

Transcription

Ron Camponi

Tape 2

- Interviewed February 26, 1993 -

Dave: Just get a bit more information on your brothers. Are they, you said that the youngest one has passed on?

Ron: The youngest one, the oldest one and myself, the two oldest are still alive. He's out in Vancouver, Victoria - Bill. He was in overseas for 6 years during the second World War. But, he might be coming down to visit one of these days. But he's 70 years old now. But he's pretty active yet.

Dave: Okay. Do you remember any of the names of any Métis World War I veterans at all?

Ron: There's probably some around out there, but.

Dave: Even if they're not living?

Ron: Oh, I have two uncles who were in World War I. Another uncle in World War II. My cousin Ernie he was in World War II, but he didn't get overseas.

Dave: What's his last name?

Ron: Vandale. There was George Vandale and Albert Vandale, they were my uncles. They both had pensions, one lost an eye in the first World War and one received a pension, he was gassed eh. And his widow, I think one of them is still alive, they're up in Creighton though. Her name was Laura Vandale.

Dave: And she was the wife of?

Ron: George. Maybe she's dead. I think Laura passed away too. But there two daughters live up there. He lost, that's the one that lost an eye in the first World War. And they both received pensions, one was gassed when they used chlorine I think it was. And then there was my dad, I have cousins, I had two cousins that were in the BBCLI. One was in the BBCLI. Norris or Claude probably know them. He's passed away. His other brother, like the two brothers, one was in the Strath with us, he was our goaltender. So actually there was times when there was 5 of us on the ice. 3 brothers, myself, and a goalie who was a cousin. All Strathconas.

Dave: What was the cousins name?

Ron: Louie Camponi. And the one who was in the BBCLI, he was Clarence Camponi. But he's passed away, I know that. When you said Leon, did you mean Leo Belanger.

Dave: No, yesterday you mean, Leon Ferguson is who I was with yesterday.

Ron: Oh I know him. Is he a commissionaire now?

Dave: I think so.

Ron: A lot of them when they got out, they ran to the commissionaire, the uniform, the discipline. Me, I didn't know what I was going to do. I was in 30 years and I was a tank commander and there wasn't too much employment for tank commanders at the time. But I didn't realize the organizational skills that were required in the army and the actual managing people. Because when you're in charge, I was a ward officer, I was dealing with 20 people, some cases 30-35 people, and they all have different problems. I coached the hockey team, I refereed ball, I refereed hockey and coached hockey, umpired ball. But I remember coaching hockey. Each guy was an individual, I remember this big defenseman, he was always looking for sympathy. And he was a big kid from Lonkton, Sussex, NB. I don't know coach, my knee is pretty bad. So after I asked him, I said look it, his name was Dauphin, I said look it Dauph, I'm going to bench you this game. We got playoffs coming up, I said you got a bad knee, I'll bench you and rest that knee. Well he didn't expect that. So he said maybe I can play for one period. I said, no, I don't want to take a chance on that knee. Well he said, let me get dressed and I'll try it out. I said look it, the first sign that it's getting sore, you come right back to me. Shit, he played hockey the whole game. But he needed that, yeah we need you Dauph. So I said we need you, but more important the playoffs than this game tonight. But like you said, you got to use psychology, every guy is different. We use to have this one guy, he was an officer, a Lieutenant. He'd come to the bench and be totally wiped out. Somebody said, one of the fans, God that guy is just totally exhausted. I said, I know how to deal with him. What about that coach, you know. I said come off the ice a little earlier, you're working too hard. Let somebody else do some of it. So you learn these skills and I remember a friend of mine got out shortly after me, a friend of mine from Regina, he was

with the Greenzone, but he was getting out. He was really worried because he didn't know what he was going to do when he got out. So his wife phoned me, she said, I was already out, and we were still friends. She phoned me from Regina. How about coming down and have lunch with us, because he's really down in the dumps, because he doesn't know what he's going to do when he gets out. So I went down and had lunch with him and I said, look it, you wouldn't believe how fucking disorganized those civilians are out there, I said. No kidding, because we often, I would be sent on the advance party to get the whole camp ready, this is in Germany or anywhere. They call it the advance party, you get it all set up for when the troops come. And you got to be organized. You guys do this, you guys do that. You guys do this. And so we got a job right off the bat as dispatcher with one of the moving companies down there. Well, dispatching was a piece of cake, we'd done it all our lives. We had vehicles and that. Like I told him, shit, you'd be surprised. And they like army guys a lot of these companies, because army guys they knew were disciplined, and organized. Knew how to give and take orders. Because you had to have that. You couldn't go around, a lot of people are fooled by, mostly American films about the army. Yelling and screaming and stomping, you couldn't get away with that in the Canadian army, the men came first. Like when you went out in the field and you're lined up for meals, it was the privates, or troopers in our case, corporals, sergeants, and officers. And that's the way it works. And if you had some young officer cadet who was in charge, you go over and say sir, back of the line. That's the way things worked, the men came first. And you had to look after the men. Anybody that was inclined to be that way didn't have men under them. They got other jobs, transport or something like that. So we had a good army, it was well disciplined, and you have to have discipline in the army or you won't have an army. You can't have a committee to decide what you're going to do the next move. That is what drill is all about. You do it, you hear the word and you do it. Cause half the time you're on the parade square and your mine is somewhere else and these things filter through you, right turn, left turn, about turn. And all that's for is to react instantly without thinking too much. Well, you've got to have that. So it's all geared to our reactions. You had military law. Like if you tell your boss to go fuck himself, you'll probably get fired or reprimanded, but in the army that's very serious you tell a senior so you had the military discipline, plus we came under civil law too. So we had both the military law and the other. Whereas military law, some of it on _____ street. If you tell your boss to go fuck himself, you either get fired or

reprimanded or he goes and fucks himself. But in the military, you don't dare, because that is gross insubordination. That's what I'd like to see nowadays for these young offenders and that is discipline. Most kids want discipline. I remember in about 72 they had this SSEP student summer employment program. So they decided that we would get a program like, and I was in Regina, but I was working out of Moose Jaw with the militia. So we got about 79 names of high school students. But half our women. I remember the major, he was a principal at one of the schools, and a part-time soldier. We had this little orderly room, and he said we can't take all these girls, we only got one orderly room, and _____ was a sergeant, militia. And he was thinking they have to learn filing and typing and we haven't got room for them. I said why not give them regular training. You mean basic training, and I said sure. What's wrong, the girls know how to drive jeeps, they can run radio sets, they can do small arms weapons, parade square. So we did it. Out of 79, we had one drop out, and actually it was good, because the girls were far better at the theoretical part of the like weapons and that, and the boys didn't want the girls to beat them, so they were busting their ass to keep up with the girls. And we even had an overnight exercise where they had to go out and dig trenches and it was raining this one night. They had ponchos. Girls were right out there with the boys. They really enjoyed it. And we just told them, if you don't like it you can walk right off right now. If you can't hack it. Well that was double insult, no way. Some of them might have been thinking about it, but I'm not going to show myself a quitter here. So we had one boy dropped out, out of 79. And they loved it. I mean they really liked it, enjoyed it. And the girls were doing the same as the men, exactly. No different. The only problems they had was with the rifle, because they were a little heavy for the girls, some were. But outside of that, parade square, they wouldn't miss it. And they were out in the afternoon 3:00 sometimes, really hot in Saskatchewan, you know how it can get at 3:00 in the afternoon. But we had our timetable and we kept it. I honestly believe that with these young offenders, that they should have a program, boot camp or something, but they go to jail. What do they learn? They learn how to become better criminals or whatever. Then they sometimes used by older convicts who might be homosexuals or something, I got nothing against homosexuals, I'm saying that they could be used by them, but to get them out on a boot camp and come under military law, I think when you discipline kids they like it because you're showing an interest in them. Even by giving them shit, you're showing an interest. I don't mean forever giving them shit, praise them when they're doing something good. I always had a

pretty easy going attitude. When I had to be hard, I would pretend to be hard, but it's all a game. And then when they're finished there boot camp, we'd have a party, they'd always try to buy you a gift or something and get your picture taken with them. It's a real experience for them. We done that in 72 I think it was. In around there in Moose Jaw. It was one of the best programs we ever had. But instead of just putting the girls in the orderly room, typing and filing, they were learning that in school some of them. When they got a chance to drive jeeps and do weapons training, first aid training, it was all good training. I ran that program and I had no problem at all. Well, I was using militia instructors were called out like for the summer. So I honestly believe that there should be some sort of. Another thing I heard the other day there was a program here they got for, I don't know what program, but they were getting money from the government to go out and shovel sidewalks for seniors, and cut there grass and that. And they were going to have to stop it because of finances. I thought to myself, they've got all of these fine options, I betcha I could recruit 20 kids, well, let's be moderate, 10 kids tomorrow, 10 young people tomorrow to go out and do these jobs. Because all someone has to do is organize. Let's go out, you're not doing nothing, why don't you get together every morning, and we'll go do there sidewalks and stuff like that. Even if they put them on minimum wage, they'd do it. But I got so much going now, I don't want to start else, Jesus Christ, that's another headache. And then the government steps in and says where's all that money going that we're giving you. We'll audit you. But you know, it's like housekeeping. There's a lot of ladies that live in our houses that are excellent housekeepers. We could start a group. I almost did once. Start a group, housecleaning. But the only thing that held me back was the fact that if we had native girls going in, and say the woman of the house is an alcoholic, and she's hocking rings and, they're going to tell there old man that my ring is missing, I think she took it. That's the only thing that held me back was the fact that they're too vulnerable to stuff like that. They go in your house, and say the woman is an alcoholic, the first thing she's going to blame is that Indian that came in here. I think she stole my watch. Of course the husband, if she's been bullshitting, will believe it. So then you've got problems. But it's just getting someone organized. I could do it tomorrow if I wanted to do it. Get these kids off the street. You get these young people that drop out of school. Get them doing something, because if they're not doing anything, they start hanging around and want something to do for kicks. Something to do. But I know there's lots of them. I could organize a group

within a week to go out and do things for senior citizens,
somebody's handicapped, go do there sidewalks. Give them \$5.00
an hour. They're making that much on welfare anyways. (end of
tape)