

## GERVAIS, Cyril



*Cyril Gervais in 1915.*

*Emmanuel Gervais, Cyril's son was interviewed by Amy\_\_\_.*

How old was your Father when he entered the army?

*"My Dad was 18 when he joined the army in Ottawa in 1915."*

Did he volunteer or was he called to duty?

*"Actually, my Dad listed himself to go to war. He joined the army himself."*

What was his training like? Where did he train?

*"My Dad trained in Canada, England, and France. It wasn't hard but it wasn't very easy either. They trained on rocks and bumpy areas with horses."*

What was your Dad's position or role?

*"My Dad was a private in the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Regiment." He rode on horses."*

When did he go overseas?

*"My Dad went to England first in 1916, but he wasn't there long and went to France the same year."*

Why did he go to war?

*"My Dad went to war to protect and serve his country."*



*Cyril's hat and jacket badges.*

Where did he go when he went overseas?

*"He went to England first, then France, Germany, and then escaped to Holland and was transferred back to England to get ready to return to Canada. This was over the course of 3 years.*

How did your Dad get overseas?

*"My Dad got overseas by boat."*

What were the living conditions like?

*"In England my father was well fed. In France there was barely any food. He was held prisoner for 2 and a half years and only ate turnips. He lived in a cell underground for a while and caught pneumonia because it was cold and wet. He was also in solitary confinement for a while. Before he was held prisoner, he lived in a trench with barely any food. The 1<sup>st</sup> four months were the roughest."*

Was he ever injured?

*"My Dad was injured several times. He got his leg slashed and his arm almost broke in one day when he was walking with all the other prisoners down a street in France. A French lady went to give him a loaf of bread and the man on the horse beside him took the bayonet and put the knife through the bread and the lady's hand and slashed his Dad's leg and hit his arm and then he jumped out of the way so they couldn't do anything else to him.*

*He broke his nose in a coal mine when my dad and all the other prisoners were working there. A whole bunch of coal fell on my father neck high. The Foreman came over and kicked his face, breaking my dad's nose. He was knocked unconscious. He couldn't remember anything after that.*

*When he was in the underground cell he caught pneumonia because it was wet and cold. He couldn't move when they went to let him out. He was able to go to a hospital for 6 weeks and get his leg, arm, nose, and pneumonia under control."*

What were his thoughts when he was overseas?

*My Dad's thoughts were mainly to escape prison and return home."*

What did he do before, during and after the war?

*Well before the war he worked on the farm in LaPasse until he was 18 and then he joined the army. During the war since he was a prisoner, he worked in the coal mines and in a quarry (the place where they break stones). After the war he worked on the farm and did carpentry. He helped build a hydro dam near Mattawa."*

War Service Badge Class. *A.*  
**DISCHARGE CERTIFICATE** No. *231668* Iss

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that No. *113242* (Rank) *Private*  
Name (in full) *GERVAIS, Cyril* enlisted in  
the *8th Regiment, C.M.R.*  
CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE at *Ottawa* on the *26th*  
day of *July* *1915*.  
HE served in *Canada, England and France*  
and is now discharged from the service by reason of *Demobilization. R.O. 1420.*  
*Medical Unfitness*

THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS SOLDIER on the DATE below is as follows:

Age <i>21 yrs 9 mths</i>	Marks or Scars _____
Height <i>5' 6"</i>	_____
Complexion <i>Fair</i>	<i>Small scars on both legs.</i>
Eyes <i>Blue</i>	_____
Hair <i>L. Brown</i>	_____

*C. N. Gervais*  
Signature of Soldier

*R. J. MacIntyre*  
Issuing Officer

Date of Discharge \_\_\_\_\_  
**APR 15 1919**  
Military District No. *8*

Rank *Capt.*  
Date *April 15th, 1919.*

N.B.—As no duplicate of this Certificate will be issued, any person finding same is requested to forward it in an unstamped envelope to the Secretary, Militia Council, Ottawa, Canada.

M.F.R. 39,  
1949-D.P.-509M-11-18,  
H.Q. 1772-39-882.

What was his most vivid memory?

*“My Dad’s most vivid memory was being held prisoner, trying to escape and being captured.”*

Did the war change him in any way?

*“No my Dad’s health was the only thing that changed him.”*

Do you have any special items from his time away?

*“Yes I have an 11 page statement letter that was special to both of us. He wrote it when he was in prison and inside, he wrote about his time over there and hid memories of hardship. I also have some of his badges and a picture of him wearing his uniform.”*

Why are these items special to you?

*“The letter is important to me because it explains to me what he went through during his time overseas. And the badges and picture remind me of him.”*

Do you think school students appreciate what happened there?

*“I think this class does because of this project you and the others are doing. It’s a very good history lesson.”*

What do students need to know about Remembrance Day?

*“I think this project will help you understand the meaning behind Remembrance Day. We need to understand that those brave Canadians saved our country. We need to remember what the Canadian soldiers did for us. They gave up their lives for what we have now.”*

Do you have anything else to share?

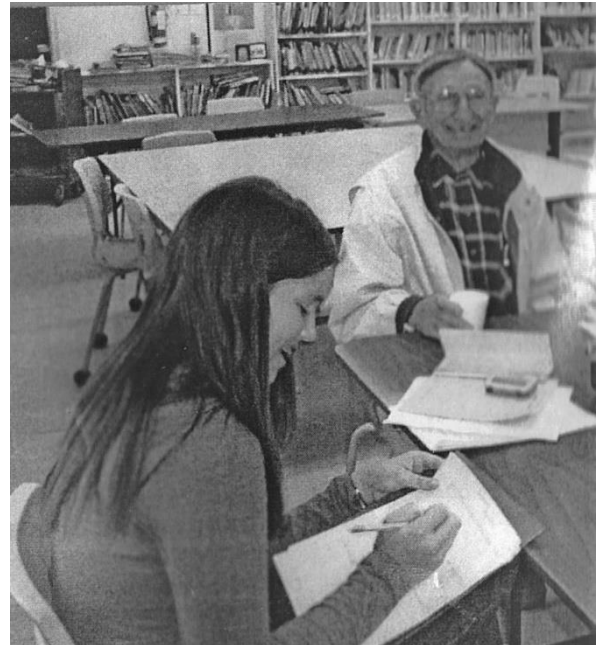
*“My father was taken prisoner by the Germans on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1916, at “Sanctuary Woods” under severe bombardment. In the prison he slept on the wooden bed on straw infested with fleas. While he was there, he learned how to knit and made socks and sweaters.*

*He helped two men escape and one spread the word around that my Dad helped him out. The Germans heard that news and tried to get my Dad to tell them how he did it. They threatened to cut his hand off, but he wouldn’t say a word.*

*Since he could talk French, it worked to his advantage because he could talk to the villagers.*

*When he came back to Canada he was discharged from the army on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1919. My Dad got married on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1919, and had 4 sons and one daughter.*

*My father Cyril Gervais passed away at the age of 71 in 1967.”*



*Amy speaking with Emmanuel Gervais about his father Cyril Gervais.*