

Interview of Marshall Poitras

December 4, 1992

I guess we are what you call a military family. My dad was in World War I and I had two brothers in infantry, one was killed in Dieppe Raid, the other one was badly wounded and I came back without a scratch. Touch wood. Michael Poitras is my dad's name and brother George. He died about 3 years ago. The one that got killed in action was Edward. He was with the South Saskatchewan Regiment. My father was in World War I. He was with 128th Battalion, "Moose Jaw's Own" they called it. It was the first CMR's (Canadian Mounted Rifles).

ENLISTMENT

There was no work of any kind for young people at that time. The best bet was to join the army, being patriotic, and looking for a little bit of adventure too. All my basic training was done in Aldershot, England. I joined the army January 3, 1940 and February 9, 1940 I was already in Grannix, Scotland and getting off the boat. We boarded a troop train to Aldershot, England and started my training. Basic training; it was foot drill, small arms drill. We were actually a transport outfit but we didn't have any trucks, no vehicles of any kind. We had to improvise and use benches and tables for vehicles until we got our vehicles which was about six or seven months later. Then the convoys began, the training. How to travel in convoys for certain distances. So many miles in the hour, all about that. We didn't use that later on any ways. It didn't really matter, that was training, discipline. I guess I spent a little over 3 years in England.

In 1943, we boarded a boat in Liverpool and headed for Central Mediterranean Forces, which was Sicily and Italy. I don't recall the date that we arrived in Sicily but we got off in Palarmo, Sicily and marched to our bivouac area. I don't know how many miles and it was raining and soggy; we were wet, hungry and God knows what else.

Anyway, where we were supposed to have our transit camp, there was nothing in readiness. The tents were there, all rolled up, still in bags. Nothing, not even a kitchen for us to

eat in. We had to depend on our rations which was a tin of bully beef and a bit of hardtack. That continued until we ended up in our area where we were stationed in Catania. This was in the continent of

Italy. Not Sicily, but Italy. Catania was our first stop over. From there on, a little bit more training. We stayed in Catania for a couple of months and then we to Masena and across the Straits of Masena into the boot of Italy in Reggio. From there we followed the rest of the troops up the boot. Our first Christmas in Italy was spent in Barry, Italy, 1943. In between that time there was a lot of training and movement of troops, which was our basic job, the movement of troops and supplies, from safety pins to personnel.

From Barry we went across into Naples, 1943-45 was spent around the areas of Naples, Ortuna, Campale Baso, Casino and Fogia, Varserio, Revanio. In 1945, on my birthday, the 20th of February, I boarded a boat in Naples, to go to Marseilles, France. There was more training, more movement of troops and supplies. Basically, that's all we did, transport troops from bivouac areas to the frontlines, same with the food and supplies. Taken from boat breaking points, broken up into truck loads and delivered to different outfits, infantry, artillery.

As far as being in the battle, the closest we came to the battle area was approximately 1/2 mile. We were not fighting troops, as such. We were service personnel, supplying materials for the use of the infantry and artillery. A couple of times our convoys were attacked by strathling planes. We were lucky in some instances where we weren't hit at all. What we did was that when we got the word to get out of the trucks and into the ditches and undercover. That was basically it. Where we stationed, especially in England, we were bombed sometimes, but actual contact with the enemy, the closest I guess we came was about 1/2 mile.

When I joined the army I was with 1st Corps Ammunition Park in Regina. It was a Regina outfit. There were two sub-parks in Regina and another, #3 sub-park was from Toronto. There were a little over 1500 men between the three sub-parks. We weren't attached to any fighting troops until we hit the United Kingdom. We were attached to the 3rd Brigade Infantry, which was the

outfit we transported and worked with very closely, was the Vandoos, 3rd Brigade. A few other outfits we transported as well, like the PPCLI or Royal Edmonton Regiment. Basically that was it, as far as being attached to fighting troops and all the way through Italy, Sicily and northwestern Europe, most of the time it was with the Vandoos. They were nice people to work with. They sure looked after their transport personnel. One major I can remember, with a broken French accent: we were picking up our rations and their supply sergeant was cutting up the meat and different staples. He saw the kind of meat that was being sent to the transport. He didn't like that. He told the sergeant that his men were supposed to have the very best of the meats. Change that. From then on, it was the best for the transport. Like I said, as far as battling, we never got into hand to hand combat.

My first discharge was after I came back from overseas, August 31, 1945. I was discharged in Regina. Re-enlisted May 17, 1947. In between that break, I went to barber school. The wages at that time was \$25.00 per week. I had been married in 1946 and you couldn't live on that kind of money. I got a letter from Ottawa wanting me to re-engage. If so, I was to report to Regina. I reported back to Regina again. Re-enlisted May 17, 1947. Was sent to Camp Borden, Ontario as the barber, May 19, 1947. Stayed there until September, 1947. Got transferred back to Regina. That was where I spent most of my career, Saskatchewan, in between attending courses down East and Calgary. Most of my time was spent in Saskatchewan.

The last four years of my career from 1964-1968 was spent in Camp Dundurn. I was the transport Sergeant in charge of the transport there. It consisted of my 15 men plus 32 vehicles. That's where my army career ended, February 20, 1968.

I had bought a house in Lestock. We lived there for a year and my children moved to Calgary, they were all hairdressers. We sold the house, packed the car and my two year old son and headed for Calgary. I was still drawing army wages and towards the end of the year, I finally made up my mind that I had to go to work. I wasn't trained for anything except weapons and truck driving. I didn't want to drive anymore trucks. I had enough of that, so I went to two different hospitals and put in my application. The director of the housekeeping department there was an ex-navy man. He told me to hang on, that they would give

me a call when there was an opening. This was a Monday morning. That same day I went to the Foothills Hospital and put in a application there. I went home and thought nothing. Tuesday, afternoon, my wife got a call telling me to report to the Holy Cross Hospital, Wednesday morning. A way I went. Filled out the necessary papers and started to work that Wednesday. That Wednesday my wife got a call from the Foothills Hospital as well.

I worked at the Holy Cross Hospital for 13 years. I started as a Cleaning Serviceman and ended up as the Manager of the Housekeeping Department. I was involved with the Public School System in Calgary training the students that were a little slow in learning. Job training is what they called it. I like working with people. I got a whole bunch of certificates.

LIFE TODAY

I used to delve into breaking down old furniture, stripping furniture, putting it back together and refinishing it. I don't do to much of that now. I have my instruments, my violins. I am an old-time fiddler. It's a good pastime. When I want to relax, I grab my violin. I have six violins, all different. I play with the Grammas and the Gramps. We are all senior citizens. We go around playing for different old people and sometimes we play for dances. We played for the Legion Dance here on the 11th of November. None of that heavy metal. We used to have 8 violins, 2 guitars, bass guitar, accordion and omnicord, piano and drums. Now we have about 5 violins left. They keep down off. I guess, the youngest in our outfit would be about 67 years old. There is one, Jenny White, is in her eighties. She still plays. Most of our in our seventies. I'll be 75 in February.