, 1895 at Havre Boucher, Antigonish County

Parents: Captain Peter and Elizabeth (Breau/Brow) Decoste

Siblings: Half-brothers Alphonsus (died at eight years of age) & Joseph; half-sister Bernadette; full brothers Pierre (died young), William, Walter, & Paul (died young); full sisters Marie Amelie, Marie Loretta, and Marie Veronique

Marital Status: Single

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Occupation: Telegraph Operator

Enlistment: March 8, 1916 at Antigonish, NS

Unit: 165th Battalion (Acadiens)

Service #: 666774

Rank: Private

Previous Military Service: None

Next of Kin: Mrs. Elizabeth "Lizzie" Decoste, Havre Bouche, Antigonish County, NS (mother)

Date of Death: June 3, 1927 at Havre Boucher, Antigonish County

Final Resting Place: St. Paul's Cemetery, Havre Boucher

Alphonsus P. Decoste was born into a large Havre Boucher, Antigonish County, family on September 11, 1895, the son of ship captain Peter Decoste and his second wife, Elizabeth Brow. Peter was the son of Fidel and Amelia (David) Decoste, and a grandson of François Regis and Anne (Boutin) Decoste, Arichat.

Sometime before 1800, François moved to Havre Boucher with his father, Jacques Coste (Decoste), becoming the first Decoste family to settle in Antigonish County. Jacques' brothers and two of his brothers-in-law, Jean Baptiste Deslauriers and Paul Boucher, also moved from Arichat to Havre Boucher, as did Anne Boutin's family. François Decoste and Anne Boutin married at Havre Boucher in 1806.

Peter's first wife was Marie Crispo, daughter of Michael and Elizabeth Crispo, who lived along the present # 4 Highway in the direction of East Havre Boucher. The first marriage produced three children, but Marie passed away sometime after 1891. Around 1893, Peter married Elizabeth Brow, daughter of Timothy Brow and Marie Levangie.

Alphonsus, a son by Peter's first marriage, passed away on March 15, 1895, at eight years of age. Peter's second marriage produced eight children, the third of whom was born only months after his half-brother's death and was thus named after him. At the time of the 1901 Canadian census, Peter, Elizabeth and their family were living on the road to Frankville just above the harbour, near the Webb, Levangie and Crispo households.

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Alphonsus Decoste was working as a telegraph operator when he completed his medical examination for military service at Mulgrave, NS, on March 1, 1916. One week later, he formally enlisted with the 165th Battalion (Acadiens) at Antigonish. Authorized in late 1915 with its headquarters at Moncton, NB, the unit solicited recruits from all three Maritime Provinces, in an effort to form an "Acadien" battalion.

Its representatives had arrived in the Antigonish area in February 1916 but received a modest response, the unit's nominal roll containing only two names from Antigonish County—William O'Neill (666379), Frankville, and Joseph Leslie Webb (469163), Havre Boucher. However, more than 30 Cape Bretoners—mainly from the island's Acadian communities—joined the 165th during its northeastern Nova Scotia recruitment campaign.

Alphonsus' second cousin, Joseph Leslie Webb—also a Havre Boucher native—initially enlisted with the 64th Battalion at Sussex, NB, but was transferred to the 165th in August 1916. Joseph subsequently went overseas with the "Acadiens" in March 1917 and, following its dissolution, served with No. 40 Company, Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC), in France's Jura District from May 1917 until the end of hostilities. He was a member of the Canadian militia between the wars and re-enlisted on September 20, 1939—only 17 days after the start of the Second World War. Joseph subsequently served as Quartermaster at the Royal Canadian Engineers Depot, Sydney.

Another Antigonish County lad who joined the 165th was William J. O'Neill, son of Augustus O'Neill, Frankville. William also enlisted at Antigonish and travelled with the unit to England, where he was also transferred to the Canadian Forestry Corps' No. 40 Company. William served in France alongside Joseph Webb.

Alphonsus Decoste stood 5' 7" and weighed 130 lbs. at the time of his enlistment. After several months' training in Antigonish, he joined the unit's other recruits at Moncton, NB. Shortly afterward, the battalion travelled to Camp Valcartier, QC, for further military drill under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel L. C. D'Aigle.

In late June, Alphonsus was admitted to Valcartier Stationary Hospital for medical treatment. According to documents in his service file, he had been drenched by rain while training at

Antigonish on April 20, 1916 and “caught [a] cold.” “Never very strong before enlisting,” he had “lost 10 pounds” since that time. Alphonsus reported coughing at night and had “spot[s] of] blood [in his sputum] on several occasions.” At the time of his admission, medical notes indicate that Alphonsus “looks sick” and was “quite emaciated.” While doctors first identified his health issues as asthma and bronchitis, further examination resulted in a diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis.

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Declared medically unfit by a July 3, 1916 Medical Board, he was transferred to the St. Agatha Sanatorium, Laurentide, QC, for treatment. The Board also suggested that Alphonsus be released from military service within six months and military officials complied, providing him with a discharge at Montreal, QC, on December 11, 1916, effective the following month. Alphonsus signed the form without reservations and departed for Nova Scotia on January 7, 1917.

During the decade following his discharge, Alphonsus’ whereabouts and activities are unknown. He was not living at home at the time of the 1921 Canadian census. His respiratory ailment appears to have progressed slowly, resulting in his death from tuberculosis at Havre Boucher, Antigonish County, on June 3, 1927. An obituary published in the June 16, 1927, edition of *The Casket* stated: “His health broke down on service and he never fully regained it. He was noted for his cheerful disposition[,] which earned him the esteem of the community in which he lived.”

Private Alphonsus Decoste was laid to rest in St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Cemetery, Havre Boucher. On September 21, 1927, Canadian military authorities agreed that Alphonsus’ death was related to service and approved the issuing of a Memorial Plaque and Scroll and Memorial Cross to his grieving parents.