

Roger Teillet , M.L.A., M.P., P.C. (1912-2002)

Roger Teillet served in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as a Liberal-Progressive from 1953 to 1959, and in the Canadian House of Commons as a Liberal from 1962 to 1968. Teillet was a cabinet minister in the governments of Lester Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He served in the RCAF as a Flight Lieutenant during World War II (1939-1945).

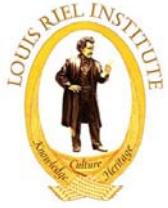
Red River Metis Roger Teillet was a great nephew of Louis Riel, being the grandson of Louis Riel's younger brother, Joseph Riel. He was born on August 12, 1912 in St. Vital, across the road from the present Riel House historical site. He attended College Saint-Boniface but was forced to leave after two years because of the Depression. He apprenticed at the Banque Nationale then joined the Royal Canadian Air Force 17 days before Canada entered World War II. He served as a navigator in the 35 Squadron and was shot down while on his 25th night bombing raid (August 23, 1942). He parachuted behind German lines at Recy, France thus becoming a member of the "Caterpillar Club" for airmen saved by parachute on land. He evaded capture for 15 days before he was taken prisoner. He was imprisoned at Stalag III (Sagan, Germany). During the Great Escape from this camp, later immortalized in movies, Roger was number 136 on the escape list. Seventy-six men got out before their escape tunnel was discovered. Seventy-three of these men were recaptured and the Germans shot fifty of those. When the Russians entered Germany in January 1945, the prisoners were herded back and forth across Germany and many perished on the "death marches." The British liberated Roger and his group on May 6, 1945, Roger weighed only 127 pounds when liberated. Subsequently, he always wore his Bird in a Cage pin, the symbol of imprisoned flyers.



Upon returning to Winnipeg, Roger opened an insurance agency and settled down with his wife Jeanne. He then ran in the provincial election and served as a Liberal MLA under Premier Douglas Campbell. He ran for the Canadian House of Commons in the federal election of 1962, and defeated incumbent Progressive Conservative Laurier Regnier by 2,601 votes in the federal riding of St. Boniface. He defeated Regnier again in the 1963 election, in which the Liberals won a minority government under Lester Pearson. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson made him minister of Veterans Affairs in April of 1963. In 1968, after Pierre Trudeau's election call, Teillet lost the Liberal nomination to Joe Guay by 100 votes. Trudeau subsequently named Teillet as head of the Canadian Pension Commission and gave him a mandate to reform veterans' pensions. He always said that this was his proudest accomplishment. Roger retired from the commission in 1980 and continued to live in Ottawa. His wife Jeanne predeceased him in 2000.

Reference:

Teillet, Kathleen, "A Manitoba native son is laid to rest." *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 12, 2002: A4.



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