Peace Country Historical Society
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December, 2022
The Winter Solstice Issue
Volume 12 - Issue 4

Promoting, Preserving, Publishing Our Heritage

The Weight of Winter
Frost in the Saddle Hills - Ron Thoreson

Events

PCHS cancelled the second tour of the Kleskun Lake Ranch planned for this fall due to low registration. We will offer this tour again in the spring of 2023.

During Remembrance Day week, Duff Crerar, historian and PCHS's Vice President, gave a talk at the Grande Prairie Library titled "Mercy on the Battlefield" to an appreciative audience. He told the story of Ed Heller from Beaverlodge, who enlisted in 1915 and became a stretcher bearer.

All things being equal, we hope to have a presentation and a film night after the New Year. The presentation, slated for January 29th, is by the Grande Prairie Seniors Reading Theatre.
We will notify members of the details by email. But you can also find them on the PCHS Facebook page. No need to be a Facebook member to read the event notices.

President's Message

Greetings to You All;

This is the Winter Solstice edition of our Newsletter. The fourth edition of our twelfth year as a Society.

It was a glorious fall this year, probably one of the best. Unlike last year, the crops came off dry. It was also a grand time to extend outdoor activities like camping and the fire pit.

All good things end they say, and they were correct. At the beginning of November, winter arrived with a bang. Now a common sight in yards and forests is the Waxwings and Grosbeaks cleaning up the last of the fruit and berries.
Crab apples, for instance

This edition contains a summary of our fall event and the story used to develop it. As well, some Christmas related things as it is the season. And to end, Part Two of Duff Crerar's article on civil defence during the cold war.

It is also time to introduce a new Editor for the Newsletter. I have very much enjoyed my time here, but I will move on to other projects. Ron Thoreson will replace me. Ron has newsletter credentials and is a writer in his own right. Best wishes Ron.

As always, I would like to thank all the writers that made this Newsletter possible. Please continue.

And from myself and your Board of Directors, Merry Christmas and all the best in the New Year.

Regards,

Pat Wearmouth

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Membership Dues

- The Historical Society of Alberta has a policy on membership dues. They will remind members to renew lapsed dues after three months. If no renewal is forthcoming, they will cease to be a member at the six-month mark.
- The due's year has also changed. Dues are now due on April 1st and expire on March 31st of the following year, or multiples thereof.
- The Society keeps the master membership list and receives dues on our behalf.
- Please go to their website, www.albertahistory.org,
  OR
  phone their office at (403) 261-3662
  for details on your dues and the categories and amount of dues and subscriptions.

Peace Country Historical Society

Vision: To encourage the appreciation of the history of the Peace Country.

Mandate: The mandated area of the Peace Country Historical Society is the northwest region of Alberta

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What We Can Offer

- A chance to help set direction for our Peace Country Chapter at membership meetings or by other communication means.
- A chance to learn about Peace Country history during presentations and tours, through Facebook, the Newsletter, the Website, and at membership meetings.
- A chance to meet other people who enjoy history.
- A chance to contribute as a volunteer in various projects that we carry out.
- A chance to advocate for the history of our area.
- We hope you choose to continue with, or join, our Society.

Christmas Stories

Does your family have a tradition of reading or listening to Christmas stories during the season? Many people would consider the story told in the Bible to be the Christmas story. But authors have written many secular stories over the years. The following titles may be familiar to you. All of them have stood the test of time, some for much longer than others. The oldest one shown is dated 1806, and continues to be read today. Perhaps it is time for a read or re-read.

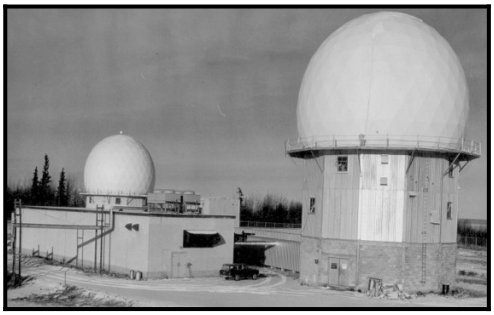
- The Elves and the Shoemaker–The Brothers Grimm - 1806.
- A Christmas Carol–Charles Dickens -1843.
- 'Twas the Night before Christmas–Clement Clarke Moore - 1823.
- The Little Match Girl–Hans Christian Andersen - 1845.
- The Fir Tree - Hans Christian Andersen - 1844.
- The Gift of the Magi–O'Henry–1905.
- Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer–Robert L. May - 1939.
- The Greatest Gift–Philip Van Doren Stern-1943.
- How the Grinch Stole Christmas–Dr. Seuss - 1957.
- Polar Express - Chris Van Allsburg—1985.

As an alternative, you can also listen to the stories on radio, television, or find recordings in public libraries.

One example you may remember is Allan Maitland's work on CBC Radio. Known as the character "Fireside Al", he read Christmas stories on the program "As It Happens". For those who grew up listening to Al, it is hard to read the story without hearing his voice.

He can still be heard periodically on that program, especially on Christmas Eve.

Tracking Santa



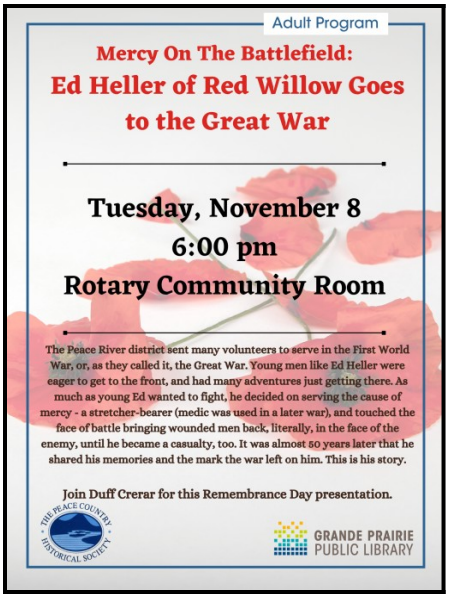
Saskatoon Mountain Radar Base
1953 - 1988

Current Radar Dome on Saskatoon Mountain

Another possibility your family's little ones might enjoy is tracking Santa's flight on Christmas Eve. Since 1955, an agency called NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command- Canada & the U.S.A.) has been doing just that using radar. Their program actually begins on December 1st and leads up to the evening of December 24th when the radar picks up Santa as he makes his way around the world delivering presents. It has many other fun things for young ones to enjoy. You can find the website at this address, **www.noradsanta.org**.

There may be a local connection in the Peace Country. The Saskatoon Mountain Radar Base was part of NORAD for many years. Their radar system might have been used when Santa was in the region. After the Base closed and was demolished, another radar dome was built. Perhaps it serves the same function?

Mercy on the Battlefield



During Remembrance Day week, our PCHS Vice President, Duff Crerar, gave a presentation at the Grande Prairie Public Library. The story he told is based on the memories of a Peace Country resident named Ed Heller who was a medic and stretcher bearer in WWI.

Heller took part in some of the major battles in the War, including Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele. He received severe wounds and spent months recovering.

After the War, Ed returned to Beaverlodge (once known as Red Willow or Redlow) and went back to farming.

Judging by the lively discussion after the talk, the audience enjoyed the presentation. Some of Heller's descendants were in attendance, and they told stories of his later life.

One source that Duff used in developing his presentation was an article he himself had written about Heller's experiences. He published it in the Grande Prairie Regional College newsletter several years ago. It appears below.

Labourer on the Painful Field

Stretcher Bearer Edward Heller and the Canadian Battles of 1917.

Duff Crerar

Arts Commerce and Education, GPRC.

During the afternoon of 8 April, 1917, a twenty-eight-year former farm worker, very far from his home, Beaverlodge (formerly Redlow) in Alberta's Peace River region, carefully prepared his gear for the assault on Vimy Ridge. C.E.F. #101094, Private Edward J. Heller, #15 Platoon, D Company, 49th Battalion, 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division, Canadian Corps, First Army, British Expeditionary Force, was a stretcher bearer. The next day he and fifteen other 49th men, like the sixteen bearers of each of the other battalions going over the top, hoped to save and carry back to the doctors as many of the wounded men as they could find. Visitors now can visit the location where he labored on the day the Ridge fell. It lies among the flocks of sheep, the red warning signs, and the pockmarked green knolls and tall trees of the Canadian Memorial Park. At sunset, the place where he treated his first casualty lies close to the shadow of the twin white spires of the Vimy Monument.

Ed Heller; Courtesy Ned and Edna Sparks

Heller joined the 49th Battalion from Edmonton, after the Somme. By the spring of 1917 he had been at the front long enough to know how to stay alive, but not long enough to learn never to volunteer. So, after a night in the line helping to carry back a wounded man, he found himself marked down as a regular stretcher bearer. As much as he hated putting his rifle aside, for Heller wanted to win the war as much as the next man, he did not back out. Soon he was learning how to prevent trench foot, help gassed soldiers and tie up wounds[1]. He could tell the difference in sound between dud shells and those filled with gas. He learned not to trust the judgment of every keen officer who was new. He saw his first man on the brink of total collapse, sticking out his tongue and chewing on it, glancing about wildly and waving his rifle[2].

Tomorrow, Ed Heller would experience his first real battle, not as he had imagined, carrying a gun, but wearing a Red Cross armband. To the men, he would be a kind comrade who risked death or wounds even more than they did.[3] Heller would win no medals. But to save others he would need every physical, mental, and moral resource he had. The Army needed men like him for two reasons: to rescue the wounded and, by their presence, keep other soldiers from stalling the attack by stopping to care for their chums. According to pre-war British strategists, four bearers would

[1] Edward J. Heller, "World War I Memories", 1976; by kind permission of Mr. Heller's daughter, Mrs. Edna Sparkes, Beaverlodge, Alberta, 16.

[2] Heller, 20.

[3] Desmond Morton, **When Your Number's Up**, Toronto: Random House, 1993, 195. Not surprisingly, the most decorated British Soldier in the Great War was a stretcher bearer, Richard Holmes, **Firing Line**, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 196.

carry each stretcher, a formula that assumed that only four or five men in each company would be crippled or seriously wounded each hour of an attack.[4] Absurd as these assumptions were, the system would not change much at the regimental level for the rest of the war. Captured Germans often did more carrying out than the handful of bearers combing a bad sector of the field, but to a badly hit soldier, anyone carrying was welcome.

He packed his haversacks and pockets, cramming into them all the supplies he could use: small tan-coloured field dressings, little wads of cotton lint with a long bandage and a tiny vial of iodine, used to tie up or pack into bullet or minor shell wounds on the spot. The men of his platoon each already had one sewn into their tunic cuffs (he had made sure of that), but everyone knew that one was never enough. Big shell dressings, triangle and roller bandages, adhesive tape, and a large brown bottle of iodine came next. These were for stopping the bleeding, stuffing wounds, making tourniquets and keeping broken bones from moving. The iodine was to prevent infection if that were possible in such a foul environment. Heller carefully packed a cloth bag of little glass tubes, each filled with iodine for small jobs. Into his large Red Cross-stenciled haversack went the special scissors, blunted on one end so he could slice open a pant-leg or sleeve without jabbing the victim. He put in some ammonia-filled anti-gas capsules, for phosgene or chlorine victims to inhale, trying to neutralize the poison breathed. Not that it seemed to do much good, but men with a whiff of gas often begged for them.

Stretchers and Thomas Splint (on ground): Library & Archives Canada

Next was the morphine, the suffering soldier's best friend, both in quarter-grain tablets – enough to dull the pain, and in liquid form, to be injected with a special collapsible-tube syringe. Tomorrow, many of the men would be in no condition to swallow a pill. Then came a handful of wound tags, string, and a blue-lead pencil, for noting what treatment, especially the morphine dose, he'd administered. Sometimes he'd write the large blue letter "M" right on the man's forehead. Many good men had gone blissfully to meet their Maker after receiving a morphine injection at every stop down the line of evacuation. Sometimes noting the time of treatment mattered a great deal. Tourniquets had to be undone regularly to keep even the most hideously mangled man alive. Booze? Sometimes officers had it in their flasks and water bottles, but Heller and his bearers did not carry it up front; it wasn't official medical issue for battalion bearers, and only made for trouble with the men the rest of the time. Heller didn't like rum anyway. An extra water bottle was more useful, either for the wounded, or him. Carrying men was hot and exhausting work, even in cold spring weather.

Finally, Heller picked out two good stretchers, instead of the one he usually carried. They'd need washing to get the blood off after the battle. Too bad he did not have a Thomas splint, for broken femurs. Without one, it made for an agonizing and potentially fatal first carry for the

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Regimental Aid Post, where the bones could be better immobilized for the next lift. Then the Field Ambulance men took over. Not that many men survived that kind of wound in the field. A bullet through the thigh was bad enough, with all those arteries and veins that could be ruptured, but if it broke the bone that was almost a death sentence. Too much blood loss, shock and, even if the man lived through the carryout, infection was inevitable. He knew by now that, back in Casualty Clearing Stations, most surgeons would say it was best to amputate, and hope the gangrene had not set in. Still, any wound that got one out of the line was a good one, if you survived. He had seen his mates celebrate with a white-faced man who'd had a bullet through his thigh, everyone shaking his hand and wishing him well as the bearers got him out[5].

As the sun set, Heller stuffed the leftover canned corned beef and hardtack biscuits from supper into his ration bag and shuffled forward with the rest of his platoon. Passing by a small cooker and a padre passing out hot coffee, he followed the man in front. It seemed like a mob of shadowy, coughing, and muttering shadows were slowly drifting forward at random, but he could only marvel at how each little group, as it reached their station, was fully equipped, briefed, and ready. The guns were firing faster now. Towards dawn, the 49th moved into Grange Tunnel, after the 42nd Battalion went through. As the Black Watch and her sister battalions of the Brigade were making the initial assault, Heller's battalion would provide reinforcements and mopping up parties[6]. Hunkered down in Grange, he tried to rest and not to think. But think he did, and when, almost fifty years later, he put his thoughts on paper, Edward Heller left an insightful and moving reflection on his year of doing an extremely difficult and dangerous job under fire during the critical year of 1917. Canadian regimental doctors, surgeons, nurses and psychiatrists have all had their stories told, or memoirs published over the years, but few accounts by or about the stretcher bearers are part of the Canadian Great War memory. Although almost every history or veteran's account praises the bearers, and heart-breaking photographs depict the exhaustion of the men who carried the wounded from the painful field, but few bearers have told their own harrowing story, or shared their wartime thoughts and postwar reflections.[7] Heller's 1976 account opens up a vivid depiction of the physical, psychological and spiritual world of one bearer's journey from barnyard to battlefield. It also reveals something of the story of the remote Peace River region, just opened for settlement, and how some of its men made their way to the Great War.

The athletic bachelor farm worker had heard the "call of the Peace" seven years before the war. His own march to the trenches began on 15 July, 1915, when a Grande Prairie lawyer came out to the Beaverlodge United Farmers of Alberta picnic. He was looking for young men to join up, and Heller was ready. The day after, he set out on foot ten miles to Saskatoon Lake hamlet for a preliminary medical exam, then jumped on a wagon heading for Grande Prairie. Along the way he joined two other laborers headed overseas. Sleeping in barns along the way, they hitched more rides to the original townsite of Bezanson, where the Wapiti, Simonette and Smoky Rivers converged. Escorted by a Captain Lucas, they traveled by boat down the Smoky to

[5] Heller, 59.
[6] G.R. Stevens, **A City Goes to War**, (Brampton, Charters, 1964), 83-84.
[7] See Winter, 196-197. Veteran Arthur Ament echoed these sentiments in his recollections, "A Front-line Soldier", **Legion**, March/April, 2003.

Prudent' s Crossing, today's Watino, for a quick meal and another night in a barn. This time the army paid for the meal. Scrambling up the high bank to a place called Culp, then the end of steel, Heller and his fellows boarded the train for Edmonton. Finally, a truck-driver dropped them off at Exhibition Camp, where they got their uniforms, a far more searching medical examination, and an introduction to drill. They had now joined the 66th Overseas Battalion, like so many Western outfits of the Great War, composed of the unemployed or down-on-their-luck, idealistic young clerks, tradesmen, farm boys, hired men, with a seasoning of older married men. Many had young families. The trio from the Peace had little premonition that any harm would come to them; yet, just over a year later at Passchendaele, all would be wounded. Only Heller would live to see Beaverlodge again.

Further training took place over the winter, at Sarcee Camp near Calgary and back in Edmonton. When time came to ship out for the United Kingdom, many of the men wanted to spend their last Sunday visiting with families or at the city churches, but back in camp, someone ordered an official church parade, closed to civilians. For the first time but not the last, Heller resented official Army religion. Whether or not the padre, the C.O. or some other higher-up had called the parade, he blamed the chaplain. "Was he so filled with such an exaggerated opinion of his own and that parade's importance that he had no room in his heart for a little pity or sympathy or room in his head for a little common sense"? It only made things worse, looking back, that so many men were denied a last few hours with their families before they left never to return. From then on, he hated the spit-and-polish inspections and stiff formality of compulsory church parades. "I feel safe in saying that the majority of us would prefer to be in the front or support trenches on Sunday than back in the reserve area and have to go to church parade".[8] It was not his last disappointment with official Christianity during the war.

After the cross-country train ride to Ottawa (where Militia and Defence Minister Sam Hughes, soon to lose his position, inspected the unit, made one of his grandiose speeches), the battalion sped to Moncton, and then sailed for Liverpool on the *S.S. Olympic*. Settled in Shorncliffe Camp the 66th endured weeks of physical training and sporting events, waiting for their call. Here Heller learned that his athletic skills were keeping him from the front. The C.O. was so pleased with the honors he won that, as the 66th was broken up piecemeal for reinforcements, he interfered to keep Heller from seeing action. Although promoted to Corporal as an incentive to remain behind, after the Somme battles he reverted to Private, talked an officer into sending him to the decimated 49th, and sailed to Le Havre. Although he did not think of it at the time, his athletic career, and an almost-forgotten short course in scouting and sniping during the frustrating days at Shorncliffe, would save his life at the front.

Le Havre brought two intensive weeks in the art of skilled killing. Heller saw for himself the disregard for individual human life that war demanded. In training, men were killed by their own ignorance. Soldiers learned to use their new weapons well, ranging from rifles and grenades to poison gas, or die trying. Some did. At first, he was shocked by how callously the sergeants, after clearing up the dead and wounded, quickly carried on the lesson. At the front, he understood better why a single life mattered so little in the war-machine. But he never liked it, and, as hard-bitten as any man became in the line, perhaps his sensitivity to the fate of so

[8] Heller, 3-4.

many individuals drove him to join the stretcher-men.[9] By then, he had joined D Company, which contained many men of the Peace River country, and the little world of 15 Platoon. As the new man, he kept quiet, shocked like so many reinforcements, by the coarseness and brutality of dugout and billet talk. A bad experience with over-strength rum persuaded him to give up the daily ration.[10] The old boys just shook their heads. Then his over-eagerness to open fire on a suspected German patrol got him a stiff lecture on the live-and-let-live ethic of the front line.[11] But he did his job without complaining. He even took part in some fraternizing on Christmas Day, as some of the Canadians gingerly crossed no-man's-land to exchange greetings, jibes, and trinkets with the Germans[12]. He was learning how to fit in.

Yet Heller could not stop his thinking. His active mind and sensitive conscience set him just a little apart from many of his comrades. When not preoccupied by the press of battle or the need of the men, long-forgotten memories would percolate unbidden into his mind, leaving him emotionally reeling in the brutal context of war. Stumbling along in the darkness towards Grange Tunnel, the guns roaring behind him, he suddenly realized it was Easter Sunday. In a flash he was back in his childhood, with coloured eggs, stories of the Easter Bunny, raisin bread and Good Friday school holiday. His mind drifted to brief recollections of infrequent visits to church on Easter, and somehow the Christmas text "Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace good will towards men" emerged to haunt him for the rest of the war.[13]

At the first shock of that thought, recalled Heller many years later, "my feet faltered to such an extent I almost lost my place within my unit… I thought what a sham, what a farce, what a mockery [*sic*] for there upon that Easter Sunday in France we were equipped to the full… and filled with a determination that on the morrow we would do our utmost to make the most effective use of the best …equipment, except poison gas, for the maiming, crippling and destruction of what after all was our fellow man across the way. That gave me quite a jolt, a shock from which I have even yet not fully recovered".[14] The sheets of rain and snow became signs of Nature grieving over the carnage. "It was many a day before Mother Nature and many another mother, widow or fatherless child smiled again…How much good will in a 15-inch Howitzer, or an 18-pounder, or the sweep of a machine gun or even a hand grenade, the Mills bomb, thrown with the bare hand? What a time and place for these thoughts!" [15] Crouched in Grange Tunnel, battling with his emotions, he waited the call to action.

He had to wait most of the day for that call to come. In the evening, the order came for his platoon to mount a patrol over the Ridge. They had barely gotten into the open before a shell downed three men nearby from another regiment. The little party stopped to give aid. They were already exposed to sweeps of machine gun fire from the as-yet untaken 4th Division objective on their left, dubbed "the Pimple". One of his patrols was grazed on the back of the neck below the helmet. He could still hold his head up, so back he went on his own – "walking

[9] Heller, 6-8.
[10] Heller, 23-24.
[11] Heller, 10-11.
[12] Heller, 13-15.
[13] Heller, 27-28.
[14] Heller, 28.
[15] Heller, 30-31.

wounded". Farther on, the young Lieutenant in charge went straight off on his own to investigate, despite the warnings of the old hands to approach his objective from the flank where there was more cover. A sniper brought the officer down after only a few strides. It was time for Heller to do his job.

A quick word with the Sergeant and the rest of the party resulted in plan: they would take the stretcher and veer off to the left, while he would crawl towards where the officer went down by the right flank. After he found the officer, Heller would indicate whether the victim would need the stretcher. In seconds he came across a wrecked trench veering towards his objective. Eager to use any cover available, he worked his way along the trench until he came to a jutting out projection of sandbags and earth: a trench block. Was there a sentry with a rifle or a machine gunner on the other side, or had all the defenders run away? Could he slip past by going up over the top of the trench? Would the sniper see his Red Cross armband and let him live? Or would other Germans nearby get an unarmed prisoner? Remarkably, the one question that seemed never to have crossed his mind was whether the wounded officer was worth the risk he was taking. "I didn't want to fool around too long making up my mind for there is not much difference in getting there too late or not at all, so I set out along the trench" [16]The block was unguarded. A few yards further on he found the officer alive, with an eye shot out. He was lucky. Like most men who had been shot, he had stumbled only a few more steps, his knees buckling before he fell, which deposited him safely in an enemy trench. He packed the wound – it was too dangerous to use iodine on the eye socket – and gave him a shot of morphine. He half carried the subaltern into a nearby dugout before the morphine made him too sleepy. There was no way they could get him back across the field, and in the dugout, he would be safe, for the time being. A wounded German he found at the bottom of the stairs would give no trouble, Heller judged, with so many Canadians in the area. Rejoining the patrol, he found another man with a face wound, and sent him to get some prisoners to carry both the German and the officer back to the Regimental Aid Post. A moment later another man in the patrol was shot in the head and soon became delirious, pushing away his bandages until Heller gave him a heavy dose of morphine. It was time to get out of there, the Sergeant decided. They had made enough contact with the enemy. Now the stretcher became useful, but Heller never forgot the raw exhaustion and back-wrenching exertions of carrying a man on it. It was too muddy for a man to take each handle, so the entire weight of the casualty was borne by only two, threading their way between muddy shell holes. Even when the wounded Canadian would lie still, the weight of the mud on his and all their uniforms only added to the burden. In the darkness and deep mud progress was slow and awkward. Every two hundred or so paces the carriers became exhausted. Only by everyone taking a turn was the little party able to get to the Aid Post. Heller knew he was too played out to carry the man down the steps into the dugout, so he staggered down and persuaded the staff to go up and do it for him. He collapsed on the floor, wearily watching a physically unmarked but mentally unhinged man leap in panic at every loud noise made by the doctors. After a few minutes he found a free stretcher and, one step at a time, got back up the stairs. It had been two hours and a quarter since they began wrestling the wounded officer out of the mire. Only a mug of hot tea made it possible to get back where his

[16] Heller, 34.

platoon was resting then he collapsed on the floor in a heap of mud and haversacks, and slept for hours[17]. His first day of battle was over.

Although the carrying got easier as the ground dried out during the summer of 1917, the work did not get any safer for Edward Heller. After some bloody attacks in May and June, the Canadians on the Vimy front set their faces towards a set-piece battle a few miles to the North, around Hill 70 and Lens. But not before the Brigade mounted a grandiose trench raid in June. Little did he know that it would bring his most memorable rescue of the year. At eleven o'clock in the evening, 9 June, he picked up his bags and his stretchers, and went over the top with his platoon.

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Trench raiding was one of the most controversial aspects of Canadian tactics during the Great War. In the days before night-vision equipment, all armies battled with the simple fact that any battle after dark was virtually impossible to control. A host of disasters could make almost every raid go awry, even when surprise was achieved. Attackers lost their bearings, treacherous winds blew gas clouds back on the raiders, hidden machine gun nests turned up, critical leaders were killed or could not be found just when a decision had to be made. When a raid went well, a unit became famous, and officers got medals. Sometimes vital information was learned, and the enemy shown that they did not have the initiative in that sector. But when a raid went wrong, too many men were killed, captured, or could be heard the next morning crying out, sometimes for hours, from No-man-s land. Many commanders decided they were wasting too many lives for the results gained.[18] But, with the Corps, Divisional and Brigade Commanders' approval, the 9 June raid was "on".

He knew his platoon much more intimately now. He noticed some of the men were extremely tense as the bombardment began and did his best to reassure them. They seemed preoccupied, but as he checked, Heller could tell their hearts were racing. Within minutes, he was directed to a man with a serious abdominal wound, already well into shock. He was a new man, not much different from himself only six months before. He said some reassuring words, fixed up the wound as best he could, and got him carried back. Months later, Heller found his name on a list of men who had died of wounds. Then he heard that a C Company man was lying off to the flank. After promising his own Sergeant that he would get back as soon as he could, especially if the Germans counter-attacked, Heller struck out but soon found he was alone. Where was C Company? Had they gotten off course? Or had D Company veered off, leaving a gap perhaps

[17] Heller, 37. Stevens places this patrol on 10 April, as does the 49th War Diary, see Stevens, 83-84, and NAC, RG9, III-D-3, Vol. 4940, Reel T-10747, April 10, 1917. This and other war diaries of CEF battalions are accessible on-line, thanks to the National Archives, at www.archives.ca . Another insight into the stress and strain of the bearers comes from Noyes, **Stretcher-Bearers**, 124-125, 177, 196-197. Another insightful account by a Canadian bearer is (Anna Ray Chapin), **Letters of a Canadian Stretcher Bearer by R.A.L.**. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1918, *passim*.

[18] Winter, 92-95.

occupied by the enemy? He soon had his answer when a burst of machine gun bullets flew past his head.

He was alone. There was a wounded man out there between him and the German machine gun nest. Once again, Heller's active mind worked out a plan. Here everything he had learned in the Shorncliffe sniper and scout course came into play. Scouts were trained to be comfortable in the dark, to move silently, and navigate by sound as well as stars and compass. They had to know the characteristics of enemy weapons. And they had to have intelligence, steadiness, and a capacity to take calculated risks.[19] It seemed the Canadian soldier probably had walked up to the gunners and had been surprised. Probably the Germans had shot at the noise he'd made because it was so dark. If he could make some short dashes in a zigzag pattern, Heller hoped to get much closer before having to crawl, feeling his way along. Pausing now and then, as bursts of more or less accurate fire went over his head, he worked his way closer to the area he judged the wounded soldier was lying in. At first the bullets sang over his head, but soon they were "popping like pistol shots around my ears, which is not so good".[20] Crawling now, he found his man, shaken but alive.

Feeling for the wound – this was no place for his flashlight – he tried to splint the broken leg he found, but the movement drew another murderous blast of rifle fire and a salvo of hand grenades from the nervous Germans. The next day he would find the bullet hole in his equipment that showed how close he came to being killed at that instant. Close enough to hear rifle bolts clicking and cartridge cases ejected, warmed by the heat from a grenade blast, Heller could not treat the wound until he removed the casualty to a safer area. A carry was out of the question, but how to drag a man when raising oneself off the ground was suicidal? Breathing into the wounded man's ear, he asked if he could drag the man out, warning him it would be painful. He thought he heard something like "let's get the hell out of here". Taking that as consent, he rolled the wounded man on his side, slipped around in front of him on his own belly and, reaching back over his shoulder, dragged the wounded man over on to his back. "I could hear him gritting his teeth and from the way his fingers dug into my shoulders I was sure he wouldn't slip off, so I put everything I had into getting him out of there" [21].

With occasional flights of bullets cracking by, the stretcher-bearer felt rather sheepish at being closer to the ground than the bleeding man on top of him, but he kept crawling furiously until they reached an occupied trench. Out of sight of the enemy outpost, Heller used his flashlight and morphine syringe to ease the painful splinting job on the broken leg. Then he raced up the trench, found some C Company men with a stretcher and brought them back to the scene. He was both startled and outraged when the four men lifted the stretcher up to the parapet and made to carry over open ground instead of back through the trench. Eager to save time and effort, they had barely shouldered the stretcher before one carrier fell dying from a German bullet, tumbling the wounded man back into the trench. The three surviving rescuers soberly allowed Heller to lead them back down the trench to safety, bringing the man he had risked so much to save back to their own lines. A year later in London, himself recuperating from

[19] Bill Rawling**, Surviving Trench Warfare**, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 25, 50.
[20] Heller, 43.
[21] Heller, 43-44.

wounds, he would meet this man and receive the thanks that could not be given that June night[22].

As dawn broke, he counted the men of his platoon, noting who had fallen or gone missing. Success or not, the raid had been a deadly night for twenty-four men of the battalion, and over 120 men were wounded or missing[23]. Some known to have died were the same men he had tried to cheer up before going over the top. A missing man of his platoon was brought in from a shell hole the next day. Then one or two men who had not been seen since the attack began turned up. “No comments were made, no questions asked, but for months afterwards” they were shunned by those who had been in the fight.

They lived an ostracized life until more naïve reinforcements came along in a few weeks and took them in. Tragically, Heller found one missing man the next day, dead, just a few yards from their trench. He had been an orphan and a social misfit, uneducated, and an outsider all the time he was with the battalion, but when his body was found, the veterans reckoned “he just had been through the mill” one time too often. Cowering in no-man’s land, a bullet or shell fragment had taken his life just a few yards ahead of the start line. Heller saw a gentler side of his rough companions that day, and as they later carried the body back for burial, putting a few poppies growing nearby on the grave[24]. It was an episode he never forgot.

Over the rest of the summer and early fall, Heller continued to survive and help others to do the same. During the August fighting around Hill 70 and Lens he had some close calls and met mustard gas for the first time. Not only did he have to wear a gas mask, but the liquid blistering agent got onto the uniforms and bodies of the men he worked on, and rendered even the grass dangerous to his hands, eyes, and face. In the late summer heat, the bodies of the unburied dead became so decomposed that quantities of chloride of lime powder were sprinkled over them and they were buried where they lay. When rumors came of a move back north to Flanders, it was almost a relief, though the men of the 49th knew that they were going to the worst battlefield of the war: Passchendaele[25].

It was a deadly place where men died miles behind the line from German bombers, on the shell-swept approaches to the murdered landscape of mud, bogged tanks, rain and ruin, and in fetid shell-holes and captured pillboxes along the forward edge of the battlefield. Clambering past wrecked tanks with dead crew still inside, the men of the 49th slogged their way to their attack positions on the 28-29 October. At 5:30 in the morning on the 30th, they would be going over the top. Heller remembered being crouched in a shallow trench, his position directly monitored by a German observation balloon a mile or so away. Darkness was welcome to the troops, as they stretched and warmed themselves a bit before hunkering down again around 5 o’clock for the barrage. They could not know that the next day the unit would be almost annihilated in one of the bloodiest attacks it ever made. By the end of 30 October, over four hundred men would be killed, wounded, and missing. One was Edward Heller.

[22] Heller, 45-46.
[23] Stevens, 89-90.
[24] Heller, 47.
[25] Stevens, 100-101.

He had no premonition that this was his last battle; crouched on the little step carved at the front of the water-filled ditch he called a trench. Half -asleep, he never heard the approach of the howitzer shell and the blast that hurled him out of the trench and left him crumpled in the mud, half buried. As he came to, he thought the right side of his head had been shot off and half his bones broken. Although seriously wounded, he probably had the Flanders mud to thank for his survival, as it absorbed the main force of many high explosive shells. Stunned, two of the men he was supposed to help, bound up his bleeding wounds and got him steered back to the regimental aid post. Heller the stretcher bearer was now one of the "walking wounded". He found himself on an evacuation train to a Casualty Clearing Station run by Australians and met his first female nurse. He was surrounded by a sea of men, with wounds of every type. One or two 49th men came through, from whom he heard of the bloodbath, and that several Peace River countrymen were lost. At one point a patient on the operating table faltered for lack of blood. Heller's stretcher was placed beside him, and his own blood directly transfused to save the patient's life [26]. After two days the Australians put him on a train for the rear. Trying to blow his nose, he discovered that his right eardrum was punctured. Later he realized that a leg was seriously gashed and liable to infection. He would not be going back to the front for a long time.

In fact, Heller never went back to the front. After recuperation and long physiotherapy, he was assigned to instructing Physical Training at Bramshott Camp. His request to go back the 49th was denied: the officer in charge told him he had done his bit. By then he had to agree, as his back was giving him intense pain. When the medical officers found nothing in the X-ray photographs, he was handed a bottle of lineament. There were stiff penalties for malingering, so he gritted his teeth and carried on until the war was over. Like many other stretcher-bearers, lifelong back pain would be a constant reminder of the toll war took on his body. At war's end, he settled in White Rock British Columbia, working as a local policeman for four years, until back surgery made it possible for him to move his young family back to the Beaverlodge and take up farming again.

As with many veterans, Ed Heller never talked much about his war, suppressing the most painful memories into the subconscious, and trying to ignore the rest. In 1976 he wrote, "Many, too many wounds of the flesh proved fatal or crippling for life, most heal over leaving no pain, only a scar and a memory. Many wounds of another nature tho' diminished in severity by the passing of years, never heal over and most of the pain remains. Can you not", he jotted down" even ever so lightly, feel what it might be like to be going around for so many years with those memories, and more like them (for who would tell everything) gnawing at you?" [27]. He never lost his rage at the stubborn insistence of Field Marshall Douglas Haig to continue both the Somme, and especially Passchendaele, beyond all hope of success. He could never forget how, at Passchendaele "some of those bodies lying there were of those just about as close to me as my own brother. I had been with some of them for just over a year under conditions bringing out what there is in a man probably more fully than could be done in any other way. And to think that after what they had been through for four months, their bodies lay out there in all that miserable winter weather in the mud and much, filth and slime and, in places, stench, a

[26] Heller,53-55.
[27] Heller, 60.

rather disturbing thought, isn't it?"[28]. But like many a veteran, he learned how to overlook the misunderstandings and disbelief of those who thought him too sentimental. He learned to bear their lack of sympathy in silence, "For no one who has not been through the mill, could well comprehend, realize, or really feel the anguish and futility of it all"[29].

Other memories seeped unbidden and unwelcome into recollection. Of soldiers spinning like "Dutch windmills" when hit by shells. Of fair-haired - and smooth-faced - boys crushed into trench-floors. Of musing on how many mothers' prayers were never answered, of that orphan soldier who died without ever knowing a mother's love, and of poppies, poppies tumbling like tears over field, trench and grave. Most of all he remembered the faces of men who "with their eyes told you as plainly as anyone ever could with words what it would mean to him and his family if they could be together again for just one day, even if only for one short hour… but as you did for him what you can with iodine, bandages and morphine you felt so frustrated, so helpless for you need not be well versed in medical lore to see that the well-deserved, well-earned granting of that ardent desire is to be denied them. One wonders why it couldn't have been me instead, who had no one depending on me…but *he* had a wife and four young children depending on him, and [*sic*] seeing a movement of lips the ear was placed close by and who could ever forget him lying there in the mud murmuring their names as he was passing into that long, long sleep."[30] Perhaps Edward Heller's written testament was meant to be a last chance to communicate what could never be spoken. By doing so, he created a moving and insightful portrayal, externally and internally, of a stretcher-bearer's labours during Canada's most triumphant and traumatic year of the Great War.

[28] Heller, 61-62. Noyes, of the *5th Canadian Field Ambulance*, seconded these bitter assessments, see Noyes, 279.
[29] Heller, 60.
[30] Heller, 48.

Preparing for the Long Day After

Peace Country Civil Defense

As viewed from holdings in the South Peace Archives
1951-1965
Duff Crerar, Ph.D. South Peace Historical Society

Part Two

This is Part Two of the article. Part One was published in the Fall (September), 2022 Edition of the PCHS Newsletter. It can be found on the Publications page of the PCHS website at www.pc-hs.ca.

For those who had lived or served overseas in the last war the following years must have been, at times reminiscent of bomber flights over farm fields in Britain or worse over their former European homes. The Peace Region, rather than being isolated and safe from future war, was an 'air front', where jet fighters and Russian bombers might decide the future of North America. The location of a Pinetree Line Radar Base on Saskatoon Mountain, staffed for the first decade by the United States Air Force, and the less obvious Mid-Canada Line radar sites tucked away in isolated locations, anchored in Dawson Creek, as well as the maintenance of the Militia at D Company Armouries in Grande Prairie were regular reminders.

Towards the end of March 1961, 14 representatives selected from the Peace region were secretly briefed for another exercise. TOCSIN was back. The chosen 14 were tightlipped: they were going to be the umpires. The rest of the regional EMO would respond spontaneously, as would the Edmonton EMO, Major Beaumont, and the nuclear staff of Western Division. Representatives came from Sexsmith, Beaverlodge, Wembley, Valleyview, Grimshaw, High Prairie, Peace River, Falher, Manning, Hines Creek, McLennan, and Fairview, prepared to evaluate the performance of about 200 volunteers.[31]

Everyone waited. It would be the first trial of the new GP Country CD unit, with sub-control rooms in Sexsmith, Beaverlodge, Wembley and Hythe. On 5 May, a three-minute blast on the sirens triggered the launch. Ministers of government moved swiftly to their wartime posts, while the GP staff raced for the headquarters, located again in the Anglican Church Hall, with separate City and County control units set up In the United Church basement. The local

[31] *Herald Tribune*, April 25, 1961.

population was supposed to stay indoors and tune their radios to a national radio broadcast by Prime Minister Diefenbaker. A program prepared by the Provincial EMO followed.

This time it was a 5-megaton bomb (the standard size for drills in Canada), probably from a crippled bomber or a rogue missile, which leveled Beaverlodge, killing one thousand people outright and leaving 200 barely alive. Information went up on the charts covering the walls. Raging bush fires around Beaverlodge ruled out rescue of isolated acreages. Suddenly at 10:55 a "take cover" warning was issued: more bombers were attacking, saboteurs had started a fire in Grimshaw, and Cold Lake was wiped out by a 5-megaton warhead. Most of North-east Alberta was ablaze.

The situation was much worse than any previous scenario, especially when radiation levels spiked over Grande Prairie. The headquarters was hastily evacuated to Valleyview. EMO in Grande Prairie was out of communication, except by radio, for a critical period. City residents were ordered to stay in their cellars or basements for at least twelve hours, emerging later for a few minutes, while their civil defense leaders were forced to pull out. Meanwhile, fire, rescue and the army were contemplating a move west to engage with the disaster. Word arrived, just before leaving, that the bridges, again, at High Prairie, Peace River and Hines Creek were down.

By 1 pm communications with Rycroft were restored, where the town had been overwhelmed by a flood of refugees from Grande Prairie and Sexsmith. Panic had set in there among those not heeding instructions to stay indoors. They packed into their cars and sped to safety in Rycroft. Except, radiation monitors reported, the big fallout cloud this time fell on Rycroft. In minutes, every basement there was packed, while outsiders hammered on the doors. Of course, the panic was only "reported", no one had really panicked, it was only a drill, but it would be another lesson, for next time.[32]

In the days following, umpires reported that largely they were satisfied: faced with rapidly increasing difficulties and unexpected fallout, the region had performed well. It had been the biggest test yet, and umpire decided that while Edmonton could not be reconstructed, there was hope, on paper at least, for the Peace.[33] Fallout had been a cruel teacher. But the Peace had come through very well. A year later, Grande Prairie showed off its CD wrecking truck and team for rescue and evacuation. Meanwhile, the training continued, with courses now in the provincial building.[34]

[32] *Herald Tribune*, 5 May 1961.
[33] Maloney, "Dr Strangelove", 53.
[34] *Herald Tribune*, 16 May 1961.

Courtesy Harry Lehners

In June the Sucker Creek Reserve near High Prairie made history as the first reserve to take CD defense training, aided by translation by Chief Scotty Willier, at the band hall.[35] The search for safe quarters continued in the County. Roy inspected the basement of the relatively new Wembley School, constructed of heavy concrete and reinforcement bars, virtually fallout resistant (a lesson from TOCSIN). When he approached the County School Board, representatives were enthusiastic, but expecting costs, referred Roy to examine the Beaverlodge Community Centre. Roy replied that the school's concrete inner basement gave the best radiation protection in the entire region, and would be ideal as both a control room and emergency seat of Government. He asked for access, but resistance from Wembley council scotched the proposal. When the old council had resigned *en mass*, the new slate had been selected on a strict austerity budget. Someone asked, "What has Civil Defense done for us?"[36]

Nevertheless, preparations for a dark future continued. Lt. G. Peary informed the *Herald Tribune* that, beginning in November, over 300 members of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment would be taking National Survival training at the Armouries. This would attract "seasonal workers" (a plan which brought a storm of controversy in Southern Canada, where critics charged that some of the most shiftless were being entrusted with national survival at public expense).[37] More plans included setting up 4-5 fallout detection stations, secure from radiation and manned by trained CD workers, to advise provincial and national EMO headquarters seeking safe areas for evacuees.[38] Forestry and agricultural staff already were training in the city. Readers were reassured that those who would operate the monitoring stations "likely" would be provided with "fallout protection"[39]

Preparations were already underway for a sequel to the earlier exercise: TOCSIN B was coming, and the 600 or so provincial EMO leaders were readying for the alarm. Federal, provincial, Alberta Ministry of Lands and Forests, would be observing from County EMO headquarters,

[35] *Herald Tribune*, 6 June 1961.
[36] *Herald Tribune*, 7 July 1961, see also October 6, 1961, and 16 Nov. 1961.
[37] *Herald Tribune*, 26 September 1961.
[38] There is no record of these radiation monitor shelters being built in the Peace Region.
[39] *Herald Tribune*, October 2, 1961. Although no record has been found of these stations being prepared, and Grande Prairie was north of the 55 N line originally designated as the limit, the lessons of TOCSIN earlier and consideration of the Peace Region as a fallout refuge could have led to this announcement.

again located in the United Church site (Wembley School basement still was out of the question), along with the Army, and with a member of the Provincial cabinet. This time, about twenty assistants from the St. Joseph's Business College provided stenographic and switchboard support, while local ham radio operators had been recruited for both County and City headquarters. City EMO chose a different location, the well-built but now defunct city liquor store, serving as the Provincial Building.[40]

This time the entire Region would be on Zulu (Greenwich Mean) Time, used by the military, and Peace Region would be linked directly through Penhold (the EMO provincial bunker adjacent to the RCAF base) to the rests of Canada. The CBC would be providing the alert signal. This time, with lessons learned and new measures in position, TOCSIN B would be a greater test of national communications at the level of every EMO headquarters in the nation and the Peace would play fully its part when the sirens went off – at the beginning of the coming week.

As events proved, the Peace Region became a major reception centre for thousands of casualties and evacuees from Southern Alberta (which took the brunt of the attack – Edmonton had been levelled within minutes of receiving its warning – perhaps, in a grim way, for the best as most EMO staff in Edmonton had not heard the sirens, anyway, and died on the way to Penhold). Cold Lake and Namao air bases were destroyed. This time the Peace was untouched. In terms of its response to the new task of evacuee reception, the region came through with flying colours. The RCMP, with the local Peace Division chief and the GP deputy participating from the provincial building (the glass enclosed liquor store checkout booths were perfect for the telephone and radio operators) became the champions of the exercise. Even when, on Day Two, Penhold abruptly "went silent", messages to and from the South were uninterrupted, thanks to the ham operators and the RCMP radio network (their messages went out to antenna in the Saddle Hills, were shuttled to Fairview, then Peace River). When a brief riot was declared, the police soon had it in hand and the expected traffic jams were sorted out, eventuallyt.

In Sexsmith a real elevator fire gave local CD firefighters good practice. When the bridges (predictably, given the assumptions about saboteurs) as usual, went down, the Army engineers and their crews were left to handle them. The Boy Scouts and Sea Cadets who served as runners were given time off from school, and the United Church women came through with hot meals for the staff on each shift. St. Joseph's commercial students, especially those trained on switchboards, were greatly appreciated, and the local Militia, led by Lt. Pearcy, detailed eight soldiers, armed with heavy FN rifles, bayonets fixed, to guard the entrances and patrol the EMO perimeters. Things seemed well enough in hand, so that, on Day 2, Grande Prairie was tasked by Penhold (now back on the communication net) to set up a relief column of welfare, police, rescue, engineering, and some headquarters staff to move south to help "the flattened" provincial capital, to be supervised by the Army according to the National Survival Plan.

[40] *Herald Tribune* 14 and 18 November 1961

TOCSIN B was the closest to actual wartime expectations which Alberta – and the national CD network -- was subjected to, and the most extreme that the Peace River Zone ever experienced. Things had not gone according to plan in Edmonton – the short-time missile warning caught the team on the way to Penhold. [41] The Peace region umpires, though, were impressed, noting the Zone had the best drill they had ever seen. Unofficially, someone stated that it was possible that the Zone might one day be designated as an alternate capital, a final refuge from which the survivors, government included, might rebuild the province.[42] Flushed with success, the County conducted a first aid course (above ground, presumably) at Wembley, adding to the over 1200 individuals so trained in the Peace. Local RNs and Jack Roy called for more rescue services to be developed in the area.[43] St. John Ambulance formed its own first aid division.[44]

At the end of 1961, the County of Grande Prairie tendered its first annual report. Emphasizing progress made since the previous April, separate jurisdictions had been sorted out with the city and approved by Dunbar, Zone Officer for Alberta EMO. Planning turned to developing a register of boat owners and their craft, for emergency water transportation, and sharing it with the RCMP. The survey was put off, however, to the spring of 1962. The CD committee identified coordinating fire departments for mutual aid and suggested having City Fire Department professionals train the county volunteers.

In addition, need for funding meant requests would be made to the County, Province, and Federal governments. Encouraging news was that the organization had again proved its usefulness in peacetime. The well-attended babysitting courses had led to one child being saved in Beaverlodge. Local visibility, by their presence with a county-supplied first aid trailer, giving first aid at the local Air Shows, fairs and "stampedes", and the Girl Guides Camp. The County EMO also assisted at St. John Ambulance during its campaigns across the county, where almost 400 were trained in artificial respiration (In contrast to the mere 70 trained that hear in Edmonton, Beverly, and Jasper Place). Demonstrations of rescue efforts and displays at the Grande Prairie Air Show, Country Fair, promoting shelters, welfare displays, including a false-front imitation manned by city Engineer staff. The Unit Director spent a week offering first aid at the Cutbank fire-fighting camp the preceding summer, and at the Kinuso flood. General Publicity on the radio and in the press also increased the visibility of the local EMO, while members of CD had been assisting at Cadet training. Given all the activity of its unit, financial support ought to be forthcoming, supporting its many training programs still in operation.[45]

[41] Maloney, "Dr. Strangelove", 53-54.
[42] *Herald Tribune* 14 November 1961.
[43] *Herald Tribune*, December 2, 1961.
[44] *Herald Tribune*, March 27, 1962.
[45] Unit Progress Report, 1 April-29 November 1961, South Peace Regional Archives, Municipal, Civil Defence.

Grande Prairie CD 1962 team posed with display, courtesy H. Lehners, from author's collection.

Now school officials considered how to prepare for nuclear attack, after a memo arrived from Alberta Department of Education, Emergency Planning. Students who lived close could be sent home in the final hours, those requiring a "van" or bussing presented a dilemma. School teachers and superintendents were toldto keep children safely at school if necessary and make "recovery" plans with school board officials. The question was whether bussing students should be kept at school or rushed onto the busses, assuming that families would rather have their children with them, even though school buildings were fallout-resisting brick and concrete. In the end, the Board agreed that parents would want them to try and get the children home. Meanwhile, Mr. Toews, Superintendent, would be attending a Ministry of Education course for Superintendents. Back in Grande Prairie, First Aid stocks in the city were now higher than many other locations in the province, including many hospitals, while money was being spent on rescue tools, hoists, ropes, and stretchers. The annual report detailed expanded First Aid courses, attempt to build a fire department Mutual Aid plan, setting up Casualty Clearing stations and working on the regional Disaster Plan.[46]

That summer the Militia provided a dramatic Cold War reminder, scheduling a major exercise bringing hundreds of reservists, and a convoy of sixty trucks from Edmonton, to descend on the banks of the Wapiti. Besides mock battles and combat training, the Militia conducted some national survival training, with the 23rd Militia Group demonstrating bridge building.[47] The city would be a provincial EMO centre. Located in the sturdy basement of the Provincial Building (built with reinforced concrete walls and cubicle divisions) Sam Dunbar described how it would become an emergency control facility for all levels of government, politicians and the military. Stating that most other control centres in Alberta were only a tenth the size of the Provincial Building site, Dunbar predicted that a battery of telephones and a teletype would be installed.

[46] *Herald Tribune*, 13 March, 1962. Roy informed the Chair that VHF radio testing had successfully proven the feasibility mutual aid, which he reported had wide county citizen support, and now was waiting for Mr. Eager of the Grande Prairie city Fire Department, to provide maps and advice. Roy to G.R. Johnson, County Chair, n.d. 1962
[47] *Herald Tribune*, 11 May 1962.

The affairs of the entire province could be controlled from Grande Prairie, especially since, he added, Grande Prairie was not considered a target any longer. A brief training exercise for zone staff and provincial officials was in the offing for September.[48]

That Peace River Zone training was brief, but intense, the first of its kind in Alberta (more were planned for Calgary and Edmonton), and some volunteers, mostly government employees, gave up part of their holidays so as not to miss the training. Attending was R.A. McAlpine, official "continuity of government" representative for the Alberta EMO.[49] A few weeks later, their training took on new significance during the Cuban Missile confrontation between the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia (though Prime Minister Diefenbaker, called upon by the Kennedy government to mobilize along with them, created turmoil with Canada's armed services and outraged the United States by not sounding the alarm along with it). [50] Significantly, a *Herald Tribune* survey of a handful of people on the Grande Prairie sidewalk revealed a far greater trust in President Kennedy's judgment than in the Canadian Prime Minister.[51] Ironically, others in the south publicly questioned whether there was any use in making CD preparation when warning times would be reduced to minutes by nuclear missiles. No one mentioned local CD: the blow would not fall, if it ever did, on the Peace. But the issue of relevance now was out in the open.

The success of the Zone exercise was followed by the appointment of several officials to new posts. At the next Orientation course in the provincial building, Gordon Moon, city building inspector, took over Control of Zone Supplies, coordinated with the Alberta EMO. City lawyer J.J. Ouelette now was Trade Controller, aided by businessman F.H. Harvey from Horne and Pitfield Foods. Appointments of Energy and Materials Controllers were expected soon to come. The War Supplies work would be connected to the federal government's Department of Munitions and Supply, and was intended to take over local production, distribution and especially pricing of supplies. The federal and provincial departments of Agriculture were to provide guidance and direction for farmers. The expectation that in the first days of emergency only local supplies would be available in the Zone, as production in the targeted zones would be interrupted, or, more likely, cease. Raw materials finance and transport would have to be supplied from the peripheral zones. [52]The hope of Alberta reconstruction, after its survival, now lay in the well-organized and governed regions like the Peace. Preparations continued for fallout monitoring: Merv Jaque, B.Sc. District Agriculturalist, would be one of two new Peace zone men sent to the radiological course in Ottawa, and would, on return, be technical advisors on the effects of nuclear weapons, equipment, treatment of fallout casualties, radio equipment and protection for those doing the monitoring. [53] A CD unit, consisting of an ambulance at the western end of the zone, Goodfare, began to organize.[54]

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[48] *Herald Tribune,* 17 August 1962.
[49] *Herald Tribune* 18 September 1962.
[50] Maloney, "*Dr. Strangelove*" 53-54.
[51] *Herald Tribune*, 11 September, and 26 October 1962.
[52] *Herald Tribune*, 18 September 1962; Maloney, "*Dr. Strangelove*" 60ff.
[53] *Herald Tribune* October 26, 1962.
[54] *Herald Tribune*, 4 December 1962.

Though it was not as apparent in the Peace, since, after all, they considered themselves apart from the chief targets in the South, the missiles of October took much of the remaining momentum from public support for CD elsewhere in Canada. Work went on in the Provincial building basement (though the official green light from Edmonton had been received), providing space for 21 staff to live, eat and work in safety. Radio installation tenders had been let, and Grande Prairie staff was scheduled to meet at Western Command Army Headquarters in Edmonton.[55] Plans were underway for the newly named "Wapiti" and County units to take in Spirit River, Wanham, Rycroft and Municipal District 133 on April 1. This would make the Peace Zone perhaps the largest and well-organized in the province, with Oscar Blais, Alderman, taking the chair of the Civilian Control Committee.[56]

Yet, there were voices of discontent about the new - expensive EMO – as an increasingly irrelevant juggernaut. In 1962, J. B. Roy, writing to G.R. Jackson, chairman of the Country of Grande Prairie #1, had requested that, just as a "mutual aid" plan for the fire departments in the area was in planning, in future the County CD unit should be designated the coordinating agency for all firefighting, including prairie and bush fires. While, to Roy, it made it sense to hand over the work to CD and allow him, a qualified forester and CD official, to take this over.[57] Whether Roy's request carried hints of CD over-reach, combined with the Wembley complaints, in Grande Prairie a dispute over rent for the Forestry building for CD demonstrated challenges to further growth. The extra space which could be provided for CDS there, led to a city council debate about how the rent would be paid. When Edmonton stated that the city alone would bear the monthly cost of 100$m city councillors hit the roof. The city claimed that the usual cost sharing agreement meant that three quarters must be paid by Alberta CD. Someone else pointed out that, if cost sharing took place, separate utility meters needed to be installed. Aaldermen decried the "autocratic" decision by Edmonton, and, again, one loudly raised the question of much good the CD organization was doing. City council demanded that Edmonton pay all the rental costs. [58]

During early 1964 another sign of possible flagging interest was the drop in volunteers for first aid courses. While some short refresher courses in first aid had been offered in the winter, Roy wrote Isabel Campbell, reporter for the *Herald Tribune* that while nuclear defense courses still had volunteers going south for training, he needed more promotion of the need for continuous local training to keep first aid volunteers up to date. Many who had once taken the CD course were not signing up with the St. John Ambulance, nor remaining active members of the EMO.[59]

Despite these hints of growing apathy, Peace and other Alberta EMO members attended a large conference in Edmonton, where Minister Halmrast promoted the need for realistic disaster and

[55] *Herald Tribune*, 15 February 1963.
[56] *Herald Tribune*, 22 February 1963.
[57] Roy to Johnson, n.d., 1962, see South Peace Regional Archives, Government – Municipal – Civil Defence, 510.10.043.
[58] *Herald Tribune* 22 February 1963. For the Wembley refusal to assist CD financially, see *Herald Tribune*, October 22, 1963, where both Roy and Dunbar criticized the "negative thinking" of the Wembley council.
[59] *Herald Tribune*, 17-18 February 1964; also, Roy to Campbell, n.d. (1964), South Peace Archives, Civil Defence folder.

emergency planning in the province, especially to cope with local emergencies.[60] The Wapiti Unit, as they were now called, were proud of their previous growth, and the *Herald Tribune* approvingly noted that, In the event of nuclear war, Grande Prairie and the Peace were one of the three Alberta centres to be designated emergency capitals, where, housed in the Provincial building (officially rated 1900 times more safe than the open street) behind reinforced concrete up to 100 top officials and political leaders could hold out "almost indefinitely".

Behind the scenes, of course, those in the know were aware that only about 21 staff at a time could be fitted into the basement, which already was throwing up a few construction headaches, being a few inches below the city water and sewer pipes, which would require extra pumping. Still, the city facility would be linked to the provincial bunker at Penhold, and plans were made to divide the Cabinet and other vital politicians into thirds, with one third allotted to Grande Prairie. If something disastrous happened at the other two (secret) locations, Grande Prairie, surrounded by "a tight security net", by default would be the new capital of Alberta. New radio antennae were to be placed by AGT to back up or replace Edmonton links. Readers were told that already provincial and federal governments had been making similar plans, and several local men had been quietly given "shadow" roles to be mobilized "in minutes".[61]

While *Herald Tribune* readers digested these items, CD work continued, boosting national CD Week with a first aid emphasis, with courses and competitions planned, meant to cap off four years of progress in the area. Women, too, were encouraged to join the teams, or make up their own for the first aid test. For the first time Civil Defense would be taking a survey of every home in the city to judge its capacity to house extra refugees. But there were no CD volunteers knocking on doors, yet. [62] In 1965, the planning was described as on a "high speed basis": 80% of the regional hospitals had completed disaster plans. AGT and amateur radio operators were now on standby, and the AGT announced it would evacuate to Banff in a crisis. Over 200 forestry and industrial CD locations were completed, though the paper did not identify these as the special fallout reporting centres. Outside factors, however, were holding up the military: the Pearson government's unification of the armed forces put the Army's plan on the sidelines.[63]

Despite the impression of haste and efficiency, the momentum had changed in the CD world. By 1967 the radiation monitors had been reclaimed by the Army. Two years' earlier, the CD folder in the South Peace Archives, based on the *Herald Tribune* clippings, fell silent. In April 1970, reporter Bill Scott described the EMO's calculations on the extent and threat from a 5-megaton bomb, and reassured readers that the Wapiti EMO radiation monitoring staff were still on duty. Once the local level dropped to a safer route, with their protection gear on, monitors would fan out create a map warn citizens of places to avoid (for example, given a 30-mph hour wind in the upper atmosphere, if a bomb did fall on Beaverlodge, it would be fatal to come out of shelter too soon, as anyone living in a line directly from Demmit to Grande Prairie's O'Brien Park

[60] *Herald Tribune*, 23 January 1964.
[61] *Herald Tribune*, 7 January 1964
[62] *Herald Tribune*, 4 February 1964
[63] *Herald Tribune*, 2 January 1965.

would die almost instantly. On the other hand, evacuations of less radioactive zones would get people, it was hoped, to Buffalo Lake and Teepee Creek). Significantly, Scott reported that command and control for this was controlled directly from the Penhold centre not Grande Prairie. [64]

CD returned to the public mind during the dread-filled early 1980s, when heated rhetoric and diplomatic confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the media. After the furor caused by the TV broadcast of the bleak fictional nuclear survival film, "The Day After", a reporter visited Sam Dunbar, still at work for Alberta Disaster Services. in his office in 214 Place. He expected the old Cold War work of the EMO to be revived. It was time to inform the oblivious that the plan still existed, despite the neglect of officials who had not kept them up to date. While Grande Prairie and district were in no danger of being a nuclear target, fallout remained a dread danger – here Dunbar was darkly realistic – and he had received about twenty calls to Alberta Disaster Services about what to do in the event of nuclear war.

Otherwise, the old plan remained the same: continuity of government was the priority, Penhold was still the Alberta command centre, and the Grande Prairie district was one of the three emergency government locations. Dunbar predicted that the provincial government could still operate from the shelter in the Provincial building. He knew that some local building had been surveyed for radiation protectiveness, especially the Post office, the Bay and McLeod's store basements on the main street, though no one had tested 214 Place or the new Provincial Building yet. The municipality still had he said, some radiation monitoring abilities, but no one had even sounded the first level alert to test them out. His office in 214 still had most of the old pamphlets and some new information for the public.[65]

CD or EMO nuclear preparations drop out of the file again until the 1985 controversy over U.S. Cruise Missile flights over the Peace, but the last story on Grande Prairie in the folder, while confirming that the Provincial Building centre still existed, it would be difficult to operate fully, in an emergency. Rated to hold 85 in a nuclear fallout situation, government, and technical staff, with their 14 days of army rations (kept up to [66]date by the base at Saskatoon Mountain -- until the RCAF shut down the installation), manning their radios, telephones (though only one was still working, owing to a water main failure) and the aged teletype, generating records on manual typewriters, resting on old military steel beds and mattresses were supposed to carry on. No one had inspected the old freshwater tank for years. The air was still filtered, but no electrical generator was available. The city police chief had a radiation monitor and was supposed to head for the centre when the siren, still installed, went off. Officials still would not divulge the names on the secret list.

Clearly, the increasingly decrepit centre was more storage space than control centre. When the Province took up more modern quarters, the control centre, now inaccurately dubbed "the city

[64] *Herald Tribune*, 2 April 1970.
[65] *Herald Tribune*, 2 December 1983.
[66] *Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1987.

bunker" was virtually abandoned. In the early 1990s, not without its stout walls giving workers some difficulty, was torn down. Reporter Paul Cowley asked the obvious question in 1994: what would be done with the old city warning siren? Bob Robertson, City Manager, speculated it might be worth keeping as a tornado warning, but Ottawa wanted it de-installed. Deputy Fire Chief Bill Walker considered it practically useless, especially as few could hear it, and no one was trained to know what to do if it sounded. For him, television and radio made more sense. The Fire Department had gotten rid of theirs the previous year. The siren's days were over.[67]

By the mid-1950s, the thermonuclear bomb and its deadly fallout raised the CD challenge to a level far beyond the early days of planning based on World War II experience. The government of Canada quailed at the prospect and costs of building massive shelters, and so opted for evacuation strategies, until they proved by, by 1955, to be largely impractical. The result was the widespread publicity and promotion of the family fallout shelter. While the shelter strategy, ambitiously pursued by the Diefenbaker government and the armed forces eventually faltered and failed on the rocks of financial recession, intergovernmental and agency and utilities' resistance, in the Peace Region, a surprisingly high level of preparedness and willingness to bear the burdens of time, resources and costs placed its CD agency among the leading regional organizations.

Judging by the *Herald Tribune*, between 1957 and 1964, Civil Defense was never out of sight or out of mind in the Peace Region. Dedicated individuals such as Dunbar and Roy indefatigably promoted and organized preparations, training, exercises, displays and educational meetings to ensure that as many local citizens and their leaders were prepared, to the best of their ability. By the mid-1960s, the size and general success of the Peace Region civil defense community and its preparations led some to offer the hope that, in the day of war, their homeland could be the last, best chance for Alberta, even Canada, to survive and rebuild in the nuclear future. Nevertheless, an air of unreality persisted, as the exercises, increasingly realistic though they were, never tested the public's willingness to feed, shelter and care for the thousands of evacuees and refugees which could flood their homes and totally disrupt their lives forever. The great question, never asked, was whether Northern Alberta had the resources, natural and human, to weather, realistically, a real crisis.

Despite the declaration of a nuclear catastrophe in each of their exercises, people in the Peace were told that wise preparations, first aid and fire-fighting training, and general good organization and discipline would pull most of them through, while the actual technical skills could be imparted or trusted to a few officials, utilities' technicians, government civil servants, police, and the Militia. Apathy, or at least obliviousness was fought by continuous streams of courses and mobilization of more and more individuals to join one or more of the groups involved in preparing. Church groups, teachers, and other community servants included themselves. In the back of the minds of many, it appeared that, whether the evil nuclear day dawned, such practical training from first aid to a babysitter course would improve community solidarity and safety. Towards the height of the movement, when forest fires and floods or other accidents took place, it was reassuring and good sense to take CD training.

[67] Paul Cowley, *Herald Tribune*, 29 April 1994.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and into the mid-1960s, gradually protests about costs in taxes, time, space, and energy, led to municipal complaint, public apathy (or despair) and the decision by the Canadian government to depend on nuclear deterrence, rather than expensive and perhaps futile CD measures. After the events of October 1962, revealed that nuclear attack would in future likely be delivered by missiles in a matter of minutes, with next to no warning, many Canadians joined with their frightened American compatriots, judging that traditional civil defense was a waste of time. First Lester Pearson, then Pierre Trudeau, staring at the nuclear future, questioned whether it was useful even to have large military forces, especially reserves, and shifted their attention to diplomacy and nuclear deterrence. The best civil defense for war would be more, and better, bombs.

Closing the folder in the South Peace Archives, placing the fragile clippings and few letters back in storage, it would be easy to put aside and soon forget the months and years of preparation, training, sacrifice of time and energy by approximately a thousand citizens of the Peace Region. The foundations of the radar installations are disappearing under regrowth, their existence and purpose lost to those who happen upon them. Perhaps more substantial accounts of the personal experiences, hopes, dreads, frustrations, and fears lie yet undiscovered. Interviews have become nearly impossible, as time and memories fade. Were it not for archives, community amnesia would soon erase this and other enterprises of our past, though some still shape, and may return to shape our lives in future. Without them, would our descendants ever wonder what so many of our predecessors were thinking, under Northern Lights, hearing the great claps of thunder, seeing lightning flashes, trying, through their imaginations and preparations, to enable their families and friends to peer forward into the dark unknown, which, perhaps, one day, would draw them into a thousand days, or years, of nuclear night?