

## Interview of Wilfred John Henry

I was with the 3rd Division. First of all, I wanted to join with Regina Rifles. I seen some guys with Regina Rifles. I thought I would like that too. I got into Ottawa, Lansdown Park. I was stationed there. They sent me to Camp Shilo, Manitoba for a little while to take some more training to learn how to jump over fences and stuff like that. It just happened that my oldest brother was there. I told Harry that he should come with me. He wanted to know where and I told him I didn't know yet. I was called into the office and they told me that they were going to drive me to Touro, Nova Scotia. My brother, Harry, went to the office and asked to be transferred with me to Touro, N.S. We went out there. We took a lot of training there; a lot of climbing, a lot of pits and stuff like that. We had one place there we had to grab a whole rope and glide across this river on this rope, you know. I told my brother to catch the rope as high as you can because when you go down, you'll get yourself all wet. Did he ever get wet. The seat of his pants were all soaked and wet. They asked if I had ever done that before. I told them that I had done it as a kid. Dad used to have great big high swings and ropes, we used to swing on the ropes and this and that.

On D-Day, Harry was there, with the Winnipeg Rifles. We both joined the Regina Rifles. When I got to England, then they transferred me to HLI (Highland Light Infantry). Mr. Gibbs wanted me, so I got in with Mr. Bill Gibbs. He told me he would look after me. I told him I hoped he did, because I didn't know what was going to happen. It was so darn dangerous. Oh, man. Bill said to me, "Why the heck did we ever join the army?" I don't know. I joined up to make money. I was getting \$1.10 at first. I thought that was good money. It was better than \$.50 a day hauling wood into town. \$1.10 a day, free clothes and all that, free board and room. That was the reason I joined up. I wanted to help my folks out. Give them half my pay. I thought this was the real thing. I could send my folks a few dollars because I knew their problems and what their conditions were. When I was home, I used to haul cord into town for them. We would haul a bunch of wood out of the bush and cut it all up into cords and take it into town. \$.50 a cord. It wasn't much money, but to help my folks out the best I could.

I couldn't make no money no other ways, so I thought I would help my folks, to supply them with a few dollars. So if I joined the army, they wouldn't have no clothes to buy for me and they would have a few dollars coming from me. I told my dad

that the money I send to him was to go on his machines. So that is what made me enlist. I couldn't stand him not having any money, you know. He had to haul wood into town for \$.50 a cord at that time.

It was hard to make a dollar. I enlisted at Regina. After that I went to Lansdown Park, Ottawa. I took training there, basic training. I completed it all. Then they sent me to Camp Shilo, Manitoba. They sent me there for a while. I took my advanced training. From there they sent me to Truem, Nova Scotia. Then we completed our training there. Then, from there we went to England.

I was only 17 years old. I said I was 18 when I joined up but I was only 17. One time they found out my age, and they wanted to send me back home until I was 18. I told them that I didn't want to go back home, I wanted to stay where I was. I could learn more where I was. That was when I was on tour in Nova Scotia. They wanted to send me home for six months or better until I was of age. I said no, I didn't want to go home. I wanted to stay where I was. I was in uniform and everything. They told me I wasn't of age and they wanted guys 19 years old. I says, "That's okay, I'll be 19 some day." I took all my basic training, then I took my advanced training. They told me that there was a draft going overseas and that I would be in that draft. So, I did. I went over to England. We took a lot of training in Aldershot. We stayed there until D-Day come.

#### **D-DAY LANDING**

When we got off the boat in France we were shot at. We sure were. We had a hard time. We really had to hide. Shortly after that I got buried. I got into a trench and a big shell landed close by and just buried me right there. A friend of mine saw a hand sticking out of the ground and he dug me out. So they dug me out and laid me on the ground. I couldn't figure out where I was. All I could see was the sky. I felt grass beside me. I rolled over and Bill Gibbs, that used to live here, yelled "Henry!, don't move! You'll give your position away." I asked what was the matter. He said he would tell me some other day.

By the time I got my strength back and we started to advance a bit, I got buried again. Oh, my God. Those damn moaning minnies. They whine, like a kicking horse. They whine and whine, you know, and you don't know where they are going to drop. I squatted down in my trench, it buried me again. Boy oh boy. Then old Bill Gibbs says, "Hey, Henry's trench is there, but I don't see him no more." So they dug there and got to a hand. When I come to, I tried to open my eyes and the whole earth was spinning. I couldn't figure where the heck I was. I wasn't in an airplane. There was grass on each side of me. I asked Bill where I was. He told me not to worry, I was laying on the ground. I couldn't figure this out. I thought I was in an airplane the way things were spinning. But I was on the ground. I could feel grass.

That's where we got off landing barges (Normandy). We had to get off the boat quite a ways from the beach because there were mines in the water along the shore. They told us before, when we were taking training in England, they says when you land ashore, and you see these big round balls floating, not to touch them. They were dynamite, don't touch them. I didn't know that. There were lots of them along the shore. The landing barges couldn't get to shore. My God, I was so scared, I didn't know what was coming next. I thought, my dear old mother would be crying her eyes out about now, after they heard the news. They would have heard that Canadian troops would have landed into France. A lot of the guys were floating in the water, just like weeds. A lot of guys never made it to shore. It was tough at times. They had their airforce shoot at everyone they saw move. Thank God, we made it away from shore. I thought our landing barges would be noticed. They were prepared. That's one thing I could say. They were all laying on the shore, waiting for people to come. Machine guns set up and everything else.

When I was buried the second time, Old Bill Gibbs was looking for me all over. He asked Huey French from Nipawin where I was. He didn't know. He said that he had seen me over a ways. Bill said, "There were some shells dropped over in that area." They came over to look and all they see sticking out of the ground was a hand. "Look, somebody lost a hand," old Bill says. All of a sudden he saw fingers move. So they dug me out. I was just lucky. If I had been hit by any shell, I would have

been killed right there. Thank God, I was underneath the ground a bit. When it hit, I had such a headache. Some days I such headaches that I couldn't eat. Your jaw bones move, you know. I couldn't figure what the heck was the matter with me. Old Bill says, "Hey, Henry you're a lucky man. There was hand sticking out of the ground. You'd have had the course, boy." I asked how come. He told me I was buried. Oh, my God. I never knew that. I was scared because I heard these moaning minnies, and I scrunched down in my trench. I was lucky it didn't land on top of my trench. I would have had the course for sure.

We kept going. It was very dangerous because there were mines. You had to be careful what you walked on. You couldn't be that careful because the enemy was watching you and shooting at you. No matter where you ran or turned, this and that. Oh, my God. One time I was laying on my belly and right in front of me was a mine. Was I every scared. I hoped to God nobody stepped on this thing, it would blow up for sure. I don't know if it was a mine or a cat, a caterpillar mine, or whatever.

One time, when I was buried, well before that - bombs and shells, those moaning minnies were dropping to darn close for my comfort. I just happened to look over to the side and I seen those

trees over there. I thought I would run for those trees. I figured the shrapnel would hit the trees and it would be some shelter. I started running for those trees. All at once I was shot at, aircraft going over and the guy was shooting at me and the bullets were going right along side my feet, you know. I was running. Oh Lord, Jesus save me, Jesus save me. I was half crying. All of a sudden I tripped. I laid there. I didn't move. The guy quit shooting at me, figured he got me. Oh, my God. His name was Robert McDougell. One time I met him. He says, "I got a burden in my heart. I wonder whose son I killed." He figured he had killed me. He told me he was in France and was shooting at a guy who was running and thought he was the enemy. I was shooting at him. The bullets were running right along side of him. I was crying Lord Jesus save me and I tripped and fell. At that time he got a message that he was shooting his own guy. That fear was sure terrible. You never knew if you were going to lose your life there or what. Oh my good gracious me, I was so scared. I thought for sure, I was going to get the bullet in the head. No. The guy he felt same way to me. After he found that he was shooting at

a Canadian, then he wondered whose son he had killed. He felt that bad. When he found out he felt real good. When I was buried I thought that was it for me too. I was knocked out automatically. I didn't know anything about it. When I got out, I was looking around and asking where I was. Everybody was under cover. The enemy was shooting a lot of duds, you know, they were shooting. They would land and explode at a certain time. I was sure scared.

I stayed right to the end. Right to the finish in Germany. I reported to the doctor that I wanted to get some stuff to rub on my head. So, they gave me stuff to rub on my head because I had pain. I couldn't comb my hair it was so sore. In Germany, I was walking in a ditch and the commanding officer yelled, "Hit the dirt." I saw some tall grass and dived into a culvert, just my feet were sticking out. I thought I was safe there. I thought to myself, "I can't hear nothing in there," so I tried to back out. I couldn't. My pouch was hooked on the ripples inside the culvert. I had hand grenades on each side hanging there. I tried to back out, and got hooked up. I hollered but my voice came out the other direction. I was hollering and crying, "Lord Jesus you saved me before from being killed, save me again Lord." I was scared that the pins on the grenades would come off if I tried to go right through and I would have been killed right in there. I tried to back out. I couldn't get my hand back so that I could get the grenades out. What a fear that was. That was terrible.

My legs were sticking out. Some guys grabbed a hold of my legs and pulled me out. The grenades are hitting the ripples on the culverts on the way out. They asked what I was doing in there. I said that the commanding officer told us to hit the dirt so I dived for tall grass and ended up in the culvert. I had nightmares

of that experience many times. I would wake up screaming about that. I would wake up the kids and everybody. They didn't know what I was crying about. I gave her lots of trouble looking after me. It was just terrible. I still got a chunk of shrapnel here. I had one in my wrist and I had a hard time getting that out. I had a couple of guys, when I was in Germany to grab with it pliers, it would hook on my clothes you know. I told them to pull the shrapnel out because it hooked on my clothes. They said okay and they did. Did that ever hurt.

**AFTER THE WAR: DISABILITY, FAMILY LIFE, AND THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**THERESA AND WILFRED HENRY**

**Theresa:** I don't really know too much in that respect, because we didn't get married until June of 1946. I didn't know him. He stayed with his folks. When I married him he was quite a violent boy, when he had pain. Yet, when he reported in, they said that they had no record of it. That's why he said he had such a bad time. Yet on his service book, it says, "Wounded". How come they don't have no record? John Diefenbaker is the one that got everything rolling. I was working for him at the time. He started getting a little bit and John went back and said that it wasn't enough, so then we got a little bit more. It wasn't enough again, so he went for more. Finally, he was getting close to \$2000.00 per month. Now, I don't know how they expect us to make due with a \$1000.00.

**Wilfred:** All the times, whenever I come home, gee whisky you would think somebody had banged me on the head because I had so much pain in my head. I couldn't stand it. Sometimes, before I was married, I just about took a gun and went into the bush and shot myself. That's how I felt.

**Theresa:** He kept up until 1948. When he got pains, there would be violence and so in 1948 I told him that he couldn't keep up this way. So, the doctor finally sent him to Saskatoon. There he had Dr. MacConnells. Dr. MacConnells said he had an abscess on top of the head. He couldn't operate on him. That must have been caused from that injury. The only thing we could do was to pump air into the spine and they lifted up the skull. I think the same thing is coming back.

**Wilfred:** Someday's I can't even comb my hair, it's so darn tender. I get stuff from the doctor to rub on it. If I don't rub it on, the pain is continuous. It's terrible. I've said that I thank God that I married a good wife. She looks after me like I was a baby.

She feeds me, gives me water and milk to drink. She looks after to me. Sometimes, I tell her where it hurts and she rubs it for me, to help take the pain away. I take pills for the pain and I

have to take sleeping pills to put me out. Sometimes I am screaming at nights.

**Theresa:** Especially, when he's talking about it. It just comes back. During the Gulf War, I had quite a time with him. It was the same thing. He was right there.

**Wilfred:** I used to feel sorry for the kids. She used to tell me that I had woken the kids last night. I would ask what I did and she would tell me that I was screaming.

**Theresa:** He couldn't go to work because he couldn't bend. If he bent, he would black out.

**Wilfred:** It was sure terrible. One time, I was going to take the gun and go out to the bush and blow my head off. Boy oh boy. Why should I live like that. Put my wife in the position that she has to look after me like a child. Then I thought of my kids and them crying their eyes out for their dad. I thought it would make her cry. I changed my mind.

**Theresa:** The disability pension wasn't enough but we had to make it do. It was more than what we are getting now. The minute he hit 65, they cut him right off. Then I phoned \_\_\_\_\_ and they gave him an interview. They gave him 10%, so that is \$195.00 per month. That's what he is getting now. For what reason? They said because he is receiving Old Age Pension. We have payments to make. Sometimes our power bills are \$180.00 and gas bill, our water, our telephone bill. By that time, it is all gone. Then we have a bank payment. They (the DVA) don't even want to hear about it. First of all my stove and fridge went on me. I phoned them and they said there was nothing they could do about it. All of a sudden this gent came to town. We went up to see him. My stove was on its very last. He said he would see what he could do about it. He went back to Saskatoon and he sent me \$100.00 and said it was for a stove. What kind of stove can you buy for that. Anyway, I managed, I bought a second hand one. Then comes along the next month and phones and says that he brought some more money for us. So, I went down to get it. It was to put on the stove. I told him I had bought a stove for \$100.00 so he took back this \$300.00 and here when my dryer went the other day. I phoned \_\_\_\_\_ to tell him. He told me he couldn't do anything. He said because we were on a pension; if we were on the allowance, then they could give us \$500.00 a year. I told him that when we were on allowance he had told me he couldn't do nothing. Now when we are on pension,

he still can't do nothing. I was talking to some others that told me

to go after them. They were getting what they wanted. But I have nothing to do with it, it is up to him to tell them it all. I have nothing to do with it. Well, he can't talk for himself. He doesn't know what he would say. You know what I mean. He is here and he's not here, you know what I mean.

**Wilfred:** You know my memory, you know, it affects a lot of my memory. These pains in my head, you know, you just forget what you are going to say.

**Theresa:** At least if we could get a little bit more. I wouldn't say that I expect a whole bit deal more. With a little bit more, we could maybe get some things we need. He needs different things.

**Wilfred:** The worst thing is when I am right out of money, there is no money, there is some things that I have to get, I get such a terrible headache just from worrying.

**Theresa:** He just walks the floor. Sometimes you wonder what he is wondering about. I heard on the radio, why they don't help their veterans, because they have more money than they know what to do with. The veterans need help. If they were to take them and put them into homes or care, they would have to pay a heck of a lot more than what they want to give us. They want them to be independent and stay in their own homes. Those guys that work there, they didn't experience what these men went through and yet they won't go ahead and try to help themselves to understand them. They don't want to understand the men. I told \_\_\_\_\_ that he was just trying to make a name for himself. What kind of a name. You don't want to help and you don't want to understand. What good is he there. He doesn't want to understand. He's just a young man and he doesn't understand what pain they went through. Instead of trying to help them a little bit, we don't expect a great big deal, but whatever. Nobody wants to talk to you. They can't help anyway.

**Wilfred:** I know of a lot of veterans that have passed away. I have one or two cousins that have passed away. One of my cousins

had cancer. He asked the DVA to help him travel back and forth to Saskatoon for treatment and they wouldn't help him.

**Theresa:** When I talked to them, they said that they couldn't do to much about it because it's not in the book. It's never been reported in that he was buried alive.

**Wilfred:** My commanding officer knew it and the rest of the fellows knew it. My commanding officer was Mr. Miller. He said, "Henry, you're alive, that's the main thing." Thank God. I told him that I had pains in my head. He was going to send me back and get someone else to take my place. I didn't want to leave. Some of my friends might have been killed and I wouldn't know about it. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to tough it out.

## **LOOKING BACK**

Yes, I remember. I took so much chances after I was hurt, you know, that I had more fear. The fear had gone. The last time when we were in Holland, way up the hill, the Germans were firing at us and I told my commanding officer that I was going to get those Germans on the hill. "You're going to go get them?" my commanding officer said. He told me I had to be darn careful. I told I would be. So I went, me and Bill. We went around back of the Germans. There were about 35-40 of them in that building. I got them to surrender. Most of the German officers talk English and I told them that the war was over for them. Someday they would go home, all your friends will go home someday. We would just take them home, to Canada maybe. They would be held there until everything stops, then you'll come home. Nobody killed, nobody hurt. So he told his men to be obedient to me and follow everything I said. So, we took them prisoner.

The German officer said to me, "You never think of shooting?" I told him that I had lots of relations that are Germans and they are nice people. Why should I kill. We were neighbours with German people for years and years. Why should I kill? When they knew my dad was kind of a sick person; he heart trouble all the time, they would come over and help seed or whatever else he needed help with. That was sure great. They didn't hesitate. They knew that I was in the army. So the Germans were so happy that they were taken prisoners and not killed. I told the officer that we were not that kind of

people. We didn't kill when people surrendered. So, that's the way it happened.

## **ARMY LIFE**

You had to stick up for one another. We were in that position, that if you didn't stick up for one another, that guy could leave you, and the first thing you know, you could get banged. They could spot something, that maybe you didn't spot and there you are. You would be caught and shot by the enemy. I know, I spoke to a lot of them German prisoners and some of them said that the war was crazy. It was crazy to have a war. This prisoner told me that he had a German relation in Canada and now he would never be able to go see them. I am out here fighting against you all. There you are. I told him that it wasn't his fault. He was drafted into the army. He had to go where he was sent, or else. He said he would have been shot if he hadn't gone.

We had to be obedient too. When we finished our training, we had to go where they sent us, to Europe. We had to do some rehearsal, ever now and then. To show that we did this and that.

actually, I liked it. I met a lot of German people all through France, Belgium and Holland. I made friends with a lot of them. I told them it was too bad that we had to have a war, to shot at each other. What for. They would understand. I didn't do you nothing and you didn't do me nothing. If I didn't shoot at them, they would have shot at me. I had to keep my gun well aimed, well loaded.

One guy, after I was buried the first time, said, "Wilfred, you know those bloody enemies, we should shoot them." Well, no, it wasn't them, it was the shell. They fired it, and it landed right there. I squatted in my trench and that was it, I got buried right there. A lot of times I thank God that I squatted, or I could have had my head blown right off. You never know, all those shrapnel pieces.

I was strictly infantry. You carried a machine gun with you all the times, your automatic rifle, you know. You had to keep moving. Before we would make a push, the airforce would

kind of drop some bombs and have them guys put their heads down and we would advance then. A lot of them would have their hands up, give up, you know.