

The Army and I

Memories and photos by Spurgeon G. "Spud" Roscoe

Malcolm Zinck placed a photograph taken at Camp Aldershot back in 1962 on Facebook.

I commented on that photograph and carried on and created this.

I doubt anyone will care about what I have to say but someone may want a copy of a photograph.

WNSR (MG) (M)

The West Nova Scotia Regiment

This was when the regiment was a machine gun regiment and included the MG in brackets after the name. The regiment was equipped with the Vickers Medium Machine Gun as their main weapon. The (M) signifies that it is a militia unit often referred to as the reserve army.



The regiment has the same motto as the United States Marines – Semper Fidelis – meaning always faithful. You often hear U.S. Marines going Semper Fi to one another as a greeting.



I am 14 years old in this photograph and a member of the Army Cadets at **Central Kings Rural High School**, Cambridge Station Nova Scotia. This was also part of the West Nova Scotia Regiment and we wore their cloth maroon with yellow lettering flashes above our Royal Canadian Army Cadet badge on each upper arm. The RCAC badge was a red maple leaf with the initials RCAC in green. We wore the same brass cap badge as the regular members of the regiment with the red cloth patch behind it outlining the badge in red.

The army had a program they called the Boy Soldier Program back then. They would accept a boy who was 16 years old, had grade ten high school, would enlist for 5 years and had their parents' permission. I met those requirements in the summer of 1955 and received the biggest disappointment of my entire life. The army refused me admittance because of the eyesight I was born with, amblyopia. Apparently one has to be perfectly healthy in order for some nut to shoot you but the standards were probably set in order to protect one and all. During World War II one fellow walked from Hay River, Northwest Territories to Edmonton, Alberta a distance of over 700 miles to enlist. The army would not accept him claiming he had flat feet. I'm sure the army could have found something for him to do and it all sounded a bit foolish to everyone who knew about it.

This boy soldier program was a fantastic program and the army should not only still have it but be made to enlist anyone that applied for it. There are two main reasons for this. It gives the kid a good home and the army a chance to make a productive citizen of this person. The army would make one a radio operator, gun smith, mechanic, electrician, chef, dental assistant, medical assistant, anyone of a multitude of trades the army requires to operate. This could help

keep some of these kids off the streets begging that one sees around the city. Anyway, they would not accept me and I can still see the medical officer, a doctor with the rank of captain in the Medical Corps sitting there telling me the reserve army would accept anyone in a coffin providing they were still warm. I was in the recruiting office in Halifax and went back home and enlisted in the reserve army, the West Nova Scotia Regiment often referred to as the West Novies.



I am 16 years old in this photograph and in our summer dress uniform. We wore the brass initials WNSR on the shoulders of this uniform as opposed to the cloth West Nova Scotia Regiment flashes in maroon with gold lettering. Naturally we had to polish the brass letters along with the cap badge, the buttons, the brass on the web belt we wore with the summer work uniform and our winter wool battle dress uniform. I am wearing my regimental maroon and yellow lanyard on the left shoulder.



This is a more sombre looking photograph taken a few months before I joined the navy. I had just turned 17 years old. This was our summer work uniform and I can still feel the silky smooth feel after 60 years. It was probably made from cotton.

I had taken a small sheet of sheet metal and made a plate out of it to fit behind the badge on my beret. I had the edges folded and flattened so there were no sharp edges. I did this in an Industrial Arts Class at CKRH. I had my name and regimental number, F450351, stamped on it and threw it in the garbage in March 2015 when I donated my Army badge, Navy cap tally and badge collection to the Cornwallis Military Museum. This plate made the front of the beret and badge stand up. The beret was the same khaki colour as our wool battle dress uniform. We had a few members that were on what was called permanent call out. They looked after the regiments interests on a daily basis as though in the regular army. These members wore a

bright red beret with no red cloth behind the badge. We wore a bright red cloth behind the badge that gave the badge a red outline around the badge.

The lanyard on my left shoulder is the regimental colours of maroon and gold. I have always felt the Dominion Atlantic Railway copied this as their colours although I have no knowledge of any DAR official who was a member of the regiment. The DAR called their colours Tuscan red and gold. The DAR ran through Western Nova Scotia from Halifax to Yarmouth with headquarters at Kentville. This would be along the same lines as the eagle on the case farm equipment machinery. That eagle was known as Old Abe and was the actual mascot of the Wisconsin Civil War Regiment that Jerome Increase Case was a member. He was the founder of the Case Farm Machinery Company. He had Old Abe the eagle pictured on all the equipment he manufactured.

I purchased two short pieces of ½ inch chain at a local hardware store and tied their ends together with string. These I wore in my pant legs to keep the pants hanging neatly and it also made a nice square front where the pant leg was folded just above the puttee. It does not appear to be that sharp in the above photograph but it was when we wore our winter wool battle dress.



I managed the smoking habit about this time and was finally able to get rid of it on my 48th birthday.



This is Private Bev Coleman outside our vehicle compound at **Camp Aldershot**. The vehicles were kept in these fenced locked compounds. They did not have keys in the ignition switches. They simply had a heavy duty direct current switch one twisted to turn on. To the left on this switch was off and to the right was on. There were no lost keys because there were none. These vehicles were probably six volts because it was about this time that our standard automobiles came out with the 12 volt system. One could get some good driving courses through the regiment.

Our main vehicle for carrying the machine guns was known as a Bren Gun Carrier and unfortunately I do not have a photo of one. They were a tracked World War II vehicle and were a lot of fun to run around in. World War II had ended ten years before this so all our equipment was left over from that war. One can see many examples of a Bren Gun Carrier on the internet. We did not have a gun mounted on one of ours nor do I remember being able to mount one of the machine guns on one. The photos of these carriers on the internet will give one a good description and I am sure one can imagine the fun a group of always hungry teenage boys would have with them.

The WNSR made quite a name for itself especially when it fought up through Italy during World War II. Another section of the regiment was retained here in Nova Scotia and used as a new entry training unit for all when first joining the army during the war regardless of the regiment or unit they were eventually assigned.



This is one of our lads practicing the maintenance of one of the machine guns in one of the lecture rooms at **Camp Aldershot**. We did not sleep with these machine guns but they were a big part of our life. The smallest part on one was “the indentation of the prolongation of the left side plate”. I doubt I will ever forget that statement but it must have taken at least two British engineers to come up with that terminology. At least it sounds a bit much for one engineer to create. Two of us fired the machine gun, one to feed the belt of ammunition lying alongside the gun, the other sitting behind and squeezing the trigger and aiming the gun. If one fired the gun in the characters of Morse code we could communicate with it for quite a distance it was that loud. Vickers created this water cooled gun in 1912. It fired the same .303 ammunition as our rifles. The gun was in use up until the 1960’s and actually an air cooled version had been fitted on World War I aircraft. The ones we had were water cooled and we were taught to urinate in the gun if we could not find water. The barrel would melt if we tried to use it without water but of course we were using it during peace time and had lots of water. It was a good reliable gun and I do not remember having any trouble with one.



This was my favourite place the Drill Shed at **Camp Aldershot** in winter as opposed to the parade square in summer or when the weather cooperated. I wish I had recorded the names but when you are 16 years old you are going to live forever and remember everything. I do remember taking this cheap little camera into one of our evening meetings and getting permission to take these photographs that I am lucky to have. If you can identify anyone in these photographs please contact me. I would appreciate any comment anyone would care to make.



I believe it was around March 1956 that I took these photographs.





We had our annual inspection on an evening in April. This parade was on the parade square at **Camp Aldershot** and was broadcasted over the local radio station CKEN – Kentville. My family was listening to it at home and became rather excited when my name was called to receive the award as best soldier of the year.



This is the regimental blazer crest I was awarded as the best soldier of the year in “A” Company, **Camp Aldershot** for the year 1955 – 1956. My father, Chief Petty Officer George Roscoe was awarded the Admiral Jones Shield as the best sailor of the year at **HMCS Stadacona** at the same time. He and my mother parted ways when I was 3 years old and I hardly knew the guy. He phoned me and asked me if I had seen his photograph in the daily newspaper re this award. I said yes and congratulations did you see the front of the Kentville newspaper at the same time. When he said no, why? I said I am there as the winner of this crest. There was a long pause of pure silence and I said to myself I will never do that again. That was the last award I told him about.



This was also in the drill shed at **Camp Aldershot** in front of a right hand drive truck stored there for the winter.





These are a couple of photographs of the canteen at **Camp Aldershot**.



This is one of the lecture rooms at **Camp Aldershot**. It was in one of these rooms where Sergeant Jack Reeves was teaching us the proper prone position for firing the .303 rifle. Towards the end of his lecture, we were laying on the floor and I was just in front of him, my arms became tired and I laid my rifle on the floor and laid my head on it. Just as I made that move Jack raised his rifle slightly and fired it. Jack felt the rifle had an imitation hard wood bullet in it. It is always the empty rifle that kills in an accident. This rifle had a live round in it and when Jack fired it the bullet went just over my head. I will never see bright yellows and whites like I did at that moment and I hope my head never gets that hot again. I could not get over how fast the military police landed in that lecture room. Jack could not talk when they led him out of the room. He was in complete shock. The bullet went through the wall just behind me and outside. It left a small pencil size hole in the wall on the inside and ripped off a foot square piece of siding on the outside of the wall. The military police could see no blood and simply asked me if I was okay and when I said I was they left with Jack. Today one would have to go to the camp hospital for a week's observation that would involve a multitude of stupid questions from an endless stream of educated idiots with a clip board.

The regiment was divided up into companies spread out around Western Nova Scotia. "A" Company, our company, was at **Camp Aldershot** just north of Kentville. **Camp Aldershot** is and was the headquarters of this regiment. If I remember correctly "B" Company was Bridgetown and they trained in the armories in the town. If I remember correctly again "D" Company was at Digby and trained at **HMCS Cornwallis** the navy's new entry training base. There would have been a "C" and "E" company at probably Bridgewater and Yarmouth but I am not sure they were active in 1956. There may have been another company or two in some other western Nova Scotia towns.

The regiment spent a week each summer in what was known as summer camp. This summer camp in 1956 took place at **Camp Utopia** in New Brunswick near St. George.



This is one half of those who attended this summer camp. This is our barracks for summer camp at **Camp Utopia**, Utopia Lake, at Saint George, New Brunswick. Sergeant Herb Best and I were sent up to open the camp for a week's training from July 9th to 14th 1956. We went up and back in Herb's Ford ½ ton pickup. It was quite a trip for me and the first time I was out of Nova Scotia.



Waterville Village Memories

Herb Best before he became a Sergeant

I did not know everyone but managed to put a few names on the back of this photo. Those that I have recorded are as follow:

Left to right Front Row: Corporal?, Sergeant Frank Spicer, Captain?, Captain (Paymaster)?, Major?, Major McLellam, ?, Lieutenant?, Company Sergeant Major Tidd.

Left to right Centre Row: Sergeant Sawler, Private Redden, Private?, Private?, Private Bezanson, Private Small, Private Bev Coleman, ?, ?, ?, Corporal Adams, Private?, ?, Sergeant Jordan.

Left to right Back Row: Lance Corporal Clemans, Private Jackson, Private Clemans, Corporal?, ?, Private Garnet Turner, Private Scott, ?, ?, ?, ?, Private Banks, Corporal Kalkman.



This is **Camp Utopia**, St. George New Brunswick in 1956.



This is the other half of the regiment that attended this summer camp in front of the **Camp Utopia** barrack building we were housed in. I am the second one in from the right on the front row. On the back of this photograph I have recorded a few names.

Front Row Left to Right: Sergeant?, Private Pulsifer, L., Private Graves G.W., Lieutenant?, Lieutenant Parsons, Lieutenant Crossman, Captain Harlow, Captain Terriault (Padre), Major McLellam, Lieutenant?, Lieutenant Burrow, Captain?, Captain? Private McGregor, Private Spud Roscoe, Sergeant Owens.

Center Row Left to Right: Lieutenant?, Company Sergeant Major Fisher, Company Sergeant Major Whittle, Sergeant Herb Best, Private Smilie, Private?, Lance Corporal Rose, Private?, Lance Corporal Barkhouse, Private?, Corporal Vaughn, Private Whynot, Private Doug Parker, Sergeant Turner, Private?, Staff Sergeant Eaton, Officer Cadet Morrison.

Back Row Left to Right: Private?, Private Hatt, Private?, Private?, Corporal Veinot, Private Armburg, Lance Corporal Bishop, Private Hardy, Private Heffler, Lance Corporal George Haines, Corporal Welton, Private?, Private?, Lance Corporal Mappleback, Corporal Rickets.

Doug Parker, 5th in from the right centre row was in the regular army shortly after this and I was rather jealous. Very jealous actually, he was not only in the regular army but the Pay Corps. If you are still around Doug be sure and contact me so we can arrange an eyeball contact as we call it in the radio world. We can always brag about our grandkids if nothing else. This same request applies to anyone.



Back in the 1950's our army was wearing a peaked cap that was a much better looking piece of head dress than the beret. No doubt the beret is much cheaper and the reason it is so popular. Each section of the army had a colour back then and this colour formed the band around this cap. The caps were black like the caps the officers are wearing in these photographs only with a shiny black peak. I believe the artillery was red if I remember correctly but the Pay Corps was yellow and their cap looked like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police cap.

There were many different sections, regiments, or whatever of the army at **Camp Utopia** at this time. A section of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery of the regular army was there at this time and Fred (Sonny) Comeau was there with them. Fred lived up the road from us; we went to school and grew up together. We had a couple of visits while we were at **Camp Utopia**. Fred remained in the army and came out with a full pension. I wanted to stop in for a visit when he moved back home after he retired but I found him in among the obituaries of the local newspaper before I managed this visit. So many of those with whom I have lived and worked with have died that at times I wonder why I'm still here.

I learned one lesson I never forgot at **Camp Utopia** and probably the reason I am so quick and sharp to jump on something that I feel is not right. The cooks there were a mess and were simply filthy animals. They were French and I am remembering them as members of the Carleton and York Regiment from Northern New Brunswick. I have no idea why an infantry regiment was cooking but they were army and should have been a part of the Service Corps. One would order a couple of fried eggs for breakfast and one of these animals would break a couple of eggs and another would catch them with a plate before they hit the frying pan. You were handed a couple of raw eggs. At our noon meal one day I watched one of these animals pick his nose and then pick up some butter with those fingers and put the butter on a plate. That did it. I stormed out of our mess and over to the officers mess and asked to see the officer in charge of us. After I explained what was going on he cleaned things up and we had an officer in our mess at every meal, morning, noon and night. After he had things cleaned up and working as designed he went up one side of me and down the other for putting up with that as long as we had. That never happened again and when something like this happens today I would rather write than waste my time talking to someone, so they get a letter. I have created a few over the years and have been told some have been framed.

I was awarded a wallet with an engraved card from the Commanding Officer as the best dressed soldier while at **Camp Utopia**. I had a hard time keeping a straight face when receiving this award. I had no way of pressing my pants so I laid them between two sheets of cardboard under the mattress of my bunk and slept on them. It worked. That card is still around here someplace although it has been some time since I last saw it.

We managed to cross the United States border and visit Calais, Maine, at least one evening while at **Camp Utopia**. This was a very big deal for us first out of Nova Scotia. We simply walked around the town, bought some tourist junk and American cigarettes.

When I returned home from this summer camp I was assigned as a bar tender to the Royal Highland Regiment the Black Watch at **Camp Aldershot**. On termination of this experience I returned to high school. **Camp Aldershot** was home to the Black Watch at least a portion of it at

this time. A few years after this the Black Watch was transferred to **Camp Gagetown** outside Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Shortly after I went back to school my father and I were in contact again and I told him how disappointed I was in not being able to join the army. He asked me if I would like to go in the navy with him and his brother. So I agreed to this and joined the navy. My father had taken me around to a chief petty officer in each trade in order for me to choose the trade I wanted. My father's divisional officer made it clear I was not going in the engine room. My father was an instructor for all engine room ratings and his brother had recently taken his course. I have a feeling something was said about a brother giving a brother a course, although I do not know for sure, but they were having no part of a father giving a son a course. I can still smell the gin on my father's divisional officer's breath when he told me to go back home and back to school. I simply said I couldn't because my parents were divorced. He said no more.

When I joined the navy I felt they knew about my eyesight but they pulled a complete medical on each of us at new entry training in **HMCS Cornwallis** and I was sent to release block to be sent home because of my eyesight. I phoned my father and told him where I was and he simply said do you want to stay in? We enlisted for five years at a time and I said I would like to get at least the five years in. He said hang up the phone I have to use it. My father ran the navy as though he owned it. Shortly after this phone call a petty officer showed up at release block and not only escorted me back to my **Aurora V Division** but actually carried my kit bag for me. Someone, somewhere, got reamed out but good in pure navalnese that translated into "keep your grubby paws off my boy". Every time an officer came into the room I was in and walked up to me I had the feeling this is it, I am history.

When my five years terminated I was given a complete medical. One received one every five years when they enlisted again or took a discharge. The medical officer who examined me took a look at my bad eye, jumped back, did it three times and finally said when did this happen? I simply said I was born that way and have never seen the world any different. He said wait a minute and went for a chat with a superior officer. When he came back he said they may get me to sign a document stating my eye was like that when I enlisted. My father had pensioned out the year before. I heard no more about it but it was a great relief to not have that feeling of being thrown out.

My father created the **Fieldwood** Sea Cadet Corps at Canning and this kept him occupied and entertained after he pensioned out.

It all reminds me of Gary Chisholm's book "The One Eyed Gunner" ISBN 978-1-927003-18-3. That guy returned home from World War II with a chest full of medals as an Air Force Tail Gunner and I am sure he saw the world the same as I see it. I flew a lot with bush pilots when

up north and I have had them look at me and say “I thought you said you were blind?” I’ve never said that. It is the others that keep telling me that. I could see things for several minutes before those pilots could see whatever it was we were looking for. It has been frustrating and I will never forget my medical before I went up north. I read the book of coloured dots the doctor gave me and he looked at me rather odd. He took the book, threw it up on a shelf and dug out another from his desk drawer. I read every page in that one also. He told me I was reading numbers I should not be able to see as though there was something I could do about it.

These are my photographs I took while in New Entry Training at **HMCS Cornwallis** and are now on the Cornwallis Military Museum web site.

<http://www.cornwallismuseum.ca/photo-gallery/daily-life/aurora/>

Our **Aurora V Division** photograph is number 9 of 110 and I am up in the left hand back corner without my glasses on. This photograph also comes up within the 18 on the above site.

I chose a special radio branch in the navy but my second choice would have been as a pay writer in the financial section. I would have been as “gung ho” in that section as I am and was in the radio section and often wonder where I would be today if I had gone that route. I would no doubt be a number bender of some description as an accountant in one form or another. I graduated from the **Radio College of Canada** right after the navy and later the **National Radio Institute**. I have no real regrets and have enjoyed myself all these years. I have done nothing but write these exercises since I retired in March 1995 and wondering if I will receive a pension for as long as I received a wage.



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