

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province in population and area, is proof that size is rarely a determinant of military contribution. The island province has contributed significantly to Canada's military history over the last century. Prince Edward Islanders fought bravely, with distinction and self-sacrifice in all of Canada's wars as well as in many United Nations peacekeeping missions.

In the First World War, the Prince Edward Island Light Horse formed part of the 6th Canadian Mounted Rifles, which contributed to the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). The 105th Prince Edward Island Highlanders, an infantry battalion, was disbanded in order to provide reinforcements for other CEF battalions already at the front. Courageous P.E.I. soldiers earned military honours at several battles, including Arras, Amiens and Mons.

Prince Edward Island had the highest per capita enlistment rate in the volunteer army, navy and air force during the Second World War. Britain declared war on Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939. Four short days later, the Summerside Journal reported that more than 200 Islanders had already enlisted at the local armoury, not even waiting

until Canada's official declaration of war on September 10. The Prince Edward Light Horse Regiment saw action in the Italian Campaign as well as in northwest Europe. It played an integral role in the liberation of Holland.

It is worthwhile to remember that the province's population is surpassed by dozens of Canadian cities. By 1941, more than 6,000 Islanders had joined the army and navy and 926 men and 13 women had joined the air force. Air force training schools located at Summerside and Charlottetown and later, Mount Pleasant, doubtlessly boosted the numbers. The population of the entire island in 1941 was less than 100,000.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, all active P.E.I. units were disbanded. Eventually, this led to the amalgamation of The Prince Edward Island Light Horse and The Prince Edward Island Highlanders, to become The Prince Edward Island Regiment, 17th Reconnaissance Regiment. It currently numbers about 150 members, who have maintained an illustrious legacy by volunteering for United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Middle East, Cyprus and Bosnia.





Harold Simpson

First World War

My dad's name was Harold Simpson, and he grew up in a small farming community on the north shore of Prince Edward Island, and the regiment which he was a part was a Prince Edward Island regiment. He wrote to his mother regularly, and in great detail of which makes for some very vivid descriptions, and one of them is a description of Christmas in France in 1917 – the last Christmas he had spent there. He was in a dugout, which he had described earlier in great detail with a picture, which they had made as home-like as possible. For Christmas they had decorated it with greenery and all sorts of things that they had gathered.

So he said about this, "In a word, by the time we had finished our home looked more like some farmer's paradise than a bare French cellar a mile and a half from brother Bosch," which was how he described the Germans in his letters. "On Christmas morning I was the first to wake up, so I got up, made a fire in the grate, had a wash and got the breakfast going, which I dished up to the other fellows in bed. Then everybody got up and got busy, and by nine o'clock we'd squared away for the day, and a fiddle was produced and we went all the way from the *Sailor's Hornpipe* to *Leave Kindly Light*. Next on the programme was dinner at 1 pm. It consisted of roast chicken with dressing, gravy, potatoes, carrots and for dessert plum pudding with sauce and of course in addition we had extras of our own in the shape of cocoa and cake, fruit, and to finish up Marguerite cigars, which one of the fellows had received in a parcel from home. Not a bad dinner, when you take everything into consideration."

I might note that in all of his letters dad talks about parcels from home, and I was always amazed. Butter, sweets – the kinds of things that came were amazing – as well as mittens, socks, sweaters. All the things that supposedly would help to make them more comfortable.

Then they talked about what might be their next Christmas. Whether they would be there in France, others thought they would be in "Blighty", and a couple thought the war would be going on.

"And so the day passed, and now it is Christmas night", my dad said. "There is just one thing that I would like this evening as I looked out over the peaceful scene, with the glittering white snow glistening under the moon. I could not help thinking what a perfect ending a nice sleigh ride drive would make to this Christmas."

Listen to Harold Simpson's story at www.thememoryproject.com

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Dorothy Gogan Canadian Forces

I joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps in 1953 and had a 28-year career 'til 1981. I spent a lot of my career as a nurse educator and some of that time it was at the Canadian Forces Medical Service School, which is in what was originally called Camp Borden, but now units are referred to as CFB - Canadian Forces Bases. So, Canadian Forces Base Borden. And while there I taught the orientation course for the newly enlisted nursing sisters. And I use the emphasis of the word "sisters" because during my early years of the military we started to take men as nursing applicants to the military. We did that as a result of Lester Pearson, the then Prime Minister, appointing Mrs. Beryl Pluntree to head up the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. And she wagged her finger at the military saying we were "reverse discrimination in action" because so many trades and occupations in the military were restricted to men only. So, of course, we had to change. And therefore, men were enlisted—enrolled, the better term, enlisted is used in wartime—into the medical services as male nursing assistants, something we'd never had but probably should have had for years.

My positions in the military involved a lot of teaching, but I also have been the director of nursing at several hospitals. And I served at an interesting hospital in Fort Churchill on Hudson Bay, which at that time was a base for the joint Canadian and Military in Arctic warfare and a lot of testing was done for equipment and things of that nature. And we also had the responsibility of doing the air evacs, which meant that when the C.D. Howe went up the waters of Hudson Bay, they did that to find TB patients and they examined "Eskimo" communities, and those who were identified as having tuberculosis were handled only by the military. Civilian aircraft flying into Whitehorse would not take, of course, anybody with open TB. So we had to take people who had never seen an aircraft before, take them on a flight, which they didn't want to do on their back—they don't like to sleep on their back, but that's of course how you have to travel on a stretcher—down to Winnipeg, where they were sent for their initial treatment. And then we had to go down and pick them up and fly them back to their communities when they were ready.

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A SNAPSHOT IN HISTORY

Classroom Activities and Questions

- 1 What features and events help make Prince Edward Island's military contribution unique?
- 2 Are there unique challenges – and possibly advantages – for Prince Edward Island in terms of military participation? Explain in a thoughtful editorial entitled “Canada's Smallest Province's Distinctive Military Position.”
- 3 What is Prince Edward Island's greatest military triumph? Why?
- 4 Imagine that you invited Dorothy Gogan and Harold Simpson to dinner (or they came to your class as part of The Memory Project). What three questions would you like to address to each of them?
- 5 Working with a partner, identify the similarities and differences in the two individuals' military experiences.
- 6 How easy or difficult do you think it is for the two to tell their respective stories? Why? What would you identify as the major lesson/message that each one of them wants to convey in relating their personal story?
- 7 Christmas must have been an especially difficult time for Canadian soldiers fighting abroad. Harold Simpson writes of it nostalgically. Put yourself in his position and imagine yourself overseas with the Canadian Forces. Write a letter home to a loved one explaining your thoughts and feelings. (While students are thinking about and writing their letter, you might play John MacDermott's “Christmas in the Trenches.”) If you are doing this around Christmas, you might think of what your class could do for the Canadian troops in Afghanistan.
- 8 Harold Simpson's account is conveyed by his son. Does that make a difference in the memory of his war experience? If so, explain the effect. Dorothy Gogan's account is obviously her own, written from the perspective of a woman. Do you think the fact that she is a woman is reflected in her account? Explain.
- 9 The experiences of Harold and Dorothy took place decades ago. Do you think that the experience of today's Canadian military personnel is substantially similar or different from the experiences of Harold and Dorothy? Working with a partner, brainstorm two lists – those factors that have changed the military experience and those factors that have kept the military experience largely the same.
- 10 What do you think Dorothy meant when she wrote that Beryl Plumtree, the head of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, said “we were reverse discrimination in action”? Do you agree that was the case? Why or why not?
- 11 Conduct a debate, either in triads (groups of three) or as a class on the resolution: Women in the military have a greater challenge than men, both historically and currently.
- 12 Prince Edward Island has decided to award both Harold and Dorothy a citation to recognize their military contribution. Write the award citation that would be read prior to each of them, or a member of their family, coming on stage to receive their award.

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