

## Michael Czuboka Remembers

### THE RIVERS CONNECTION

My father, who, along with thousands of other Ukrainians, was unjustly interred by Canadian authorities during WWI, managed to secure employment as a section labourer with the Canadian National Railways during the 1930s. We moved to Rivers in 1937 and I entered Grade 1 at the Rivers Consolidated School that same year. Rivers was an important divisional point on the CNR and most of its residents were railway employees and their families. WWII broke out in 1939 and construction on an air base at Rivers began shortly afterwards.

During the war years the airport at Rivers was a part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and its facilities were used primarily by Avro Ansons for the purpose of training navigators. I remember the drone of airplane engines almost every evening during the early 1940s. It was an exciting time. Crashes were frequent. Airman from Britain, Australia and New Zealand who were killed in these crashes were buried in the Rivers cemetery.

After the war ended Rivers continued as a military base and was eventually called the "Canadian Joint Air Training Centre" or "CJATC" because all three services trained there. All military parachute training in Canada at that time took place in Rivers and Shilo. The base's recreational facilities, with a large gymnasium, bowling alley and swimming pool were superior to those we had in the town of Rivers. Brooke School at the base, beginning in the early 1950's, enrolled students from the town, including brother Bill, as well as from CJATC. I was impressed and envious of these facilities. As a young boy, I greatly admired all of the soldiers, sailors and airmen that I saw, and I seriously considered a military career. An opportunity opened when the Korean War broke out in 1950. I quickly enlisted.

After I returned from serving with 2 PPCLI in the Korean War, I completed a parachute course at Rivers and Shilo. I was then stationed at Calgary. During the last year of my army service, during 1953-54, I was posted to the Airborne School at Rivers. One of my jobs at the Airborne School was working with the Personnel Officer. The Chief of the Defence Staff was concerned because of the high failure rate of people taking parachute training, also called "the jump course". I gave a modified version of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality test to incoming parachute trainees to see if it could identify potential failures. Eureka! After administering the test to a large number of parachute trainees, I discovered that one item was significant: "I am afraid of heights". People who

failed the jump course were afraid of heights! I don't know how, or if, this discovery was ever used, because in the fall of 1954 I left the army and enrolled at Brandon College.

MY MILITARY CAREER  
BEFORE AND DURING THE BATTLE OF KAPYONG  
A PERSONAL MEMOIR  
by Michael Czuboka  
Originally published in the 2008 edition of The Patricia magazine

PART I: JOINING THE SPECIAL FORCE FOR KOREA:

I was born in Brandon, Manitoba to Ukrainian immigrant parents in 1931. My father, a CN section labourer, like thousands of other Ukrainians, was unjustly interned by Canadian authorities during WWI simply because he was classified as a citizen of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, an enemy of Britain and Canada during that world war. The Ukrainians, ironically, had come to Canada to gain freedom from an oppressive and foreign regime. I believe that my father wanted his three sons to be good Canadians, but that he was probably never able to overcome his belief that he was an unwanted foreigner in Canada. If he had lived long enough, he would certainly have been proud of the fact that all three of his sons, Walter, Bill and Mike, would eventually become commissioned officers in the Canadian Forces. It is certainly true that I, as a young man, needed to prove that I was a good Canadian and that this was one of the reasons I joined the Canadian Army in 1950.

In the summer of 1950 I was an 18 year old construction labourer living in Rivers, Manitoba, a CN Railway town, and working on renovation projects at the nearby Canadian Joint Air Training Centre. I had earlier graduated with a Grade 12 "senior matriculation" standing, but jobs were scarce and I considered myself fortunate to have employment of any kind. I wanted to further my studies with a university degree in either arts or science, but neither my parents nor I had any money for that purpose.

I had grown up in Rivers and I was impressed by the young soldiers, sailors and airmen who served at CJATC, and especially those who wore wings. While attending high school in Rivers I became an air cadet, gained military experience by attending summer camps at air force bases, and was promoted to sergeant, the highest cadet rank in #320 Rivers Squadron. My older brother Walter, as a Flying Officer with the Royal

Canadian Air Force, had completed 52 air missions over the Atlantic Ocean and Europe during WWII and I admired him greatly. I had been too young to serve in the war and I felt that I had been left out of a great and exciting historical event. A military career greatly appealed to me and the Korean War would eventually give me a chance for the kind of an adventure that I had missed during WWII because of my youth.

The Korean War broke out in June, 1950, and later in that summer the Canadian Government announced that it would recruit a "Special Force" for the purpose of serving in the war. What was especially appealing to many recruits about this force was its limited 18 month period of service. In those days, those who enlisted in the Canadian Forces were usually required to enlist for at least three years. Moreover, it was practically impossible to get out earlier than three years. It was almost like being in the French Foreign Legion. You signed your life and freedom away. The Canadian Army, in those days, was lacking in sensitivity and human relations skills. Soldiers did not have any "rights" as we know them today. You were required to obey all orders without questions of any kind. It was a joke but also a reality when lieutenants, or sergeants, or even corporals said: "I need three volunteers to go on a dangerous patrol and I have decided that the volunteers will be you, you and you".

In early August, 1950, shortly after the Special Force enlistments began at recruiting depots across Canada, I decided to travel from Rivers to Fort Osborne in Winnipeg, a distance of about 125 miles, in order to join up. But how would I get there? My funds were limited. Fortunately, I knew a CN Railway fireman and he smuggled me into a caboose at the end of a freight train going to Winnipeg. I arrived full of enthusiasm but was initially rejected because of my age.

"How old are you?" the recruiting officer asked skeptically. "You look like you are about 15!"

" I know that I look younger, but I am 18 years old" I truthfully replied.

"That's too young to be in the Special Force" he said. "You have to be at least 19. Go home and come again when you are 19".

I did go back to Rivers but I returned to Fort Osborne about two weeks later and hesitatingly, and with considerable trepidation, told another recruiting officer that I was 19 years old. He did not look at me too closely and did not seem to care. I was a warm body and the army was not too particular. I was never asked for a birth certificate or documentation of any kind, either then or ever. I aged by one year instantaneously and was immediately enrolled, at my request, into the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. I wanted adventure, and the infantry was the place to get it.

On August 22, 1950, at about the time I was scheduled to travel by train to the PPCLI in Calgary, Canada's railway workers went on strike. The problem was solved by the Royal Canadian Air Force. I, along with other recruits from Winnipeg's Osborne Barracks, were loaded onto C-47 Dakota aircraft and flown to Calgary. We arrived, a lot of us sick and vomiting because of a bumpy ride on a hot August day, and were immediately housed at Currie Barracks. Unfortunately, the Army was not ready to receive us and we languished for many days in our civilian clothing. Finally, in about mid-September, we were equipped with WWII vintage uniforms, webbing, kit bags, boots, mess tins, and .303 Lee Enfield rifles. Shortly afterwards we were shipped to Wainwright, Alberta, to undergo basic training. Our training was under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel "Big Jim" Stone, the CO of 2 PPCLI and Brigadier John Rockingham, commander of the 25th Infantry Brigade. Both officers had had served with distinction in WWII. In fact, most of our senior non-commissioned and commissioned officers were veterans of the war that had ended only about five years earlier.

## PART II : TRAINING FOR THE KOREAN WAR AND SAILING TO KOREA:

Camp Wainwright was located on the sandy site of the former 25 square mile Buffalo National Park in central Alberta. It served as an artillery, armoured and infantry training area during WWII , and briefly as a German prisoner-of-war camp at the end of the war. Its facilities were expanded considerably at the beginning of the Korean War, but in November, 1950, it was decided that the entire 25th Canadian Brigade would be moved to Fort Lewis, Washington because of the better facilities at that location. It was apparently cheaper to rent from the United States than to spend a lot of money on Wainwright. We did not complain. The idea of living and training near Seattle, a large American city was very appealing to the men of all ranks. Seattle, we reasoned, probably contained a lot of beautiful women who were anxious to consort with handsome and heroic Canadian soldiers.

In late November, 1950 several trains began transporting soldiers from my regiment, the PPCLI and other units, from Wainwright to Fort Lewis. We were loaded onto old wooden colonial railway coaches. These ancient and fragile vehicles had originally been used to haul immigrants, like my parents, to the Canadian Prairies. Tragedy struck on November 21, 1950 when two trains, including a troop train, collided at Canoe River in British Columbia, killing 21 people, including 17 soldiers from the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery. Investigators later decided that these deaths were caused primarily by the weaknesses of the wooden coaches in which we were travelling. It was alleged, by some, that the Government and military authorities were negligent because of their decision to transport soldiers in these ancient and dangerous conveyances. The investigators noted that none of the civilians who were riding in modern and strong steel coaches died in this collision and concluded that the soldiers had died as a result of government cost-cutting.

Shortly after our arrival at Fort Lewis the Canadian Government decided that only the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry would be sent to Korea on an immediate basis. The communist forces of North Korea had been pushed back to the Yalu River on the border with China and General Douglas MacArthur, the United Nations commander, had declared that the war would be over by Christmas. It appeared that 2 PPCLI was being sent as a token occupation force and that the rest of the brigade would probably not follow.

When I arrived at Fort Lewis on November 21, 1950, I was a rifleman in the PPCLI. One day a number of us were called to a special parade and we were told that we were being re-assigned. Most were sent to rifle companies, but when my name was called out I was told that I was now a member of 2 PPCLI's 81 mm. mortar platoon. "Mortar platoon?" I asked myself. "What is a mortar platoon and what will I be doing?" I vaguely remembered seeing mortars in WWII movie newsreels, but I knew next to nothing about them. I would not see any 81 mm. mortars until after we arrived in Korea. I wondered why and how I was assigned to the mortar platoon, and I concluded that it was simply an arbitrary decision and not for any particular reason. That's how the army worked in those days.

On November 25th, after only four days at Fort Lewis, we were shipped to Port Angeles and loaded onto the Private J.P. Martinez, a rusting "liberty ship" from WWII. These vessels had been welded together for temporary use and did not appear to be very seaworthy. The facilities were crude and the food was almost inedible. I still shudder over the memory of seeing large black cooks sweating into the soup and food that they prepared in the galleys for our consumption. We had coloured meal cards and ate at badly coordinated times to announcements on loudspeakers such as: "Yellow cards will chow now; will chow now." The weather was some of the worst in memory and even the ship's crew were seasick. I spend the first week in my bunk flat on my back and next to my rifle. The bunks were six deep and jammed together in the hold. The odour of unwashed bodies and feet was almost unbearable. Moreover, we learned, about half way across the stormy and badly-named Pacific, that the Chinese had entered Korea in large numbers and that the United Nations forces were in retreat. We were going to a full scale war and not occupation duties as previously announced. After about 23 days, including brief stopovers in Hawaii and Japan, we arrived at Pusan in South Korea. We disembarked to the sounds of a welcoming U.S. military band. We were in the "land of the morning calm", the nickname sometimes given to Korea. It was December 18th, and we had arrived just in time to prepare for Christmas.

### PART III: KOREA FROM DECEMBER, 1950 TO APRIL, 1951:

Pusan was a collection of huts and ramshackle buildings that housed tens of thousands of refugees. A pungent odour of charcoal, fish and human excrement filled our nostrils.

Fortunately, we did not stay long. Big Jim Stone advised General Walker, his American superior, that we were not ready to fight and needed about six weeks of training. General Walker reluctantly agreed, but not until after Stone produced formal instructions that he had received from Ottawa.

We were moved to an orchard area near Miryang, about 50 kms. north of Pusan, and our training there lasted until mid-February. We also spent some time in the neighbouring hills hunting guerillas. It was at Miryang that I first learned how to use an 81 mm. mortar. I was assigned to a "number two" position. My responsibility was to feed "bombs", or "shells" into my mortar. Feeding bombs into the barrel of a mortar required good coordination because a "double feed" into a barrel would cause an explosion and wipe out the whole mortar crew, as happened on more than one occasion. Our platoon had six half-tracks with a three man mortar crew each. Each half-track had one .50 caliber and one .30 caliber machine gun mounted. We carried several hundreds bombs, most of which were of the high explosive variety, and a few that were made of phosphorus and used for creating smoke. Range was determined by an elevation-finding sight on the side of the mortar. Small packages of explosives called "charges" were added or removed at the end of each bomb for the purpose of increasing or decreasing distances of delivery. In later years I learned that mortars are considered by military experts to be extremely effective infantry weapons.

What I remember most about Miryang is the clean, relatively odourless air, the cozy sleeping bags, folding cots and tents where we slept, and the hot food. It was in an orchard area and human excrement was not spread on the fields and rice paddies as in most parts of Korea. After leaving Miryang, and for the rest of my tour in Korea, I slept in a slit trench or simply on the ground and ate canned American "C" rations most of the time. More than once, during the cold Korean winter, I woke up only to find myself covered in snow.

The first year in Korea was one of rapid movement. We moved frequently from February to April. It was not until the fall of 1951 that both sides began to prepare relatively permanent defensive trenches and bunkers that were reminiscent of those that were used in WWI. During most of the period between mid-February and mid-April, the Chinese gradually retreated northwards. Seoul was retaken in mid-March and the UN forces, including our battalion, began to push across the 38th parallel and into North Korea. During these first few weeks of combat 2 PPCLI had 14 killed and 42 wounded. Casualties were light compared to those suffered by Canadians in WWI and WWII, but we were certainly in a real war and not a police action. My own problems were relatively minor.

On one occasion when I was feeding bombs into our mortar on a "rapid fire basis", a "delayed action" took place. One of the bombs did not emerge from the barrel as was anticipated. I instinctively lifted my head next to the barrel, in keeping with normal

procedure, and I was greeted with a loud explosion as the faulty projectile exited. Blood immediately came out of both ears. As a result, I suffered a permanent hearing disability.

In early March, when it was still very cold, I was stricken by a serious case of dysentery. I lost total control of my bowel movements. I became very sick and was loaded onto an Indian Jeep Ambulance and was transported, along with two seriously wounded Chinese soldiers, to an American MASH hospital. I still remember the groans and occasional screams of my Chinese companions during our bumpy ride. I remained at the MASH hospital for about one week. I was visited only once in the hospital by an obviously inebriated Canadian sergeant who thought that I had been wounded in action. When the sergeant found out that I had dysentery and not a wound, he quickly terminated his visit. As previously mentioned, the army in the 1950's was not known for its sensitivity.

I was also infected with malaria in Korea but it did not surface until the summer of 1952 when I was taking a course at Camp Borden in Ontario. Flash forward about a year. It took the doctors at Camp Borden Hospital several days to diagnose my illness. My temperature rose rapidly to about 106 degrees and I became delirious. Two young and attractive female lieutenant nurses rubbed my mostly naked body with alcohol to bring my soaring temperature down. I was a shy corporal at the time, but I was having hallucinations and I mischievously asked: "You are really enjoying this, aren't you? Fortunately, they chose to ignore my remark. Corporals, in those days, were expected to always speak to lieutenants in respectful terms.

Flash back to Korea. In the middle of February, 1951, our battalion was loaded onto trucks and half-tracks at Miryang in preparation for our move to the front, at that time about 200 kms to the north. I remember the cloudy skies, snow-covered valleys and mountains, icy and winding roads and the bitter sub-zero cold. It took us about two days to get from Miryang to the front. Very cold Arctic winds from nearby Siberia often descend down the Korean peninsula, and they certainly came frequently in the winter of 1950-51.

As we arrived on our half-tracks at the Korean village of Kudun, near the front line, we were suddenly confronted with a scene of horror. I had never seen a dead body until that day, but now something like 68 black and mostly naked American bodies were scattered all around us. They had been bayoneted and shot by the Chinese, and their weapons and clothing had been removed. They were frozen solid and looked like black marble statues. Some were magnificent physical specimens and I remember feeling overwhelmed with pity over their horrible fate. We were later told that this had been a black infantry company. Some had their ring fingers cut off, and their winter clothing, sleeping bags, boots and weapons had been removed. The Chinese coveted American clothing and weapons and took them whenever they could. Apparently these black American soldiers, led by white officers, had posted a single sentry on the previous evening and had not dug

slit trenches. Although only about 68 bodies were counted on that day, it was subsequently reported that more than 200 had been killed. In later years I read a report by the Chinese Communist Forces "CCF" 116th Division which claimed that two companies of the U.S. 23rd Infantry Regiment had been annihilated at dawn on February 14, 1951. American infantry companies do hold about 100 soldiers, so if two companies were wiped out, 200 dead seems like a reasonable estimate. The Chinese had a habit of removing dead bodies, and especially their own.

I was shocked by this bloody spectacle and ate very little for the next several days. I knew that we were in a war, but I was not prepared for such a sudden and violent introduction. I noticed that my three companions on our half-track were also taking it badly. All had turned very pale and silent. Our commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Stone, on the other hand, considered this to an important lesson for all of us. We would, in future, never be allowed to use sleeping bags in the front line. And needless to say, it became apparent that a strong contingent of sentries was always needed, and especially at dawn, the time when the Chinese preferred to attack.

#### PART IV: THE BATTLE OF KAPYONG:

The Chinese Spring Offensive of April, 1951, turned out to be the greatest battle of the Korean War. The introduction to Hub Gray's excellent book *Beyond the Danger Close* states that a part of this offensive began immediately north of Kapyong when "10,000 men of the South Korean 6th Division panicked and fled running south, leaving a 16 km gap in the front line. Two Chinese divisions, with 20,000 men blitzed southward 40 km in 36 hours to Kapyong, where the badly outnumbered 1,700 men of 2 PPCLI and 3 RAR were ordered to hold the line." According to Gray, 2 PPCLI was considerably under strength at this time, with only about 700 soldiers in the front line rather than a full battalion component of 940.

In the meantime, a few miles further west, the British Gloucester Battalion heroically held its ground and was virtually wiped out. Most of the Gloucesters were either killed or captured and only about 56 out of about 900 survived the battle. Our fate could easily have been the same. Of course, we we did know any of these details at that time. We were simply told that the Chinese were attacking in large numbers and that we would have to stop them.

In late April we were in a reserve position in the Kapyong area. Our activities included cleaning weapons, undergoing kit inspections and replenishing our supplies of ammunition and other supplies. We appreciated getting periods of uninterrupted and peaceful sleep. Japanese Asahi beer was available and eagerly consumed. For the first time in several weeks we enjoyed hot meals. American "C" rations, which we used in front line positions, consisted of predictable and boring cans of meat, vegetables and

fruit. Late April also brought spring to Korea. The weather was warm and pleasant, and I have often wondered if it was at this time that a malaria-infected mosquito bit me.

Unfortunately, our respite was quickly and rudely interrupted. Our commanding officer, Big Jim Stone, was suddenly ordered to take 2 PPCLI to positions on Hill 677 north of the Village of Kapyong. At the same time, the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment was instructed to occupy Hill 504, a lower feature located immediately across from Hill 677. The valley below was a critical part of main route to the South Korean capital of Seoul, and the Chinese understood that they needed to control Hills 677 and 504 to allow a safe passage southward.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stone demonstrated his competence and experience as a veteran of WWII by taking his company commanders on a reconnaissance of Hill 677. Captain Lloyd Hill, our 81 mm. Mortar Platoon commander, also accompanied this group. We were later told that Stone and his officers studied the approaches that the Chinese would likely use during their attack. Companies and platoons were to be deployed, as much as possible, in mutually supporting positions. The advantage of Hill 677 was that it contained many very steep approaches, which meant that the attackers would often have to monkey run upwards to get at us. In those days the mountains of Korea had very few trees and visibility was unrestricted. During visits to Kapyong in 2003 and 2008, I was amazed at how Hill 677 and other Korean mountains were now covered with thick forests. In April, 1951 the mountains were mostly bare and the Chinese were especially vulnerable to grenades that were rolled down towards them on the steep and visible slopes. To a large extent, however, the defence of Hill 677 would depend upon artillery and 81 mm. mortar fire.

At first it looked as though we would not be able to get our half-tracks and 81 mm. mortars to the top of Hill 677. Lieutenant Lorne Hurst, the Pioneer Platoon commander, said that our half-tracks could not make it up because of the very narrow track. Stone did not agree. According to Hub Gray, Stone growled at Hurst and said: "Hurst, get the half-tracks up that bloody hill!" No one ever questioned Stone's orders and Hurst quickly complied. In retrospect, it can be concluded that the survival of the entire battalion eventually depended, to a large extent, upon the 81 mm. Mortar Platoon. Our supporting New Zealand and American artillery batteries were also very important, but they were not as readily available as our mortars. If the Mortar Platoon had not reached the top of Hill 677, it would probably have been ineffective. In fact, if we had been left in the valley below we would have been very vulnerable and likely would have been eliminated by the Chinese very quickly. The Chinese were swarming all over the valley below. As it turned out, our .50 caliber machine guns, deployed in a key position on Hill 677 and commanded by Lieutenant Hub Gray, 2 IC of the Mortar Platoon, would soon afterwards save the entire battalion from total destruction.

I vividly recall our ascent with our heavily loaded half-tracks onto Hill 677. It was getting dark and difficult to see anything. The route consisted of a single narrow trail and wound dangerously back and forth on its way to the summit. A slide into one of the deep ravines that bordered the trail would have been disastrous. In some places the trail was blocked with large stone outcrops and these had to be blown away with explosives. Then, when we were almost at the top, one of our half-tracks broke down. Stone threatened to push it into a nearby deep ravine. Fortunately a mechanic, Bob Hoffman, arrived and revived the vehicle, which had apparently stopped because of a dead battery.

Soon after arriving near the top of Hill 677 we unloaded our mortars and set them up in small rice paddies. The ground was very hard and it was impossible to dig down more than a few inches. However, the rice paddies, with their stone walls, did offer some protection. My Number One Robbie Roberts and I unloaded all of our mortar bombs in a pile close to our mortar. I believe that we had about 2,000 mortar rounds on board. The whole Platoon probably hauled about 12,000 mortar bombs to the top of Hill 677. I recall that our half-track was so full that we were forced to sit haphazardly on top of our heavy and volatile load. A single enemy shell or rocket could easily have instantly detonated the whole load and blown all of us to kingdom come. The other five mortars were set up similarly on rice paddies that were close to ours. I dismounted the .30 caliber machine gun from our half-track, as I usually did, in order to provide additional protection.

We were assigned "defensive fire" tasks. This allowed us to zero in on the places where the Chinese were likely to attack. These targets were called "Fox 1, Fox 2, Fox 3, and so on. When the Chinese later attacked one or more of our rifle companies, we were given commands such as: "Rapid Fire on Fox 1!"

During that first night hundreds of shadowy figures poured past us in a southerly direction. We were told that these pathetic and usually weaponless men were remnants of the Republic of Korea 6th Division, but we were not sure. They could have been Chinese and North Koreans, and it is entirely possible that some of them were indeed our enemies. Infiltration was a common Communist tactic. These unwelcome intruders sometimes came to within 50 meters of our position and they made us extremely nervous.

Then we sat and waited. The Chinese decided to attack the Australians on Hill 504 first and from our position high on Hill 677 we had a grandstand view of the battle. Large numbers of Chinese soldiers were seen massing in the valley below. Several American tanks were engaged in the battle and one was knocked out. The Americans performed heroically even though they were engulfed in large numbers of swarming Chinese. We later learned that three of the American tank commanders were killed, and that the Australians had 33 men killed and 58 wounded before they were overrun and forced to withdraw from Hill 504. We were now alone and the Chinese turned their attention in our direction.

The first Chinese attacks were against Baker Company. The company's three platoons, with about 30 men each, were located approximately 200 meters to the northeast of our position. Because Baker overlooked the valley, it is likely that the Chinese considered it to have the most important strategic position. Able, Charlie and Dog companies were situated in higher isolated positions to the north and west of Baker company and further away from the river valley.

Although we were close to Baker company and could hear all of the violent battle noises, we did not, at that time, know about all of the hand to hand fighting that was taking place. Baker was being subjected to typical CCF tactics, including bugles and human waves. We fired hundreds of mortar rounds in support of the company, but we were not able to directly observe the results of our action. But we were very effective. For instance, Lieutenant Charles Petrie of Baker Company later recalled that on one occasion, as dusk approached, 6 Platoon reported that the enemy was forming up in a re-entrant and preparing for an attack. Our battalion 81 mm. mortars opened fire on this force and "decimated it." Somewhat later 6 Platoon fixed bayonets and forced the Chinese to retreat. Mortars are an extremely effective infantry weapon but bayonets can also be very persuasive under the right circumstances.

The next two days and nights are a blur in my memory. We frequently fired large volleys of mortar bombs in support of the rifle companies, and in particular Baker and Dog. After trying and failing to dislodge Baker company, the Chinese attacked Dog Company in large numbers. Lieutenant Mike Levy, the commander of Dog Company's 12 Platoon, initiated a mortar and artillery bombardment of his own position in order to stem the Chinese assaults.

We were told that we were surrounded and to expect an assault on our position at any time. The attack that we were expecting came in the evening of April 24th. We did not immediately notice their presence, but about 500 Chinese began to climb from the valley floor towards our location. They were advancing quietly in our direction and they were not signaling their approach with bugles and loud shouts as was their usual habit.

Lieutenant Hub Gray quickly took command of the eight .50 caliber machine guns that were mounted on our half-tracks. Whether by a stroke of genius, or as a result of sheer luck, these vehicles were located in a very favourable position for the purpose of confronting the advancing enemy. The machine guns were mounted on circular swivels and could be turned rapidly to any direction. Gray handled this critical situation efficiently and calmly. He waited until the leading formation of Chinese was only about 40 meters short of our position before giving the command to fire. The eight .50 caliber machine guns opened up and began cutting a bloody swath in the Communist ranks. I have often wondered by Hub Gray was never given any kind of recognition for his very significant and important action. At the very least, in my opinion, Gray should have been

"mentioned in dispatches". Unfortunately, military awards are not always given in a fair and objective manner.

I was totally unaware of the approaching enemy until the moment that Gray opened fire. We were, as usual, doing defensive fire tasks for the rifle companies. As soon as we became aware of the Chinese in our vicinity, we turned our mortars around about 180 degrees, raised them up to an almost perpendicular angle, and began launching bombs on a rapid fire basis. Our mortar bombs travelled only about 100 to 200 metres and began landing in the midst of the Chinese.

It was a devastating slaughter. Jim Wall, a private in the Pioneer Platoon, described the scene as follows in *Beyond The Danger Close*: "Approaching our position in the dull light on night they looked like a bunch of ants groping their way up the hill. It is frightening watching them slowly ascend, and to realize that they are coming to kill us. When Gray orders the machine guns to fire there are masses of the fallen, dead and wounded. Those left standing grab what they can of their casualties and are running and tumbling down the hill heading for the river." On the following day one of our men went to the killing field, counted more than 100 dead Chinese, and then stopped counting. It is highly likely that many other bodies had been dragged away in keeping with Chinese practice.

The Battle of Kapyong ended very unexpectedly on April 25th and 26th. By that time our Mortar Platoon was almost completely out of mortar bombs. The rifle companies were also down to a few rounds of ammunition. Our food and water was almost gone. We were in a desperate situation, but for some reason the Communists did not continue with their attacks. However, the trails and roads leading to and from Hill 677 still appeared to be occupied by the enemy and Lieutenant-Colonel Stone radioed for help.

On the morning of April 25th several Flying Boxcars of the United States Air Force suddenly roared over our position. Parachutes of various colours opened up and drifted into our position. I eagerly helped to open up the canisters and discovered that we had been supplied with mortar bombs, rifle and machine gun ammunition, C rations and water. A minor miracle had taken place. Robbie Roberts and I piled our fresh supply of bombs next to our mortar. We were ready for action once more but everything remained strangely silent. We were not called upon to fire again. On the 26th of April we were ordered to re-load our half-tracks in preparation for a move from Hill 677.

Our descent down Hill 677 was full of tension. We did not know if the Chinese were still present. But nothing happened and we eventually reached the main road in the river valley. A regimental combat team of the U.S. Army had arrived to take our place. As we drove southward a powerful feeling of relief surged through my mind and body. In spite of very difficult circumstances, we had somehow survived.

But what were the reasons for our survival? I did not give this question much thought in April, 1951, but in later years I concluded that the Chinese had stopped their attacks at Kapyong because of their very heavy losses. In particular, I believe that the machine guns firing in unison under Hub Gray's command saved all of us at Kapyong. Their thunderous firepower decimated the advancing Communist force of about 500. The Chinese, having already suffered very heavy losses, must have felt that they had suddenly encountered a powerful and well-armed enemy.

According to Hub Gray, 2 PPCLI had 35 wounded and 10 killed at Kapyong, which is more than the official total of 23 wounded and 10 killed. Apparently some casualties on Hill 677 took place before the actual battle began and were therefore not officially counted. In any event, the 35 or 45 casualties suffered by the Patricias during the Chinese April offensive was a lot less than the approximately 850 by the Gloucesters or 91 by the Australians. The United Nations forces, in total, had about 7,000 casualties.

I believe that our limited losses happened for the following reasons. The Patricias were located on a high mountain with steep slopes that were difficult to climb by the attackers. The battalion also had massive artillery and mortar support that decimated the Chinese when they charged. Hub Gray has calculated and observed that in addition to the Battalion's 81 mm mortars, support was provided by 81 artillery pieces of the New Zealanders and Americans. That extensive firepower was brought to bear on very small areas in front of and on top of our companies and it killed thousands of Chinese. An additional factor was that the Communists had advanced very quickly over a long distance and that they were unable to bring up supplies and heavy weapons quickly enough. Moreover, the air was controlled by the American Air Force which attacked the Communists at every opportunity.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Bishop, in his very interesting book *The King's Bishop*, provides an excellent observation in regard to the significance of the Battle of Kapyong. Bishop served as a corporal with 2 PPCLI's Able Company at Kapyong. He was later commissioned and retired after 35 years of service in the Canadian Army. He points out in his book that if the Patricias had not held at Kapyong, "the way would have been open for the Chinese to drive the UN forces back to Seoul, and ultimately all the way to Pusan and into the sea." He notes that when Kapyong, a relatively small battle, is put into context, the stemming of the Chinese spring offensive "entailed a massive loss of lives and material comparable in scale to many of the engagements of WWI." The UN had about 7,000 casualties during April, 1951, but the Chinese total of about 70,000 was much more.

I remained in Korea until the fall of 1951 and then returned to Canada for parachute training. Although the Battle of Kapyong took place more than a half a century ago, I still vividly remember my involvement as a 19 year old private. Occasionally I dream that I am returning to Korea and that the Communists have invaded once again. This dream

never changes. I am excited but not afraid because I know that I am going to survive and return home. It is not an unpleasant dream. Of greater significance is the fact that I still feel a strong attachment to my regiment. It is still, even after many years, something like a family to me. "Once a Patricia, always a Patricia" is certainly true in my case.

#### SUPPLEMENT TO THE JANUARY 2010 RICE PADDY:

Mike Czuboka ~ Editor, The Rice Paddy ~ KVA Unit 17 (Manitoba).

This presentation on  
Manitoba's Korean War casualties  
was produced by our KVA Unit 17 Webmaster,  
Captain (Ret.) Bill Czuboka of Ottawa.

Click to view the PowerPoint presentation. Sound on for music.

[VIEW PART II](#)

[Photos from the Korean War](#)

[VIEW](#)

#### Rivers and CJATC Rivers Years

A photo of 320 Rivers Air Cadet Squadron, in which my photo appears.

I took my parachute training at Rivers on a C-47,  
and then later jumped out of C-119s.

The photos featured in this Rivers site bring back many memories.

#### Military Years

My brother, Bill Czuboka, was born in Winnipeg in 1935. He grew up and went to elementary school at Rivers. He attended Brooke High School at CJATC and has many photos of this period in his life.

He served in the Canadian Army for 35 years. During most of his career he was a map-maker. He also worked on decorations for the Canadian Forces during the last part of his career. He retired as a captain.

He has done a lot of work for the Canadian Legion in Rivers. This work included retrieving and storing the photos of all Rivers residents who served in the wars of the last century.

He also photographed the graves of all Commonwealth airmen who accidentally died and were buried at Rivers and Brandon during their training at Rivers and Brandon during WWII.

Bill now lives in Ottawa.

Brother Walter Czuboka was a product of the British Air Commonwealth Air Training Plan, although he did not train at Rivers. He was a wireless airgunner. He was near the top of his class and was promoted to a commission as soon as he graduated. Walter completed 52 air missions over the Atlantic Ocean and Europe during WWII.

Legion Magazine: Last Post entry:  
Born: June 13th 1917 Brandon, Manitoba  
Died March 9th 2007, Victoria, BC  
Service Number: 290444  
Age at death 89

The Korean War  
A CTV Interview with Michael Czuboka: [VIEW](#)  
CTV Winnipeg ~ November 11 2008

It's often referred to as the forgotten war, but those who fought in Korea will never forget. If he can't get the sound out of his head there's a good reason for that. Firing mortar shells was Mike Czuboka's job during the Korean War in 1951. That job is how he lost most of his hearing.

"What happens is when you drop the shell in you normally bend your head down to put it next to the barrel to avoid the blast and this particular occasion I lifted my head prematurely and this is what caused the injury," recalls Czuboka.

Czuboka was only 18-years-old when he left for Korea, wanting to prove that he was a good Canadian citizen. He was a member of the Second Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and fought in the battle of Kapyong on hill 677. He says the Chinese wanted to win that hill because they needed it to take Seoul. But Czuboka's unit fought them off.

"They had to climb this very high hill to get at us and so we directed our artillery mortar fire on top of them. They had a hard time; of course they were out in the open while we were in trenches," said Czuboka.

Czuboka says he saw friends die and a country destroyed by war. He was chosen to represent the PPCLI Korean War Vets at the Veterans' Affairs Ceremonies in Korea this past summer. The ceremony marked the 55th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice. Czuboka visited a cemetery where more than 300 Canadians are buried.

The forgotten war it may be, but not for Mike Czuboka.

#### Education Years in Rivers and Brandon

I took Grade 12 at Brandon College in 1949-50 because Rivers did not have a Grade 12. I returned to Brandon College in 1954 after four years in the army and graduated with a B.A. in 1957. I taught history courses at Brandon College on a part-time basis from 1960 to 1965. I had to discontinue teaching at Brandon College because I was appointed principal of Neelin High School and no longer had enough time to do both. I organized a Brandon College 1950s reunion which took place in Brandon in October. We had a great time. I consider Rivers and Brandon to be my home towns. I was the principal of Neelin High School from 1965 to 1969, after which I became a superintendent of schools for 21 years.

I was commanding officer of 249 Squadron in the 1970s.  
I qualified as an airplane pilot during this period.

#### Family History

click

NWMP Document on my father

This was the occasion when he was arrested in Saskatchewan at gun point.

#### SITE NAVIGATION CHART

Rivers I | Rivers II | Rivers III | Rivers IV | Rivers V | Rivers VI  
Rivers VII | Rivers VIII | Rivers IXIII

Visit the

COMMONWEALTH AIR TRAINING PLAN MUSEUM

Brandon, Manitoba, Canada

## MORE MILITARY TRIBUTE PAGES

### BACK TO BILL AND SUE-ON HILLMAN MAIN PAGE

[www.hillmanweb.com](http://www.hillmanweb.com)

Bill Hillman

## VII. RIVERS BASE TODAY

Photos by Johnnie Bachusky

Research Information from the  
Ghost Towns of Manitoba Site  
[www.ghosttownscanada.ca](http://www.ghosttownscanada.ca)

CFB Rivers, located seven kilometres west of the Town of Rivers, closed in September 1971.

In September 1972 the land was turned over to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for use as an industrial training centre for Manitoba Indians, the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre. The Rivers Gliding School, a summer Air Cadet glider camp opened at the former base in 1974, remaining until 1984, when it re-located to Gimli.

In 1980 the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre closed and the land was sold by the Federal Government. Hangar Farms Ltd, a hog farm operation, opened at the site in 1988.

Today, only small parts of the old air station still exist, including the old supply buildings, two World War II era hangars, a post-war "arch style" hangar, the power plant, the fire hall, some of the two-story H-huts, and five of the PMQs. The entire airfield remains, and used by crop dusting airplanes, although a reservoir sits across one of the runways.

In the mid 1990's, the RCAF returned to the former RCAF Station Rivers, with the help of some movie magic, in the movie "For The Moment", a film about an Australian pilot who comes to Manitoba to train under the BCATP, starring Russel Crowe. While most of the movie was filmed at the Brandon Airport, scenes of the actors standing outside their barracks were filmed at Rivers, requiring a fresh coat of green paint to be applied to the old buildings.

RCAF Station Rivers originally opened in May 1942 under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan as No. 1 Air Navigation School (No. 1 ANS). As the war progressed, RCAF Station Rivers also became a training centre for Army pilots and parachutists as

well as flying instructors from the Army, RCN and RCAF. Additionally, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Dispatch School made Rivers their home.

In 1947 the Canadian Parachute Training Centre, established at Camp Shilo in 1942, merged with the Airborne School of the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre and moved to RCAF Station Rivers, making the station Canada's main para-training centre. Also in 1947, the Army Aviation Tactical Training School was established at Rivers to provide pilot training to Army aviators, as well as helicopter instructor training for the Army, RCN and RCAF. No. 6 Signal Regiment, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Support Signals Unit provided communications duties at Camp Rivers. 444 Air Observation Post Squadron was formed on 1 October 1947, but disbanded 1 April 1949.

In 1948, the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School opened at Rivers. The school closed in 1960.

The Basic Helicopter Training Unit was established at Rivers in August 1953, initially to train RCAF pilots, but by 1956, Army helicopter pilots were also training at Rivers.

In December 1963, No. 1 Transport Helicopter Platoon (No. 1 THP), a unit of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, was established at RCAF Station Rivers, along with their fleet of CH-113A Voyageur transport helicopters and one CH-112 Nomad.

408 Tactical Fighter Squadron, whose primary functions were reconnaissance and weapons delivery, moved to Rivers in 1964 from RCAF Station Rockcliffe, and remained until disbanded on 1 April 1970.