

Transcription
Leo Pruden
- Interviewed Feb. 23, 1993 -

Dave: Just at the outset I should mention that I'm here with Leo Pruden. He's a World War II Metis Veteran and he has agreed to have an interview with me for the Metis War Veterans book that the Gabriel Dumont Institute is producing. I'll just ask a few sort of basic questions up front and then you can tell quite a bit more about your own experience after that. I don't know if I've mentioned, it's February 23, 1993. Where, or I should say when were you born?

Leo: I was born in 1921.

Dave: 1921.

Leo: 15th of October.

Dave: And where?

Leo: That would be, the closest I can say is between Wynyard and Big Quill Lake on the farm.

Dave: And you were just about to get at why you enlisted in the army.

Leo: I joined in 1941, June 14th. At Wynyard. Then we mobilized at Broadview, SK. That's where I lived in tents. From there the first trip was to _____ from Broadview, SK. So we took our basic up there. In Sessack, New Brunswick was relatively you know.

Dave: So why did you join the army?

Leo: Because I had to have money, I couldn't have money, and I sent half \$1.30 a day, and I sent home my money frequently. My mother took it to live. That's not very good pay. I didn't save no money, I didn't save \$1.30 a day. They got me playing poker sometimes, maybe half an hour after I had \$300 bucks, maybe a half an hour after, I had nothing. But I kept going anyways. I wasn't man enough to go overseas, but I wasn't too yellow to join it. I had to do it, you see. Otherwise, I didn't wait for a call. I called, I went myself and joined. But I am no further ahead than the next guy that got called, no further ahead.

Dave: So you, you don't think you were any further ahead than the guys who weren't inscripted?

Leo: No, I'm not further ahead. Maybe half a star ahead.

Dave: Why do you say that?

Leo: Because I joined, I figured, okay. Because I knew, because I seen it, I saw it. I would know. They got land, lots of them got land. We never got nothing. I didn't try very much neither.

Dave: We'll come back to that towards the end of the interview, because that's an experience that a lot of the Metis Veterans share, is that a lot of them did not get the benefits that they were entitled too.

Leo: Forsure not. Not only them alone, there's other ones.

Dave: That's right. Yeah. I just wanted to get back to your basic training experience though. You went to Nova Scotia?

Leo: Yeah, the basic in Divert, Nova Scotia.

Dave: And where else did you say?

Leo: Sessack, New Brunswick we went on ranges there.

Dave: Oh, okay.

Leo: You know, Sessack, New Brunswick, and then we'd come back again there. The ranges were firing, firing ranges in Sessack, New Brunswick, and Trackadee, three places.

Dave: What regiment were you in?

Leo: 110 15th field regiment.

Dave: 15th field is that artillery?

Leo: Yeah.

Dave: Okay, and so after the, after the basic training, where did you go from there?

Leo: From the basic training, after we were finished when we went overseas, they shipped us to Fort St. John for a while,

maybe 2 months and from there shipped me back to Regina. And from Regina to Dundurn to wait for my discharge, then they called me, there was too many enemies. They called me to Regina and I got my discharge in Regina, after I was in Dundurn first for a while.

Dave: So, did you go overseas at all?

Leo: No. That's what I say, I wasn't man enough to go over there I guess.

Dave: You weren't man enough?

Leo: I guess I wasn't man enough to go, I was man in my way, but they didn't take me to go over. 4-5 of us that were turned down from there. I was one of them. But I'll tell you another story. I shouldn't tell you a story.

Dave: No, go ahead.

Leo: I come home on invitation leave, I figured I was going. I come back and in Wynyard, I was in Wynyard, and I had to come back. And the next day first of all I stopped in Shallow, Camp Shallow. But the, in town, in Brandon. But there was some guys from Camp Shallow at the train, at the station, and I knew one, I knew one my wife the boy. Jumping up and down laughing like everything else, so I come back. The next day I was downtown in Wynyard in the doctor's office... that's what I don't like to see that. I walked in the coatroom and the old folks say how are you doing. Good, I can't complain I guess. He said you lucky man. I said what's the matter now. He said, my boy is awfully sick, he's getting discharged. That's who I saw the night before in there. But I guess maybe he had \$1000 to get out, but I didn't. So, they're just for money. I don't like that stuff, I don't like it at all, because maybe if my dad had been living, maybe if he'd have the money, maybe I'd be out. What for. When there's a war, everyone should do there share if they got the go. So I didn't like that at all, I never did like that. I can see it's just for money, it was done just for money. And I believe it like that, and I'll stay to it till I die.

Dave: So this is a story about a guy who paid to have his son discharged.

Leo: He must have, he must have.

Dave: He wasn't sick at all.

Leo: He wasn't sick at all. Dancing up and down the goddamn...he had _____ he's getting out next week, and he did get out. And I can prove it, I know goddamn well, they're both dead now, the old man's dead and that boys dead now.

Dave: And here you are, you were willing to go.

Leo: I was willing to go, damn right, I was willing to go. You bet your life. That don't suit me at all. Otherwise, if everyone had \$1000 or more, maybe \$5000 then there wouldn't be no war right.

Dave: Right.

Leo: That's not right, that's not right. I don't understand that, I don't understand. I know it's just for money. And what do you get out of it. I had a brother-in-law, a German fellow, he's German. He went to Germany, man to man over there. He was over there 5 years. And they sat down the Cree way. They had a smoke together, they talked to each other they had right looking too closely they figured to depend one on the other. So they said what are you fighting over. He said a _____ and he said yeah I think so. And we got the _____ long time ago, not long. They were right. So they both had a smoke and they walked away the best way both of them.

Dave: Is that right.

Leo: He said he had eyes all around. But I guess the other fellow had too. They had a talk. Easy _____ the boy that (mumbling)

Dave: What's his name?

Leo: Jim McKive. Bill McKive. I call him Jim.

Dave: Is he Metis?

Leo: Well, know. He's German.

Dave: Oh, okay. Did you know any of the other, where there other Metis men?

Leo: Yeah, but they're all dead pretty well now.

Dave: Is that right. What are there names?

Leo: Maybe if I look around (walking around)...quite a while ago. 1945. 159 here. Here's my family here. That's my brother here in behind. They're all dead, but the three of us left.

Dave: Oh my goodness.

Leo: They lived this much from Wynyard.

Dave: So 12.

Leo: From Wynyard.

Dave: From Wynyard, okay.

Leo: But the ones from Wynyard, there's just me and just wait a minute, one more. Right here. Tony Lispronge, he's dead. He was with me too.

Dave: Lesspronge.

Leo: Tony.

Dave: Okay.

Leo: That's all there is in there right from Wynyard, you know that. I know some more, but I don't know where they're at. There's lots of them up there, lots of Cabroderies, lots of _____ . In the front row you can see a bunch from here. (mumbling) Another one here. There's lots of them. Delorme from the States. He was from the States. See, that's when I was in there.

Dave: The 10th field bat. RCA

Leo: (mumbling)

Dave: Right there.

Leo: That's me.

Dave: Oh yeah.

Leo: When I got out. I was 22 when I got out.

Dave: Oh really. So how old were you when you went in?

Leo: (walking away from mic)

Dave: So aside from Tony Lessparonge, that's the 110th you say.

Leo: Yeah.

Dave: Do you remember the names of any other Metis vets who weren't apart of that regiment, but people you knew?

Leo: Yeah, I'm trying to think of them. Not in this war, I don't think I do remember.

Dave: Do you remember any from World War I?

Leo: Yes, but they ones, that's Clayton's dad and 2 brothers, I think.

Dave: Clayton Pruden?

Leo: Yeah. Clayton's dad and he had 3 other brothers in it. 2 forsure.

Dave: Where does Clayton live?

Leo: Clayton lives between Wynyard and Quill Lake.

Dave: Okay. Did Clayton go to war at all?

Leo: No, I don't think he was in it at all. Maybe he was, you know, because I wasn't being too close to him for a while there.

Dave: So how long were you in basic training for?

Leo: In the army, about all together 5 years and 5 days. I joined June 14, 1941 and I got out June 19, 1945.

Dave: Okay. So after 5 years they still didn't see fit to send your overseas at all?

Leo: No, no.

Dave: There must be quite a few men who didn't get to go overseas?

Leo: Quite a few, yes. They got turned around, turned back.

Dave: But still, that's 5 years of your life...

Leo: That's 5 years of my life getting \$1.30/day, not an hour, a day.

Dave: Is there a different, I don't know what you'd call it. A different way of treating men who did not see active duty then those that did, according to Veterans Affairs?

Leo: Yes, they did. I think that they were more entitled to it than a fellow that never got. Ain't not one of them that never saw it, but I'm saying the truth I think.

Dave: Yeah.

Leo: I think so. But some of them didn't get much afterward. When they were in you know, if they got wounded, they'd be the _____ they never got much. Cause later on I just...

Dave: Did you get anything at all out of it, any benefits of any kind?

Leo: No.

Dave: No.

Leo: I didn't see anything. I forgot now. But I got a truck, 3 years after, in 47 I think. I got a truck and they paid for half of it. It was an old truck. Just to get around at that time.

Dave: Right. So what about since that time, you've basically been working on farms?

Leo: Pretty well all the time.

Dave: Did you marry at all?

Leo: No. No, I didn't. I stayed with a _____. Maybe 4 of them, but never got married. I'm still single. Now too.

Dave: So, you were discharge, June 19, you said?

Leo: June 19.

Dave: 1945. So you were, where were you when you heard that the war was over?

Leo: In Regina at that time. In Regina. But then there was so much of the shipment, they shipped some of us to Dundurn for a while to wait for our discharge. The rest was ahead of us, so when they come back they called us back to Regina to get our discharge.

Dave: So you never thought to bother going back into the army for say Korea or anything like that?

Leo: I think, I didn't know if they'd take a man my age now, yet. I don't think I'd turn it down. I'd go. I got once to die, that's all. That's the way I look at it. Die right here too. So if I've done any good, yes. Because, it's a tough world that we're getting into now, boy it's a damn tough world and boy it's not the end of it not yet, wait till we see the end of it. I don't know much, but I know that much. We're not halfways through it, what's coming to it, I've never seen it that bad in my life yet, that bad. So quick too. I've seen it tough enough. When you walked across to a farmer with horses to do work, if he couldn't hire you, he couldn't even ask you for dinner for Christ's sake. That's tough times. Yes. One time they pulled up from Elbow, SK up north and went to Carrot River. Team of horses and a rack, what they could put on the rack and leave a couple of colours behind, going there you know. And now you can see yet, they're just this high, they blow dirt come to the, I mean the Russian Thistles blew at the fence and it made a round blow dirt to stop there. So about three years after that, it turned out it come back again, we had more rain, so it come back again. But I seen it. I worked there one year after that and at that time too, it was stormy. At 3:00 in the afternoon, the boss come and got me. I was sitting by the wheel, the tractor wheel, I couldn't see him you know. He see the lights and come and got me. Shut it off and took me home. And the lady said, it 's bad eh. I says yes it is. And she said, I never washed clothes for the last 3 weeks. Because it comes here to the house too.

Dave: So that's right during the 1930's?

Leo: Well, the 30's yeah.

Dave: So your father, where was your father from?

Leo: From ah... They moved up here, there they are there both of them. Mother and dad. They moved up here in 1911 they got here. But they come from Manitoba. From Hollan, Manitoba.

They weren't taken, at that picture, they're two different pictures there. But I put them together there.

Dave: Did they come here to farm?

Leo: Yeah, they did. They farmed here north, just 7 miles north. Do you know this place around here, Daffaney? The little town Daffaney?

Dave: I heard the name. Yeah.

Leo: There's nothing there now. But it was 5 miles East of there. They homesteaded there.

Dave: Right. What happened to that land. He had to sell it eventually?

Leo: Eventually yes. What got him going I guess it's the sickness. Taking my brother to Saskatoon.

Dave: Oh really. What was wrong with your brother?

Leo: That was in 1927. He was sick in 1927. He had chlorosine. He had one lung out. But he lived through it, and he just died here 3 years ago. 85 years old. He was in the hospital 9 months in the sanitorium. He didn't know nothing at all for 4 days after the operation. That's a long time to be sick, since 1927, right.

Dave: And your father had to pay for all of that too?

Leo: That time they had to pay for the doctors and hospitals. It wouldn't be bad today. Today they pay mostly. Even at that time you couldn't sell nothing. What could you sell. You couldn't get nothing for selling. I think I can remember, I say I remember, but maybe I was told, often enough maybe I know, that's why. The bull we were selling was too heavy to put in the box, in back of the box. So we lead them a little behind the wagon. So I chased him. They told me that, but I did chase him, but we got \$13.60 for him. You couldn't buy a goddamn steak off him for that much now. That's a lot of difference eh.

Dave: So your family, your mom and yourself moved from here at some point did you?

Leo: Yeah, well see, I was the most close to where Clayton is. Then from there they sold out there and bought south of Wynyard.

That's where he died there. He died when I was a man, 63 years old.

Dave: How is Clayton related to you?

Leo: It's my dad's, Clayton's dad and my dad are both first cousins.

Dave: Oh, okay.

Leo: So that's the second to me.

Dave: That's right. So what do you do to keep yourself busy?

Leo: Well, a lot of people figures that they'd be nuts if they were in my boots. You're damn rights they'd be nuts. I use to make stuff all the time, small stuff. But my eyes are not too good for small stuff either. And the furniture, I made pretty well all my furniture.

Dave: Oh this here.

Leo: A long time ago. And I got this outside with no heat in it one year. It's chipping off right here. (away from mic) The bigger stuff I can do yeah. Like barns, little barns and stuff.

Dave: And you're in uniform there?

Leo: Yeah. And I make these too.

Dave: Oh really. Are those ever nice.

Leo: That's me and my brother and sister in there.

Dave: Oh, okay.

Leo: This is the one of the _____ when I bought this, there was some pictures in it and I had to get this _____.

Dave: You were mentioning at the beginning that you were concerned about some of the things that have happened or have not happened with vets through the Department of Veterans Affairs. What sort of things concern you about what's happened over the past 40 or so years with Veterans benefits?

Leo: I don't know if I talked about that.

Dave: You were mentioning a bit about land, how some people got land, and others did not know about it.

Leo: Yes, land, some got land. Of course the next one didn't you know. There's lots of them I heard, not myself, they were farmers before, they tried it and they haven't got it. They didn't get nothing out of it.

Dave: What did you have to do to be entitled to land?

Leo: It didn't matter. I don't know, it didn't matter if you were a farmer or not all your life. Strange you see. Or else you're a boy from the farm, you still do it. And you knew, they say to know more on writing. They knew them. Same as today, they tried to taught the farmer how to farm, and the farmer don't know nothing, but he's a farmer all his life. It's not, I don't know. I'm not a very good talker, but I know what I see and what I heard, I've seen most of it.

Dave: Did anybody ever

Leo: I'll tell you just a story, and who knows it neither. In the 30's I rode the freight. I rode it from Manitoba to Wetaskiwin, Alberta. We thrashed in Manitoba and got \$2.00/day and in Saskatchewan I got \$2.50. In Alberta, I got \$3.00. See. Work like that. Save our money to come back on the freight again. Anyways, that's okay. I made it, we made it. Then I took the wrong freight in Saskatoon, and I ended up in Melfort, in _____ I went to sleep. If I never went to sleep, I would have jumped off. So I woke up in Melfort. I tried to get more work there. I had money, a little bit of money. Couldn't get nothing. Okay. I was suppose to take the bus to come back on the bus. From Melfort to where what's her name is here, Dayfu, it took me 12 hours to get to Dayfu from Melfort on the bus. If we got a bus to pull, I mean a tractor to pull us for 12 miles, there was no gravel on that road for 12 miles, 14 miles or so. Rain, rain, it was still raining. So, we missed the bus. Next day we walked to Wynyard. But then it was on the radio. They said Canada didn't have nothing but a bunch of bums. See. But that's not all bums. They had to something to get home. So we're on the freights. And after the war broke out, Canada, had the best soldiers. That's a son of a bitch, loud (train outside). Sure. The big fellows stayed back and watched, smoking cigars.

Dave: Yeah, I wonder sometimes just how much of the war was fought by men who didn't have a lot of money?

Leo: That's right. None of them had big money. And that brother of mine, Bill, was in the 5 year training, 5 years. He come back and never got wanted at all. But, a lot of times he was driving some big shots and they want him to go ahead first.

Dave: Is that right. Anything else you want to talk about, or do we got everything?

Leo: I think so.