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Archie Nicholas Interview

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I went to the Van Doos, I think there was 9 of us. I felt quite at home I met a lot of guys that I met at Three Rivers, Quebec as a matter of fact I met a lot the officers there. We had an awful lot in common. They thought I came from New Brunswick as a matter, fact because I spoke a little different from they did. I spoke the Duck Lake French. Once they got to now my name and I could speak French I was very welcome. All 9 of us stayed with the Van Doos for three weeks. We went in action with them. They were a rough bunch but they were a good bunch to be with.

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But you knew that the Van Doos were ahead of you. If they wouldn't get through there, nobody would get through there. We were over there for three weeks and when they got their own reinforcement they put up quite a yelp for us then, a real party.

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I went in as a cook's helper all the time we were in Ortona till we moved out, then we hit the Hitler line. We hit at four o'clock in the morning. Near Casino, it was before we hit Casino. On the front that we attacked, I had like my company commander was Armstrong and my platoon commander was J. Harper Prouse and I don't know if I was his batman or his runner I think I was his runner so I was very close to the command post. Before the battle, just around twelve o'clock at night we heard one shot over here and one over there and it happened you know. Harper said "this is it Army" you know, because his name was Armstrong we called him Army. He said "lets go!" and twelve hundred guns opened up. 1200 guns loaded up and we put in the attack on that creeping barrage.

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Then we crossed the river √

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That was again one of our old colonels, we use to call Bald Face Stone, Jim Stone, he got these little bail bridges across the river and we use to cross that without getting wet. We didn't have too much trouble there till we hit the mountains and when we hit the mountain climbing up there, they were waiting for us on top the mountain. The enemy seemed to have, I wouldn't say they were marked out exactly, but they seemed to now exactly the distance from where they were to us. j

It wasn't to bad in there we lost

some afterwards. I went back that day of the next day of the battle of Casino. The only thing that was standing up was the one door frame. Then they pulled us out we were on our way to Rome.

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At that time they were getting ready to open the second front.

There was talk that we were going back and some generals wanted the Canadians to be in one group, instead of being stood up and while they were discussing this they pulled us out and we were three weeks right out on holiday more or less. We used to listen to the news whenever we had a chance © we heard they'd opened up the second front and we were thinking holy jesus. We knew there was something up cause the going was easy we could walk I mean all day long almost and we met the odd German soldier.

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WOUNDEDf

In August that same year I was wounded for the first time.

The B company was in the reserve and C company went in. They went in quite a ways and they got cut up. We were in B company and some of them were taken prisoner. So then they order B company in there. They'd gone in a day before, late in the afternoon towards the evening © they ordered B company to the same place and we went a little to far. We had to retreat so we had to take back some wounded and we had some guys that hadn't been in action too long. They didn't have enough training or may be they didn't have the violent experience. When you are taking somebody out you fire on the spot there where the jerries are, while these come back and you come back so far yourself you turn around and fire. When I passed this certain group on the way back they stopped hard and the jerries opened and got me.

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So I got back to the where we were and we couldn't find the officer. There was some prisoners in the bottom of some cellar and another guy and myself were ordered to go in there. So we shot the door open with the tommy gun and when we bust through the door we could hear "don't shoot Canada! Don't shoot Canada!" They were British hostages that had been taken prisoner. They were being kept in there. I was wounded and you know those German officers they had these nice P 38 lugers. And when I went to pick up one © I wanted one too © that's were I found out that it was just a little bit worse than I thought. I went to pick it up and ooh it hurt, so I was ordered out, and we took them out.

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German officers weren't the worst ones. Some of these Paratroopers, I've seen one of them get wounded and you know to sort of help them out and they'd spit at you. Well they don't last long spitting on the Canadian soldiers. Not in battle. You had to touch them a little bit with your firearm to let them know that you were boss and you meant business.

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I've seen some of them, well most of them died with their fingers on the machine gun and their guts are hanging on branches or part of their bodies not even there. And most of them were big and young and blonde. They were the ones that were probably promised the cream of everything if they pulled through.

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When it comes to brass tacks, I mean you take some of those prisoners afterwards I mean you had to respect what they did for you too. I marched six of them back one time, and one of them was going to make a break and attack my gun. Naturally they were walking in front of me, and the other one turned back to me and had bowed his head like that. Mind you it was probably their duty to try and get away.

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That first time I marched back we were short of men. I had to go back to the line and Seargent Major Almer asked me if I was able to help march back these prisoners. I marched them back to the line and that's how I got to the hospital I was in the hospital for 30 days. It was just a flesh wound, I had one bullet in me. When I woke up in the hospital they had this bullet all bent up in a saucer. I kept it for as long I could till I was wounded the second time. It was in the northern part our last battle in Italy.

This was our last battle we were going over to join the Canadians in Holland. Then were going into this attack and I was on the extreme left. We were looking this way, you know, that was our objective. Probably if we would have held that objective that would have been our last battle in Italy. Suddenly, all these guys popped out of a hole and opened a machine gun on us and killed the guys in front of me, one behind me, and knocked me down. They were probably about 50 yards away. They nailed the hole section but they didn't even kill us all. There was some of them that got them but it was too late. I called in a tank truck © I couldn't walk. I was hit in the hip © they shot my hip out.

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The last thing I remember there was the major Armstrong. Well they were shelling and fighting, they were shelling pretty bad and he hooked a pole in my harness and dragged me in a building. He was the company commander. Then I lost consciousness for a while there. I crawled: I remember when the boys called "Come on! Come on! You can make it!" I think that was Barwold, a guy by the name of Barwold from ✓

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, Alberta. The next thing I remember is going through fire, you know these jeeps with the A frame? I was tied up on top there and they were shelling and all I could see was fire. Then I lost consciousness again. I woke up in the hospital. This was on the 13th of December, 1944. I woke up the evening before the new years, that's when I came back. I didn't know where I was. Everything was dark for quite awhile. I was wondering where the hell I was. Everything was dark but I could hear a noise. My leg was sore. I kept scratching at it © I was tied up. I was wondering what the hell? I didn't know where I was. I new I wasn't taken prisoner cause when they first tried to give me first aid, they put that little thing that smells bad on your face and I grabbed that and I threw it away. I mean you know this was in the field. I threw it away. That's when they tied my arms up but I didn't know what to think. But I was sore so I tore the whole thing out. I didn't feel good I suppose it was infected. Then I broke the cast. And junk came out and in about two minutes I had the whole staff around me. They operated on me that night. They were Canadian. One of those nurses spoke French.

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I didn't have adequate clothes on or a damn thing and they said awhile after they said they were in the hospital just out of Naples. I stayed in there till April and they were going to fly me out. I wasn't in very good shape. I had infection, I couldn't eat I had a cast up to here and it stunk. I don't know what it was

actually, but for me to eat they use to wet some towels and stuff. They'd give me a drink of brandy and a couple bottles of stout a day. They got me ready the night before. They said you'd be flying out in the morning. We're going to fly you out to England but in the meantime now next morning just before we left, somebody approached me and asked if I would mind giving my place to somebody else. Well I wasn't very fussy about flying anyways I've never been in the air before, so I had no experience with flying. One time I use to be a pretty good swimmer. So they brought in this guy, he's more or less in the basket they called him Mack. As a matter of fact they put him in a bed next to me. This guy had both legs off, one arm off, and the other arm was broken. His name was Mack but he was an American. His spirits were good though. He asked if I would give him my place and I said give it to him. I waited. I went by boat to England. We landed in Birmingham and then I was in Birmingham for three weeks. I think it took us about six days, but all the lights were on and we had apples and ice cream. It was something we hadn't seen for years. They treated me pretty good there. They they put me on a stretcher a couple of times and took me to a picture show. The nurses or the helpers there wheeled you on a stretcher to a picture show in Birmingham. They were Canadian nurses.

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I didn't walk for a long time after that. About two and a half years. Operation after operation and nothing would work.

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COMING HOME

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I come home on the hospital ship, the Lady Nelson. I come to Regina here. I was on the hospital train and I was there a week and the folks got me. It didn't feel very good, I mean you weren't in very good shape I was sick with infection. There was a doctor in there by the name of Doctor Ryon Colonel. He look at the papers without looking at me. They had put a splint in my leg and it had a spring. I was in a cast that had a √  
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pin my below my knee  
here and had a big board up here with a spring to keep the tension. This doctor in Regina he said, "he's been in this cast this long, well from December to April." He said "this thing must be healed." He took the cast off, lifted my leg, and punctured the flesh.

This reactivated the infection. There was nothing they could do for me. They wrapped me up one night and they put me through a little window in the train and they shipped me to Winnipeg, Deer Lodge Hospital. I was there for over two years.

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First of all they had to clear the infection, with penicillin and operations. I was getting pretty well fed up there. Well you know in Winnipeg you're in bed, you can't move, your leg is sore. The infection was so bad they put me in a private room at Deer Lodge Hospital. I was in there a year by myself. Finally, I started getting better after half a dozen operations, and in May of '47 I come back. I come back to Duck Lake I was on crutches then I was still on crutches.

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I was getting, you know \$7.50 may not mean a lot to people today, but then you get \$7.50 a month more while you're still in uniform. When your out of uniform I mean they take that \$7.50 away from you. You get 15 dollars a month more when you're overseas. When we start out we figured out because we were on duty, we were getting five and a half cents an hour. So they wanted to discharge me and I said no I won't sign my discharge. You see the Jackson (war with Japan) is still going. This was in Winnipeg and I said no I won't sign. So now they transferred me back to Saskatoon here to 121 and in the meantime 121 had been transferred somewhere in Quebec so by the time the papers come back and they had to transfer me from one command to another, from my regiment to my depot where I enlisted, and from my depot to the Winnipeg depot, Fort Oxford Barracks, and there one morning they had a major or something come up and he signed my discharge for me. That's the part I didn't like and I'd been in there a year already in the hospital. They took me off the payroll I was losing \$7.50 a month.

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\$e he admitted to his fear

Archie:Oh you bet you booties

Don: Yes no problem he admitted to his fears

civilians were worse of than we were I me I mean we were protected we were trained  
and we \*spected some  
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EPSONLX

Don: I'll just get some of the basic stuff now you were just saying that the worst part of going into action was called old group and your first big action was in Ortona in Italy in 1943

Archie:Yes

Don: and o.k. I am going to go back you joined up basically let me just get some of this down now you joined up basically because the other guys were doing it and you didn't wan