

During our 2014 Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society Annual Meeting the featured speaker was Shelley Jacobs who informed us of the position and the price of pacifism in WW1 and WW2. Our brother Eugene Perry, along with many others, held the position of a conscientious objector. Here is his story as told by himself.

My World War II Experiences as a Conscientious Objector

Before reporting I determined that I would try to manifest a humble, submissive attitude while at the same time firmly explaining how my convictions limited the scope of my participation. Whether it was a consequence of this I cannot tell, but I was treated with understanding and respect and never in any way abused or mistreated by those in authority. No one ever even tried to test my convictions, accuse me of cowardice or reason with me or persuade me to change. I was and remain thankful.

My basic training experience is of particular interest as it relates to my stance as a conscientious objector. Even though I fearfully anticipated an unpleasant reaction and it required a lot of courage to declare my convictions and request noncombatant service, it seems to have been notated without comment or negative reaction. I fulfilled the required weeks of drill and "presenting arms," etc. but this did not, to my surprise, involve actual shooting, target practice or bayonet drill. We lived in horse stables on the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto and then in tents in a muddy field (Barry Field) in Kingston until snow began to fall.

Over two years later when the plebiscite freed the authorities to send us to active duty our unit had had no real training for combat so this was the next logical step. We were taught the use and care of Bren Guns (automatic machine guns) and then required, in one on one sessions, to demonstrate our skill to our trainers. When my turn came, I mustered my courage and calmly told the Sergeant that I could disassemble and reassemble the gun but had no intention of ever using it. As I remember the incident, he checked my off as if I had passed the test even though I had not done it.

Soon after this incident the time for my regular "leave" came up. I applied and, surprisingly, obtained leave to visit at home. It is of some interest that the news of V-E Day came while I was on the train en route back to Halifax where I expected to join my unit and likely be sent to Europe. I was a bit surprised to find that the barracks were empty. My unit had been shipped out while I was on leave.

