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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discusses his experiences in World War I.

Russell: I was born in Ottawa. Now this is going to be all in English.

Fay: Okay. If you want to speak Ojibway that's fine with me too.

Russell: Oh yeah, after. You can ask me some questions after. Now first part, I was born in Ottawa, and my mother wasn't married. She was Miss Blaker so my name is Blaker. And, so she had two boys. My name is Russell Taylor, and my brother's name was Jack. Now mother never... This is all right the way I'm going? So, well, you know what the parents is like, eh? You've got that idea, you know, when they have children and they're not married and there gets to be like trouble in the house. Do you get me? So I had an aunt living in Curve Lake Reserve, she was married to McKeough, Peter McKeough. So they had one daughter. And they... So when my mother was over here -- I can't just say how long, couldn't have been very long, maybe a couple of years or something -- and she married a Taylor. And so there was two brothers, like me and Jack, see. So Jack wasn't baptized yet so when my mother went with this Taylor, Abraham Taylor... But she had to get rid of us before Mr. Taylor got married to my mother. So my brother Jack was given to a McKeough, Charles McKeough, on Scugog Island.

So when I joined the army I was lacking... Just a minute now. So I was three months lacking, like I was lacking three months

to be the right age for... They took them at 18 years old in the army -- that was the First War. And I'd be, like I'd be 17 but I was lacking that three months for to be 18 years old. So then, well, I got through with that then I went overseas. Now I don't know just how long now. Probably about three years anyway, pretty close to it, somewhere around there. So that's

how I come to lose my Blaker's name then. I went to work and I joined up as Taylor, Russel Taylor. But I wasn't baptized that way, I was baptized as a Blaker. Then I went overseas and got back home, and...

So when we got discharged out of the army we was... We had our choice, like to take whatever we want to take. Like you could be a farmer or anything like that. So when we got our discharge they asked us what we wanted to do, either go for anything we want -- farmer or anything like that. That was (inaudible). Or... I don't know how they got that, anyway we got a pay out of it anyway. And of course that's the way my name was Taylor. So from there (inaudible) like, you know, right from the start...

When I first came down to Burleigh I was five years old so I'm ahead of that time, see, so you'd have to (inaudible). When I first came down to Burleigh I was five years old.

Fay: Who did you come with?

Russell: I came with my stepfather and my mother.

Fay: Is he a Treaty Indian?

Russell: Yes, he's a Treaty Indian. Yeah, he was from Curve Lake.

Fay: Was your mother a Treaty Indian?

Russell: Yes.

Fay: From Alderville?

Russell: Yeah, from Alderville. Then, so I like, I went from different house to different house because my stepfather didn't like me, and I went from different house to different house till I was 12 years old. And there was an old Indian, he was about (inaudible). He asked me see if I'd go out fishing with him. I had no place to go so I went out fishing. And that time the Indians could fish anytime, I don't know (inaudible). So he took me across the lake. We got about seven or eight bass. And we went to this farmer's place right across the lake. And to tell you the truth I didn't have no second clothes as to what was going on. And of course my backside, part of my backside, you could see it.

Yeah, we went over there and we sold the fish. Like he trades the fish off for like food, didn't get no money. So he even, those couple, those couple that was living there, they were

just a young couple. I'd say probably maybe around about 25 or 30 years old, they was just a young couple, and they... So just after he got his different stuff, eggs, and one thing and another like that... He knowed them well. He says, "I'll even give you the little boy."

So their name now was McKinny. If you want to put that down there, her name was Pearl, Pearl McKinny, and his name was Bruce, Bruce McKinny. So she looked at me and she says, "Would you like to stay here?" I says, "Yes, I would." So I stayed there till I was like three months before 18 years old, like from 12 years old when I went over there. But I was lacking that three months to be 18.

So we got along nicely. They bought me clothes; when there was any picnics or anything like that we went on. I didn't get

no money, like I didn't get no pay for my work, but I got lots of pay for when we went to picnics or something like that. They used me just like if I was their own child, that's the way they used me. And so we went down to Buckhorn and they bought me enough clothes to do me for one whole year, because her mother and dad was a storekeeper in Buckhorn, a general storekeeper. So that's where I got all my clothes.

So I lived good over there and I got so that I got to be like my own boss, you know. I was getting a little bigger and older and run the farm for them. He was some kind of a councillor and there was times that he went to Toronto for maybe three or four days and I stayed there and run the whole thing. He wasn't afraid to leave the stuff at home.

So one day when the War broke out, one day that we were just having our dinner and, you know, just fooling and laughing like that, having a joke like that. So Bruce says, "Russell," he says, "I bet you I can stump you." I says, "On what?" He says, "I bet you I can join the army before you can." Well I knowed I wasn't old enough so I says, "Maybe you can." So he says, "No," he says, "Russell," he says, "I'm just joking." He says, "I wouldn't go there because we got to run the farm." So anyway... We went to bed that night after he said that -- this was at noon -- went to bed that night. This was on Friday night, this was on Friday. And my parents -- this was at trapping time then, like when the Indians used to go trapping, you know, to get money for their children to get clothes for them and pay what debt they owe like that. And I couldn't go to sleep that night, I just got thinking about that now that he was going to stump me, see. I know it was just a joke but I couldn't get it out of my mind.

So Saturday I done all my work, so I says to Pearl -- that's Mrs. McKinny -- I says to Pearl, I says, "I'm going up home tomorrow." I says, "I won't be back till Monday evening." Of course we didn't have (inaudible) and I know Bruce could do the chores. And my parents was already going to Pigeon Creek, what they call Pigeon Lake, and that was about, oh, I'd say probably around eight miles from where I was and where they were. So

Sunday morning I got up early in the morning. Well, I used to get up early anyway do the chores, and Bruce he'd lay in bed. He didn't worry about me (inaudible) like to, for breakfast. And if they didn't get up, well, they got their own breakfast (inaudible). So I got up and I done my chores. I didn't do them all, just done what was necessary to do, like milk the cows -- well, we had two cows to milk -- separated the milk and washed the pails, then I had my breakfast. And I went upstairs -- I was sleeping upstairs all the time. I had a nice room. Well, they used me just like I was their own, that's the way they used me. And then he came out, came downstairs. And I run away from there, it was still dark. So I got up to Pigeon Lake where my parents was living, like where my, I say where my mother was living.

Fay: How did you get there?

Russell: Eh?

Fay: How did you get there?

Russell: Well, it was in the wintertime, see, and I walked all the way up there. But I guess I run about half ways anyways. But I stayed there all day. That would be, yeah, that would be Sunday. I stayed there all day Sunday and I stayed there over

night. So my stepfather and the one I called my uncle -- that was my brother or my stepfather's brother -- I says, "Will you wake me up early in the morning?" This was for Monday morning then. And I had 12 miles to go then to the Indian reserve. It was in a different direction, see. So I left there just before daylight. They got up early -- of course they always got up early -- I had my breakfast and I started. And I had come across this big lake, what you call Pigeon Lake, and then I had to come across another lake, like what they call Little Pigeon Lake. It was pretty near the same lake -- well, it was the same lake only there was a narrows there. And then I got to our storekeeper at Curve Lake. So when I got there it was pretty early. So his name was Dan Wheaton. So I went to the store and Dan Wheaton -- his wife was a sister of the one I was living with, Pearl.

Fay: Were they both native people?

Russell: No, white. Well, Dan Wheaton was... Like, he was a member of the band or of the reserve. And Dan's wife, she was a member of the reserve, but the other two wasn't. So he says, "Russell," he says, "you're up here pretty early." I says, "Yeah." I says, "Are you going into Peterborough?" He says, "Yes." I says, "How's the chance to get a ride in?" He says, "Sure," he says, "I'm all alone." So I went into Peterborough with him.

Fay: Did he have a car?

Russell: Yeah, he had a "T" Model Ford that he had. So we went in. So after I got out I knowed where to go because I had

two best friends in the army. One of them was Sam Taylor and the other one was Bill Johnson.

Fay: From Curve Lake?

Russell: Yeah, both from Curve Lake, Indian boys. And I knowed where to go, at the armories. Of course, they were already out in the field, like drilling. And so I went in. So the officer was there. He says, he asked me, you know, what I wanted. So I told him I wanted to join the army. So he looked at me and I guess he thought I wasn't -- I wasn't very big then, you know, I wasn't even very tall either at that time. So he looked at me and looked at me so he says, "I'll take you up to the colonel." That was the head man of the army. So we talked it over. So the colonel asked me, "How old are you?" Well I had to say 18, see. If I'd have said 17 I wouldn't have gotten in. But it was my chums that put me up to it. They give me what to say, see. So that's how I got in. So the colonel says, "Well, he's pretty small for to carry a rifle." So the officer says, "Well, we need a bugler." Of course the officer didn't know anything about me at all. And so the colonel says, "All right," he says, "we'll put him in for a bugler."

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Russell: Anyway I couldn't make it go on the bugle part so they put me in the cookery. Like more like a chore boy or something like that, peeling potatoes, one thing or another, what I did there for a while. I don't know how long, maybe a couple of months. So we moved from Peterborough down to Kingston.

Fay: Trenton?

Russell: No, Petawawa. So that's where we moved to. So... Just a minute now. Now there was something that they put me in. Anyway I didn't do so very good on with that either because I couldn't read or write, so I couldn't do very good on that. So the next thing was that they were going to give me a discharge out of the army. So I says, "No," I says, "give me a rifle." I says, "Put me in with the parade." So I had quite a job to get in there because I was short. But the colonel knowed that I was willing, you know, to do whatever I could. So I got in with a rifle and I done good with a rifle.

Fay: Where did you learn to use it?

Russell: Eh?

Fay: Where did you learn to use a rifle?

Russell: Never learned any place. But anyway I got so that I got pretty good on that, and I got good praise for it. And so I went right along then. So after from there we went to England, but our colonel was too old to take us into the firing

lines. So we got split up in England. Some of us, well there was quite a few of them, went to the Pioneers Battalion. There was quite a few Indians then in the army. Well, there was like a whole company, they were all Indians. So anyway I was to go to the lumber camp. That was, I was written down for a lumber camp. Well, I didn't want to go to the lumber camp, I wanted to go over and fight. (laughs) That was my idea, I guess.

So I went over. I got around so I got permission to go over with them and I went into the 18th battalion. And I got along good and I got to be a sniper. I got so good on the rifle, and

a good shotsman, so I went in for a sniper. So then one day that we went to Somme. That was the first place we went to -- that was in France, I guess. And then we marched through there 16 days, and went to Vimy Ridge, and that's where the big battle was.

And we was like, we went in for two weeks then we came out of the trenches for two weeks for rest -- that's the way it worked. And when we was, like we had about two more days before we'd exchange the soldiers that was resting for two weeks. And we was in there for two weeks so we was fixing up a trench. Of course I went through all through Vimy Ridge battle as far as that goes. And... But we still had two days to go to our resting camp. Of course you didn't get no rest, like you still drilled and all this and that. And they...

Yeah, and on the last day we was fixing the trench. And there was two, I had... Well, there was one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight -- there was eight of us Indians that was working on this trench, like building it up, see, so you could go through it, you know, like walk through it without the other army seeing you. So there was two white fellows with us besides us Indians and they were both white fellows. One was a lance corporal and the other was a full corporal. Like that was one, with a lance corporal, just the one stripe, and the full corporal had two stripes. So the last bag we had, the last bag, they picked up the last bag and they threwed it up in the air where they should have just set it on top on that where we had it built up, see. But they just throwed it right up in the air and then the shells started to come over. So that's where five of us got... Like we got the shells. And there were, well, I couldn't say that they were my cousins or anything like that. One of them was my best chum but he wasn't

hurt very bad, and the other one that was right along side of me got his leg cut off and got his eye out. And next to right behind him he had his whole stomach was just blowed right off. So he just like barely got to the hospital and he was...

And, but me and my chum run back, oh, I'd say from here to Margaret's anyway, through the trenches. And we came across an old bridge, they had an old bridge across the trenches and it was kind of caved in, so we crawled in there. So we were sitting in there while the shells would go off. So I was

looking at my chum -- well, we was talking, you know, and I was looking at him and I seen the blood coming down his, from there, you know, going down over tunic, you know, and clothes like that. I says, "You must be hit." So, you know, it was all slush and mud all the time, you know, over there, so I just wiped it off and then the blood just squirt right out. So I says, "You got hit." And at the time -- we were sitting down, you know, right under there, just as far as we could in there -- and at the same time my leg was getting sore, like my left leg. So anyway we was talking away there, listening to the shells, and so he just happened to look down to my leg. Well I said, "Gee," I says, "my leg is getting numb." I says, "I must have hurt it some place. So he looked at it and he says, "There's blood down there." So that was just coming out of my shoe leather. So I just wiped it off with my finger. Gee, and the blood shot right out there after I scraped the mud off it. I just wiped the mud off. So after that my leg just went numb then. You're supposed to let the blood just...

So we had to stay there, we had nobody to come and take us out or anything. So anyway we stayed there and of course the shells was still going. Then we could hear some people talking. Some of them are coming up the trench the same way as

we came up, but we didn't know who they were or... And there was two of the Indian boys that came up and a couple of other white people, like sergeant, two sergeants that came up. So they found us in there and they carried us back. Then I came right... Well, I came to the hospital and I stayed at the hospital I don't know how long. And of course my chum he had to go back -- his wasn't too bad. He got fixed up so he went back but he was still (inaudible). But I was through then, like I couldn't go back again. And I went to the hospital -- well, more like a dressing hospital, it wasn't a real hospital. So we stayed there. Well, we didn't stay there very long, maybe two or three weeks, I guess. It all depends how you're hit, like it was more like a dressing hospital but if you're... Like if you could still help the army you went to a hospital, a real hospital, then you'd get looked after there. And then by that time you had to go back to the trenches again. That's the way that worked.

And of course they kept me there and then... So they send me (inaudible). They got all the fellows that was pretty well gone, like pretty well shot up, they went to England, so I came along with him. So there were three, no, there was two Indians ahead of me. There was three of us came back to England and I was, like they put them two Indians together and they put me in here and a white fellow along side of me. So then you went to a... They had like their own hospitals, in the army in England, like Canadian and English, like that. So we was in the boxcars. We was just laid in there in stretchers so when we came in, when they came in, when we stopped at the station, well there was some people to get off there, some soldiers to get off there. So they came to this fellow, so the other two fellows took me off with the same guy. So that left me all alone then with the English hospital. So the other two

Indians, they went to a Canadian hospital. So I was lost for at least about five weeks anyway before they found out where I was. I was in an English hospital. And of course I was treated the very best, you know, couldn't wish for any better.

So I guess I stayed there for about three months, then they shipped me to a Canadian dressing hospital. Like I was on crutches then. So I went up there and that's where I got fixed up quite a bit then. Then I got a job there after I got a little stronger. I got a job there with the colonel and worked for him for about five weeks. So one day he called me up to his office. I think I was only into his office about three times, but there was always a corporal that was in that office that would come and tell me what to do. Of course that would be my job for the day then, it wasn't hard work or anything. So anyway this corporal came in so he says, "The colonel wants you in his office." So I wondered what in the hell I done. I thought, you know, that I'd done something wrong and I was going to get in some trouble. So he got talking to me, asked me different questions after I got in there, asked where I was from and all this and that and at the same time he was writing everything down, see. He'd ask me a question, I'd answer, and he'd write it down. And so he says, "Well," he says, "Russell," he says, "how would you like to go home?" Well, you know how you'd feel way back there. So I just busted right out then. So he came and tapped me on the shoulder and says, "You can leave now."

So I came to London, England then and I was there about five days. And then I came back home to Canada. And, of course, you know, all I was thinking about is home then, coming home. I didn't care how come I went, I knew that I was going home, that's what I had in my mind anyway. So we got three weeks

leave they call it. Like three weeks we got paid, we got the full amount just before we left, you see. And then they tell you just... Well, they give you a piece of paper, "You get back here on such a date."

But my two best chums, one of them got killed over there -- he went through a court-martial. Our own soldiers killed him. Like he lost his mother while he was over there and after that he didn't, well, to tell the truth he didn't give a damn what went. He just got, I don't know, he was just a different man altogether. So anyway my chum, he was on leave, he had two weeks. So I stayed at the village with him, oh, I'd say maybe about five days. So my chum says, "Well, I got to go back tomorrow." He says, "I don't know what they'll do with me." I says to him, "I think I'll go back with you." I still had five days to stay around there. I says, "I think I'll go back with you." So he says, "All right." He says, "It's up to you."

And anyway I came, I went back to Kingston with him. And the next morning they called him, called him (inaudible). And so he says, "What about my chum over there?" So he says, well, like the sergeant major says, "He can come along if he wants to

go with you." So I went up. So when he went in, so this sergeant major came out. He told him in there, in the office, "Russell Taylor is here." So he came out and called me in. So both of us got our discharge together, so we came back home together.

And then from there, well, I had a girlfriend in the village for about four years, I guess, and he had one there. So she already had a little girl from one of my chums. So you know what young men is like. Yeah, I'm telling you the truth here. So this was on Sunday night, I just acted like a damn fool

(inaudible) and I felt pretty bad. Then I... Like I wasn't one of those fellows, you know, that's... Well, I didn't have a chance, you know, to be like mean or anything like that, I didn't know enough, I guess. But what I tried to do (inaudible) I didn't say nothing, you know. (inaudible).

I went to Sudbury, got a job out there and I stayed up there a year and a half, lumber job, lumber camp. Worked up there and went home after that. Of course all I had to do was just like think about my mother, and I had sisters, like half-sisters. But mother was the main one. So when I got home to see my mother and I stayed there when my job was over. So my girl was still waiting for me, but no, I couldn't face her any more. And so I just stayed there for about five days, then I went to Orillia and I got a job up there (inaudible). So I just kept working around just like that. Then she got married to another person. (inaudible) like guide...

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