

Transcription  
Cliff Hessdorfer  
- Interviewed Feb. 24, 1993 -

Dave: Okay, we're all set. I'm here with Cliff Hessdorfer. Cliff has agreed to have an interview with us for the Metis War Veterans book. It is February 24, 1993. And what I do Cliff is I just ask a few short sort of basic questions about your military background and then you can talk a lot more about your experiences. When were you born?

Cliff: 16th of January 1927.

Dave: Where were you born?

Cliff: Wakaw, SK.

Dave: When did you enlist?

Cliff: I enlisted June 1942 in the reserves. June 1944 in the active. Then I got discharged underage and I joined up in April 1945 and I got discharged at the end of the war and then I joined permanent force in 1948-1953.

Dave: Okay. Where did you enlist when you first enlisted?

Cliff: Prince Albert, SK.

Dave: Why did you enlist?

Cliff: (laugh) For the money really.

Dave: That's what a lot of guys say. What, were you married when you enlisted?

Cliff: No, I was single. I was only 15.

Dave: Oh, is that right. How long did it take them to find out that you were underage?

Cliff: November 1944 I got discharged underage. I was 18 in January, so I joined up again right away in April.

Dave: Right. Did you, when you first enlisted did you go and do the basic training and then you were discharged?

Cliff: I was 2 years in reserve. We use to go every summer to Dundurn for a couple of weeks, and then back. You work at your own job, whatever. In June 1944 I got into the active army, and I took basic in Prince Albert and Maple Creek, and I was discharged from Maple Creek. And the second time it was April 1945, I went back to Maple Creek and then to Calgary and I was discharged in September I think it was 1945 from Calgary. They sent me to Regina to my own and then they discharged me from there. And then in 1948 I applied for permanent force and I was accepted, so I went to B.C., then \_\_\_\_\_, Ontario, then back to Chilliwack where I.

Dave: Okay, did you see any sort of active duty at all?

Cliff: No.

Dave: Right. What regiment were you with?

Cliff: Well at first I was with the infantry and then I went with the Royal Canadian Engineers and then I ended up with the Royal Canadian Armed Service Core.

Dave: Okay. Did you have one sort of regiment number or one service number at that time?

Cliff: I had 2.

Dave: 2 of them. Do you remember what those were?

Cliff: Reserve one was L438337 and the active one was L109062, and the permanent force one they just put an S in front of the L.

Dave: Oh, okay. So when the war ended, World War II ended, do you remember where you were at that time?

Cliff: Calgary.

Dave: Do you know of any other Metis veterans or Metis soldiers who went overseas in, do you remember any of the names at all?

Cliff: I know lots of them, but they're not in any of these locals or anything. There's lots of them, but they don't go to the meetings or anything like that. There was lots. Even from Prince Albert there was Henry \_\_\_\_\_ and my brother, my cousins.

Dave: Your brother's name is?

Cliff: Henry.

Dave: And that was World War II?

Cliff: Yeah.

Dave: And he saw action, did he?

Cliff: Yeah, he went into France on D-day. He got wounded.

Dave: Yeah, I had an interview with Wilfred Henry, and I think he was. D-day is the Normandy invasion?

Cliff: Yeah.

Dave: Yeah, he had some pretty interesting experiences. Hard to imagine what that must have been like. But yeah, he had a brother who just died last year actually and I forget his name. But he has a number of cousins that went as well.

Cliff: The cousins are the ones I know. Of course that's the same Wilfred. There's 2 Wilfred's for sure that I know of. Maybe more. But I was referring to Ben and Tommy.

Dave: And you're trying to, you were telling me that you're trying to get a pension.

Cliff: Yeah.

Dave: Now, how is that suppose to work. How are you suppose to be eligible for a pension?

Cliff: Injury or whatever it is, is suppose to happen during an active service. And I was in Prince Albert in August 1944, I started to get that pain in my chest. And it was never died. It was still NYD, not yet died. And I had that same pain and same all the way through. And even after I got discharged the same thing. And they didn't find out, they gave me lots of X-rays, but it was always of the chest, because I told them it was a sore chest. The pain is there and it's always there. But in 1968 I went to a doctor here, my doctor was on leave or something, and there was a doctor from England here. And when I went to see, they ask me do you want to see him. I said, well a doctor is a doctor. First thing he did, he sent me for X-rays and they X-rayed my chest. They gave me that white stuff. Come

back, I had ulcers. And now they say that they see that old scar and everything in there. And that was always this time you see. I had this after that they sent me to this specialist. And I have this hernia in here that \_\_\_\_\_ or whatever. I have that there too. But it's all in the documents. They say no, I can't see like this. Mrs. Dixie can't read English or something, and that guy in Charlottetown the same thing. They make you go back. I had to go back 10 years and then they tell me it's no good. They only wanted that active service. Well they had it here all the time. And then we found out that we could get the war records down there, we got it and everything is right there, he's got it all in black and white. You know. I don't know. (laugh)

Dave: So, this is something that developed during active duty?

Cliff: It started there and...

Dave: Kept on going.

Cliff: You know and all the stuff I was taking, it was ulcers, but they could never say it was ulcers. And I didn't know either, the pain was up here, I figured ulcers would be in your stomach. But apparently it starts way up here. You know, that was the, where it was so sore. That was the same when I first went on sick leave for that, that's when it happened. I was never sick or anything till then.

Dave: So you got, Ron Camponi is going to talk to him is he?

Cliff: No, I got John Shanks. See, I was on long-term disability. This John Shanks was the guy from our union, we was helping with this stuff. So when I showed him this he done everything for me like.

Dave: That was nice of him.

Cliff: If I would have known that, if we could have got them papers right away, everything is there in black and white, why wouldn't they. (laugh)

Dave: Yeah, it's an interesting derocracy. I don't think they even understand what makes a person eligible for certain benefits. I know with Wilfred Henry he was buried alive by a mortar shell, he was in a trench. And he was dug out of that, but he, the concussion from the explosion really did a number on his head, and it said in his service book that he was wounded by

the DVA's said that he had no record of that. But in his very own service book it said wounded on this day. So yeah, it's an interesting organization. There's no doubt about that. So what does it look like is going to happen now, they are going to give you a pension?

Cliff: I don't know. You see, after I got married, I was out in 1953. I got married and well at that time the wages were only low, \$1.00/hour I got in financial difficulty. So I went and seen the DVA here and there was a guy here, he had 1 leg, maybe 2 legs off. He was a very nice man. He took me in and showed me everything. He says he couldn't do anything through them, but they have a benevolent fund, money from the canteens. So he payed off most of my debts, so I could go to work without getting a garnishee. But they wouldn't pay off, I owed a finance company, I owed a finance company. They wouldn't pay off that, but the ordinary bills, you know like doctor, dentist or whatever it was, food, grocery store, furniture store, like I got behind. But I had went and got a lawyer to put all the bills together to get a lump sum, and I paid him so much a month. At that time maybe I was making \$200/month. It was low. So I was giving only like \$25-50, so it would take a long time. And after when you got to layoff for the winter, it was all seasonal work mostly. Well I'd get behind again, and then one guy was \_\_\_\_\_, he'd put a garnishee, so the first time I got to work, they want to garnishee my pay right away. But this guy, Guenther I think was his name at the DVA, he paid off that and then he said you should go for pension. So I told him the only thing I ever was this not yet diagnosed and my leg. But they said I was in the army. It happened at 23:59 at night and they said I wasn't in the army. You know, it happened on vacation. I showed him my leg and everything.

Dave: Oh yeah. What happened, how did that happen?

Cliff: In the kitchen.

Dave: Burn?

Cliff: No, this guy was drunk and he manhandling everybody. So I went, I had like \_\_\_\_\_ shoes on, and they were pretty good. But when he flipped me, my ankle twisted, and my ankle was sore for a long, long time. And I don't know, ever since then when I was working. Sometimes I couldn't put on my shoe even, but they say there's nothing wrong. (laugh) But anyways, he said there's no use putting your chest, at that time it wasn't diagnosed. This was maybe 1962 or 1963. I never had that ulcer

at that time. It was still NYD. But I was taking all this stuff like amphrogel and tums and charcoal tablets, you name it I was taking. Anything on my own. But afterwards when they diagnosed that, they gave me that kind of pink stuff. It helped, it kept it down till 1980 or 1983-84 when it broke again. The ulcer broke. They had to give me blood and that stuff instead of eating.

Dave: Oh the intervenes.

Cliff: Yeah, the intervenes. They gave me that. Then I had that arthritis from before, well everything, so they gave me early retirement instead. They put me on long-term disability for 6 months, no they gave me my full wages for 6 months and then they put me on long-term disability.

Dave: Who were you working for at this time?

Cliff: Operating engineer. I was on there till I was 65 years old. At 65 they took me off. All I get now is Canada pension and my old age pension.

Dave: Really, so they cut the long-term disability at 65 and there's no other pension from your workplace?

Cliff: No, it's Canada Pension. And you see while I was taking that, like the \$1200 they were giving me, they told me to apply for disability Canada Pension. So they gave me disability Canada Pension of \$600 and some which they took off the \$1200. (laugh) So now when I got 65 they took me off the disability Canada Pension. Instead of \$690, they gave me \$508, straight Canada Pension.

Dave: That's a hell of a system isn't it. Yeah with Wilfred Henry, he was getting disability pension from the DVA it was about, I think it was about \$2000 a month, but when he turned 65 they put him on the old age pension I think and they cut everything. He went from \$2000 to about \$900 a month. They pro-rated everything back using the same sort of logic.

Cliff: Still, it's better than before. Before you got 65 it was straight old age pension, that was it. Now you got a little bit. But if a man is entitled to it, he should get it. That's what I think.

Dave: Yeah. I talked with Harold Ross too and he was saying. He went to Korea, I think he was World War II and Korea. He

took sick over there and he got pluracy. Came back here and he had to spend about a year at Fort Sand, and he did not get any disability pension from the DVA. But he knew other guys who on the ship going overseas got sick and got sent home and they received disability. So it's an interesting system. What about World War I veterans. Do you know anybody, anybody from your family or anybody that you remember who went to see active duty or was a soldier during that time?

Cliff: They're dead. (mumbling)

Dave: But even if they have, even if they're dead, do you remember any of the names?

Cliff: Bill Barassa, Walter McKay.

Dave: Are these World War I or World War II?

Cliff: Bill is both, I and II, and Walter McKay I.

Dave: Do you have any idea what regiments they belong to or anything like that?

Cliff: No. I remember the second one was Veterans Guard, like Barassa. And Albert Gordon he was in I and II, same as Bill.

Dave: What's the Veterans Guard?

Cliff: Veterans Guard, that's a name that they, they were older soldiers that joined up for the second World War, and they put them guarding POW's at \_\_\_\_\_ Alberta, and Lethbridge. But there was lots of other ones there. Even in Prince Albert there was lots. All headquarters and that. They were all pretty well World War I, and the instructors were from the permanent Core. It was hard to get in then, but the guys use to in 1937. It was more or less a job. There was lots there from. I don't remember the names.

Dave: These 3 men are they all from the same area, P.A.

Cliff: Yeah. Bill moved here in 1952 or something. He moved here about 10 years before me. And Premo, well he got to be my cousin afterwards. (laugh) He married my cousin. He was in World War I. Well lots of them, they were gassed. Like that McKay and Premo, they were gassed.

Dave: Premo, that's the last name? Can I get the first name?

Cliff: Alex.

Dave: Yeah, I had an interview with Dan Pelletier, one of the last surviving Canadian veterans, he was in World War I. At Vimmy when they took the Ridge, and he was gassed as well. He was telling me about that. It was horrible.

Cliff: There was a lot of those veterans, they only got veterans allowance. They never got disability. They had to wait until they were 60 years old before they got any help too.

Dave: So it looks like all totalled you spent, you must have spent over 10 years with the army?

Cliff: No, not really.

Dave: No, oh yeah, you were in the reserves for a few years there. Were there any benefits that you would have been or could have been at all, aside from having somebody help you out with your debts. Like land grants or anything like that?

Cliff: You just got, like at the end of the war, what do you call them, I forget the name of them now. I had a little stroke in 1985, and it's hard. Something sounds familiar and you somehow think of it.

Dave: Was it like a small?

Cliff: Gratuities. They gave you gratuities and they'd match that here if you wanted to buy stuff.

Dave: Did you take advantage of that at all?

Cliff: Yeah, yeah in 1946 I went partners with a guy and I bought a sleigh with that outfit. There was a lot of horses in those days, so I bought this sleigh and that guy had the horses, and we teamed up and we hauled all that spring break up. In the fall I used it for awhile again, and then it was getting more trucks and stuff. It was getting obsolete. But I mean, it helped.

Dave: So you had a brother who was in World War II. Is he alive?



Cliff: He had a stroke and it will be 12 years this coming July. He was 60 years and he had a stroke. And he hasn't talked since. Dave: Really?

Cliff: He lives in Prince Albert. He had a spot on his lungs when he got discharged. He never went after it or anything, he just kept on working. He got a job with the city of P.A. and became a water meter reading. But still they said that walking, you're not suppose to get a stroke or something, but he got it. First day of the holidays I think it was too. But he's getting war veterans allowance, but they take everything off. There's a certain ceiling. So I think now they took the war veterans allowance all off and they just give him this homecare or whatever it is. I think it's always Canada Pension and \_\_\_\_\_ from the city and it would be too much for the war veterans allowance.

Dave: That sounds similar to what Tony Desjarlais was talking about at that meeting.

Cliff: I don't know exactly what it is, but I talk to his wife, and that's what. I had made it a point when he comes and visit me here, before he had his stroke, I told him the difference between war veterans allowance and disability pension. Oh he said I'm working there's no use bothering it now. But it was too late afterwards. He know, they wanted to know. But they must have lots of that in there documents anyways.

Dave: So he was, was he wounded overseas?

Cliff: No.

Dave: No, but he had developed a lung problem.

Cliff: Yeah. But he said, he'd get colds and that, but he didn't know very much about that till he got (end of side 1)

Dave: What regiment was he with?

Cliff: Army Service Core. Royal Canadian Army Service Core.

Dave: So what do you do nowadays to keep yourself busy?

Cliff: Nothing. Drive my wife around. She demonstrates food.

Dave: Oh, is that right.

Cliff: My one daughter is going to University in Washington now, and the other 2 are married there.

Dave: What is your daughter who's going to university study?

Cliff: She was born with cerebral palsy. She's deaf and she's got a hard time balance. But she's walking good. She went to the school of the deaf here to \_\_\_\_\_ then she went to London, Ontario that prep school. I sent her to that university. I think she's got two more years there. But she's interested in this Metis stuff and family tree. She's found out lots from that.

Dave: Speaking of family trees, your mom and dad, where did they come from?

Cliff: My grampa comes from Germany, he was a soldier. He was an \_\_\_\_\_, and there's another name there. My daughter got all that. He was a soldier and he was the king of that \_\_\_\_\_. And he come after that pressure or war, whatever. He come to the United States. He come with the title, but no money. All money was gone. So he got married there in the states, and my dad was born there in the states. They were in Iowa and Nebraska and Minnesota and then there was drought, so they kept moving. So in 1903, they had another \_\_\_\_\_ in South Dakota I think it was. They loaded everything up and my dad come ahead. He wasn't married then. He come to Rosthern and he rented a quarter of land there in the first year and then he went to Saint Bendrick and he got 4, what do they call that, homesteads. One for himself, one for his dad, one for his uncle and I forget the other one. It's all marked in that book. In 1919 he married my mother. My mother was from Toronto. They were from the Red River, north of Winnipeg. That was before there were even provinces here. Then they moved to Saskatchewan. Louis Riel was there. And then they kept moving and they moved up by east of Regina. They took homesteads there. They travelled to St. Laurant, near Batoche, they had a homestead there. They went into Montana, Harbour Montana, Harbor or whatever you call it. And then they come back to \_\_\_\_\_ to homestead there. Then he retired in 1931 or 1930 and they moved to Prince Albert. But my dad had died already in 1928. He had strokes and that swelling, his leg would get. I don't know what it's called. I was only 1 1/2 when he died. I was the youngest. I had a brother and sister that were older. My daughter that is in university is sure interested in what happened. The Metis part and everything.

Dave: Must have been a pretty tough life growing up if you had no father. Did you get much schooling at all?

Cliff: Oh yeah. I quit in grade 7, but I took them courses. When I got discharged in 1945, you had to have grade 10 to get into the permanent force. So I wrote a letter and asked and they accepted me on the IQ. So I was okay there. Then after I took some more courses here. Then I went to Kelsey. Christ, I was 45 years old when I went to Kelsey. I got my grade 12 GED down too. But it's too late. If I wouldn't have got that god damn stroke, it wouldn't have been too bad. Now you don't remember nothing till after. Like at night, you think of something in the daytime, so you think of it at night. It comes back to you.

Dave: So your mother must have been the one who had to do a lot of work?

Cliff: Yeah. It wasn't like today. She was only getting about \$8 month at that time. Hard on her. Old age pension at that time was only \$15 or \$20. And if you were only one drawing, you would get \$20. And if the man and woman were drawing, they'd get \$15 a piece instead. And because my mother stayed with her parents, they wouldn't give it, they'd only give her \$8. It was a big \_\_\_\_\_. But still, everything was pretty cheap in those days, keep gardens and everything.

Dave: Do you have any pictures of yourself when you were in service?

Cliff: Gee, I don't know where she kept them. (end of tape)