

Transcription
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I never did have much schooling. I went to a country school in a district called Woodhill district south of Shell Lake. And I only went up to grade 8. There wasn't too many in our family. There was 6 of us. 4 boys and 2 girls. I moved to Chitek Lake in 1941 from a homestead where my dad had homesteaded in 1929 and in those days it was pretty rough. You had no work, well there was work, but there was no money to pay you with. So I had to work for fifty cents a day, cutting brush mind you. This was 1940. That was in the fall of the year. Mind you we had to cut brush from daylight till dark for 50 cents. And in the wintertime back home, there was nothing on the homestead, there was nothing there. Nobody had any work. So I decided to go north to Chitek Lake, me and a couple of other guys from home. So I came in a cutter and I drove. They give us about 75 miles to drive. It took us about 2 days to get there. Got work there in 1940. Originally we came from St. Laurent, Saskatchewan. North of Batoche. Along the side of the Saskatchewan River, South Saskatchewan River. But anyways, going back to my move to Chitek Lake, I got in there in 1941 in November. I thought I'd go work for the winter, and I'm still there today, about 40 some odd years later.

Oh, I've been away a bit. In the spring of 1942 I wanted to go and work on the Alaska highways. The Alaska highways was paying good wages at that time and they were just starting construction from Fort St. John on, and you didn't need much qualification to get on. You could go to Edmonton those days and hire on as a truck driver. They'd give you a truck load and send you on. That kind of attracted me very strongly, so I thought before I go, I might as well see if I get rejected from the army and then I'd be free. Cause I know if I went I'd be called back. So I went and joined up. And no way of getting rejected. I passed A-1, and there I was stuck for 3 years. I was 20 years old. When I joined the army, first of all, I didn't want to be called in. I didn't want to be a zombie. And secondly I said I wanted to go Northwest to Alaska, to work on the Alaska highway, and I didn't want to have to do that and have to come back with my green card in the army, so I thought I might as well get it over with see if I can get rejected or whatever. If I have to go, I have to go anyways. So there I

was. I took my basic training in Camrose, Alberta. And I was a bad boy for awhile. I didn't like discipline coming off the homestead and work in the bush and stuff like that, being your own boss, and young fellow from the homestead, you don't have too much

discipline. So I couldn't understand discipline. I ran away a few times from the army, but just to let them know that I wanted to do what I wanted to do. And they punish you for it. They put you in detention, and that didn't prove to be much good either. So when I decided to soldier, I just went right ahead.

I always wanted to drive trucks. So I joined the army service corps. I wanted to be a truck driver. But after awhile I learned that it was kind of a gimmick. They go by category. If you were A-1 you didn't get a chance to drive truck. You went right with the rifles and machine guns. And they decided that. We took advance training at Currie barracks in Calgary. There was Indian, a few Metis I guess, but those days, I don't know. Your fellow soldier was like a brother to you, so it didn't make much difference. They proved to be one of the best soldiers in the front lines, the Canadian Soldiers. We always use to kid the other guys from Eastern Canada, we'd ask them where they come from they'd say Montreal or something like that. We'd say, "shit, you're not even in Canada. Canada starts from Winnipeg west." Most Western guys were real good. I don't want to brag them up, but they made first class soldiers. And if they trained on one thing, they took it seriously once they understood the whole make up of it.

There was some pretty stiff training. They had to put you through and get you on a drill and train for action, and it was all kind of kids play as far as that goes. The only thing was it was hard. There was a lot of exercise. Lots of parade square. Lots of it. You had to understand the basic rules of regimental life.

And you never done any thinking when you were in the army. They did all that for you. They always told me, "Boyer, if we can't break you, we'll break your mother's heart." And I guess they would do that.

Well I went over, about 2 years in Canada, and I went overseas for a year, 3 years all together. We went over from Halifax,

but we were supposed to go direct to Halifax and get on a ship, get on a boat and go across when we left Calgary, but the coach I was in on the train was packed full. There was a whole train load of troops. And the car I was in broke out with scarlet fever. So we got quarantined for 30 days in Nova Scotia.

LEAVING CANADA

A lot of guys were crying. We had a Negro, well more than one, but we were all mixed up you know. I believe there was a few Americans on there too. Some Negroes on top deck there, they had a recreation area. We were all in there, and we had a piano. And some of those guys got on the piano and sang there. They were playing the blues. I can remember that very clearly like today. And guys were breaking down with tears and everything. I never got seasick, but I just about got seasick. I had to go and lay down in my hammock.

We landed at South Hampton, England. The British got along pretty good with Canadians actually, but I don't know. Most guys got along real well with the womenfolk in England, and even the Indians, like the native boys, the English girls weren't scared of them. They didn't know what they were, they thought they were just Canadian, and it was great.

First of all I was transferred to just reinforcement infantry. I was training for the infantry. And then I, when I was ready to go, they sent me over with the Algonquin. That's an Ontario regiment I believe. And they called us the Mohawks. And then I got over there, got into France and they were just out of Normandy when I got in there, just past Caen, and I got transferred to the Blackwatch. Canadian Royal Highland Regiment of Canada. We went with the guns. To hell with the pipes and the kilt. I never went into Belgium. Never got out of France. I got wounded and taken prisoner.

I received two gun shot wounds in action and as a matter of fact I came back with a bullet in my shoulder and I carried it around for 17 years and they took it out of me in University hospital right here in Saskatoon. Well, they were cross firing on us. We were in a little town. They crossfired on us and we were pinned right down. They were well camouflaged, we couldn't see them. They were on both sides of this road. There was only about two that came back from our regiment that didn't get killed or taken prisoner. The rest were taken prisoner or killed. That was about 5 miles the other side of Caen. A little place called May-sur Orne. And we were to take this other little town, I don't recall the name of it. And they said the Germans had pushed back, that was the information our officers told us, but that wasn't the case. They were just well camouflaged waiting for us. That was on the fifth of August, 1944.

We didn't know if we were even going to live very long after we were taken prisoner, because we were up against the SS troops. One of the toughest men that Hitler had, and it was all made up of

young fellows under 20. They knew nothing else but fight. They were good soldiers. They didn't treat us all that bad, but the only thing was that you didn't have much food. The medical supplies were running low, they'd put bandages on your wounds and wrap it up with crepe paper. That same night they brought us into a hospital, into a big hospital in Paris. And we went in there by trucks, Red Cross trucks and some of the guys were stretcher cases, and some of the guys could walk, I could walk myself because it was only my shoulders. I lost a lot of blood, a lot of blood. But I was strong and I could stand quite a bit.

Just like, when I got hit in the shoulder blade, I was laying down, a couple of guys standing behind a big tank and they come on the highway, on the road, and they hollered fire the machine gun and it went through me like a red hot iron. And the one in the shoulder I hardly didn't feel it because I was kind of numb. My shoulder was dislocated as well from hitting the ground when I went over an approach. When they took us in there, we didn't know how we were going to be treated but all that mattered at that time was hope to God they don't torture you too much. Like I said they took us to Paris finally and after they got us back from the line they put us in an old barn there, and of course we

had guards outside there. And we were in pain we didn't feel much like going anywhere.

We were only there a matter of hours. And then they moved us by truck to Paris. And we got in there and they unloaded us in kind of a big hall there. And there was rows and rows of stretchers full of wounded soldiers and they were not all Canadians, they were English, Americans, and some Germans. We were mixed up. So we got into this big hospital, and I was on a stretcher by this time and I was getting weaker and they had no more room and there was no beds, so they put me off the main hallway into the nurses office and that's where I laid for the night, on a stretcher, on the floor. And then I was dry and I really wanted a drink of water, and the nurses were all grey nuns. And they all spoke French. So I asked one of the nuns when they come by for a drink. I could get along with them real good with French. And they were very surprised as a matter of fact. But you had to watch that too, because most of the Germans could talk French, because they had occupied that part of France for over 4 years. Anyway, she went and got me a cup of wine. You don't drink water in France. She was real nice. And she felt sorry for us. And they were very nice.

In my shoulder I had a lot of pain, and next morning when they found a bed for me finally, and I went to bed and then some young Germans, wounded German soldiers too, and one came up to my bed and

started talking. And he talked good English. Said he went to University in London, England, and they called him back just before the war. And they were telling him propoganda telling him that London was all flattened out with bombs. And he asked me if that was the case. And I said no. That was never the case. So we sat there and talked for a long time. He said we don't want to fight either, but they're making us fight. What are we going to do. And he asked me if I smoked, and he said I smoke too, but he said our ration here is only 3 cigarettes a day that we get. And he said I'll give you mine, I'm going to quit smoking. If I only get three cigarettes a day I might as well. It was different tobacco than we were use to as Canadians. Like I said before, they were pretty nice, a lot of them once we got talking. And they didn't want to fight anymore than we did as a matter of fact. All the soldiers we could turn them loose and they'd be the happiest bunch you'd ever see. But

they couldn't do that. I guess as far as that goes, the same goes for the other side.

I was laid up in the hospital in France for, we finally ended up in Chalon, in France. When we left Paris they moved us out of there, 125 kilometres, and it took them about 5 days to get us there on the train, because the Americans were bombing all the rail lines. And we only had enough food for 24 hours. And I'm telling you it was a son of a gun to be hungry, and, the worst was water.

Finally when we arrived there, they moved us into this makeshift hospital. There was 97 of us. And we were taken care of by German doctors. But of course there was some American doctors. We had one who was looking after us there, he was an American, had been captured, and he was of German descent. He spoke German. But the guards were all German. And we didn't have much food. All we ate was spaghetti soup twice a day. And we got one Red Cross parcel at the time we were there, and it taste pretty good.

Eventually, the Americans came through there, and pushed the Germans right out. The Germans just left us, but surprisingly enough, there was one sergeant who was with the German medical corps, and he was supposed to leave on a bike the early hours of the morning, and all the Germans got pushed back. And when it was all done and said he said to our German-American doctor, he said I'm not going, I want to stay. I want to be your prisoner, but I hope you can get me in the medical services when I get back to wherever it is they take me. So when he was certain that the Germans went back, he had a belt and a pistol so he took it off and gave it to the German-American doctor and said, you're my prisoner now, but in a few hours I'll be your prisoner. So at daylight, they start looking for contacts with the American army to get us out of there, and they did. They finally found them and they moved us back in a field hospital.

We were all glad to see them. But the night before, we were taken back there when the Germans were there, and the allies were bombing there and shelling over the town. They were pretty close.

We went down and all moved down into the reinforced basement into a shelter. And everybody was praying. Some didn't even know how to pray, but they were trying. You know, I must say,

there has to be Someone up above, because that's the first thing you have in mind when you get really scared is the Lord. All the soldiers know it. They have had the fear. If they went into action, and anybody who had it rough and went into action and came back and said he'd tell you so and he could tell you he was never scared, you can always tell him that he never seen too much. Because it's only human. A lot of our own people when they take German prisoners or come to a dead German they take all the jewellery or watch or rings, valuables, and I never wanted anything to do with any souvenirs. I thought if I can get back myself, that's souvenir enough for me.

They shipped us back in this field hospital and then they got us some more Red Cross trucks and they brought us back quite a few miles and to another field hospital. But we were quite aways back from the front lines. We ate a lot of mouldy bread, I guess maybe that's maybe where the penicillin came from. We had a chunk of bread that looked like bannock, but it was very, very dark. Some of that was mouldy, but you ate it because you were hungry.

DISCRIMINATION

No discrimination once you're in uniform. That's one thing I say now, the only time the natives were equal to the whites was when you had a uniform on. It is a strange thing. It's what the general public is taught at home and in books at the beginning, cowboys and Indians and stuff like that, it still goes back to that old history. Then it's pretty hard for the native people now to make it in public life or otherwise, unless you're one of the topnotch scientists, or doctors. If you really know your stuff you can make it. Otherwise the general public of the native people whether they're from north or south doesn't make a bit of difference, the white people are prejudice against them for some reason. I get a kick out of that sometime when I hear people talk, even government people say they got to educate the native people, especially the Indian. I say before you do that, educate the white people towards the native people. Let them know that those native people are not just bums or want to live on welfare. Give them something to do and they will get back on there own feet and do it very well.

The funny part of it, the native people at that time, especially the Treaty Indian, once they got in uniform they were treated like white man. They could go in the bar and have a drink along side there white man chum, you know. And before they got into the uniform, they weren't allowed to take a drink in public.

And after they come home when they were fortunate enough to come back, they were treated the same thing. Once they took the uniform off, no more social with the white people. They couldn't even go in the pub until the government some 10-15 years later, even maybe more that they allowed Treaty Indians to go into the bar.

AFTER THE WAR

I decided when I left that I wasn't going to get married overseas, and I didn't. I came back and I got married a year later. My wife's name is Helen Lucier. We raised twelve kids. Seven boys and five girls. Eleven of them are living, I got one boy that got killed in 1977 in the first of October in Fort St. James, BC in an accident. My kids are all working, and they all got fairly good jobs. Some are in business. Some of them graduated and I tried to get them through school. None of them got less than grade 11, but when they get in the mid-teens, it's hard to stay in school, especially the boys when they can go out and make money. At that time they could go to BC and make 10-15 dollars an hour. Working in the bush. They were all bushwhackers to begin with, but later on they started there own business some of them and go in different things. I brought up my family without any social help, welfare or anything. And I worked and I made it with my two hands, and sweat.

Those days I use to drink a lot and I use to wash out all the sorrows and memories. Every soldier is your buddy in the army. And some are more special than others. And you get that in civilian life too. That's very hard when you see your buddies getting knocked off and dying on both sides of you. It's just very, very hard to take. But I always got thinking that if your time is up, your time is up. If it's not your number, you're going to go through somehow.

LOOKING BACK

I think if you look at it in general terms and look at it in a broad sense I guess it was worth it, because the Germans were defeated. And there was something that we accomplished, but when we went and we asked some of the high rank officers what are we fighting for, for freedom and free country. But 40 some years later, I wonder if that is true. Do we have freedom and everything with it in this country? It makes you wonder. Because everything around you is all regulated and if you don't follow the straight line, there's the law to grab you and punish you.

I never hardly think about it, and I don't like to even talk about the war experience, especially some people, some guys that don't know anything about it. I find it much easier talking with a return man that's been there, and then we both know what we're talking about and we both know what the other guy is talking about. You know the thing was in Canada here, before the war it was real hard times. People were really hard up. But they were close. And then once the war broke out, the jobs got plentiful, money started circulating. People got money, more independent and there was more trouble. And it still exists today. I think what happens today is that everybody is too independent. I remember even after I came back from overseas, my only means of transportation that I had was horses. And I always liked horses. And it was slow. But you met somebody on the road you could always stop and talk or say hello. Now you're driving sixty miles per hour and you don't have time to say hello. Always in a hurry to get there, and once you get there all you have to do is wait anyways.

LIFE TODAY

I sit on three boards, and I'm also the president of the Northern Fur Conservation of Trappers Association. I sit on Gabriel Dumont provincial board and then I sit on the alcohol

council, known as SNAC, and I sit on a provincial board there. And then I sit on a local board at home and I'm also involved with the Metis Society.