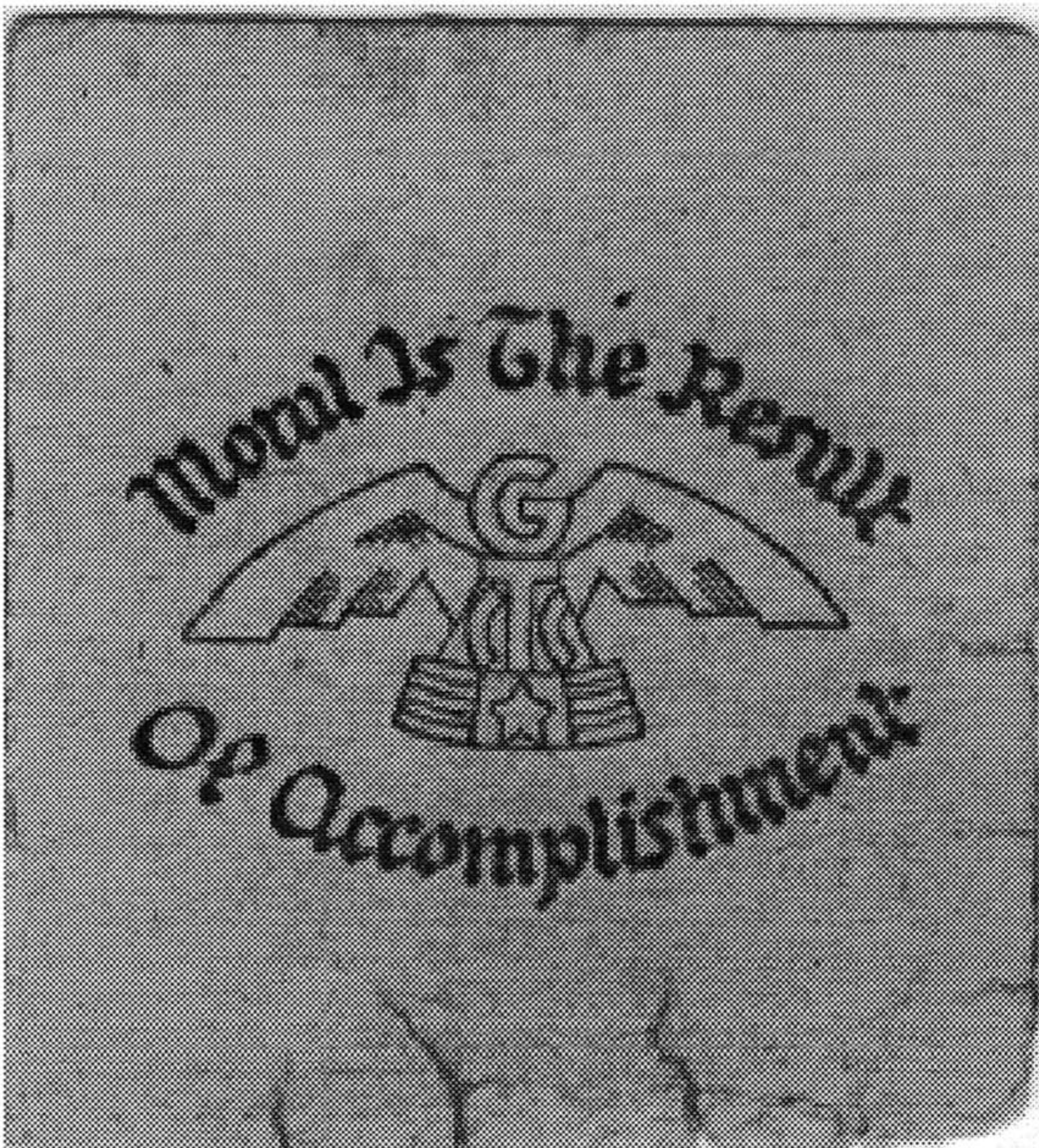


4

Canada

There were more talks about immigrating and we had many countries to choose from. The Americans were promoting and encouraging us to go to the United States. They showed us films on what life was like there. Australia and Canada were also promoting their countries. Some of the guys had already immigrated to different countries all over the world and we were receiving mail from them, so we had first hand news of what life was like there.

I was all excited. My heart was set to go to the U.S.A. We were learning the English language and preparing for citizenship in the U.S.A., and thinking that maybe we would stay in the U.S. army. We were never pressured as to what we should do.



Commendation for exemplary service

I liked what I was doing. Many of the guys were transferred to different companies. My friend Mirek Baranek was transferred to Munich. We corresponded and visited each other.



John 1949: Towards the end of my army career. The service medal is the one shown in the previous picture

Christmas 1948 in Sandhofen was our last Christmas in the army. We had a big celebration, with the best of everything. The guys were cheering each other up because this might be the last time we would see each other.

It finally hit me. This was my fourth year in the army and I thought to myself, "This kind of life can't last forever." I missed my family and from this time on my thoughts were slowly changing. I was thinking about immigrating. Of course my choice was the U.S.A.

So early in the spring of 1949 I signed up to immigrate to California, U.S.A. I was looking forward to settling down and start working for a living.

There were about fifty of us who signed up. It was a slow procedure. We had to go through all kinds of medical tests and screening. I was all fired up for a new adventure, until one day a Canadian delegation came and said that they needed 250 guys to immigrate to Canada for a one year contract to work on the railway in Ontario. That was when my enthusiasm for the U.S.A. got deflated, and I wished that I could go to Canada instead. I wanted to work on the

railway.

So out of desperation I went to see the immigration officer and told him how I felt. He laughed and said that I could sign up for Canada if I wished to and that I was free to go wherever I chose to.

Without hesitation, I chose Canada. The Canadian delegation didn't have any problem to sign up 250 men, as the majority of the guys preferred Canada to anywhere else.

We went through various medical tests, screening and character evaluation. So after that we waited for the call as to whether we were accepted or not.

At the end of April 1949, on the same day I received letters from both the American and Canadian embassies that I had been accepted to both countries. I took a discharge from the army and I had two choices to consider. I didn't have any trouble to decide. I chose Canada of course. Here I was jumping for joy because I was going to Canada. Everybody was praising Canada about what a beautiful country it was and how lucky we were.

I received my discharge papers from the army and my visa was in order.

There wasn't anymore army duty. We were just waiting for our call to go to Canada. We didn't have to wait too long. In a few days we were transported to a railway town close to the Austrian border. We stayed there just long enough to get a last minute medical as they were very strict. We then boarded the train - all 250 of us.

We travelled through Bavaria, Austria, Northern Italy, Rome and ended up in Naples, Italy. We stayed in Naples for about three weeks waiting for the ship.

We had a nice time in Naples. Oranges were just in season. Dances were held under the open sky and orange groves were all around. Wine was cheap and the weather was great, the temperature was between 28° and 30° C. We lived like kings. The nights were just beautiful. We could see Caprice Mountain in the distance all lit up. Palm trees were all around us. This was the first time in my life that I saw palm trees. This life style soon ended.

On May 30, 1949 we boarded the ship Nea Hellas, a Greek liner. There were over 2000 passengers on the ship, many Americans,



Visa picture for Canada

various immigrants, and 250 of us soldiers. We were still in our uniforms and we were much admired by everyone. We looked very sharp. Everybody wondered who we were and what army we were with. Our uniform was a regular U.S. army one except that it was navy blue. We felt good about ourselves and very proud.

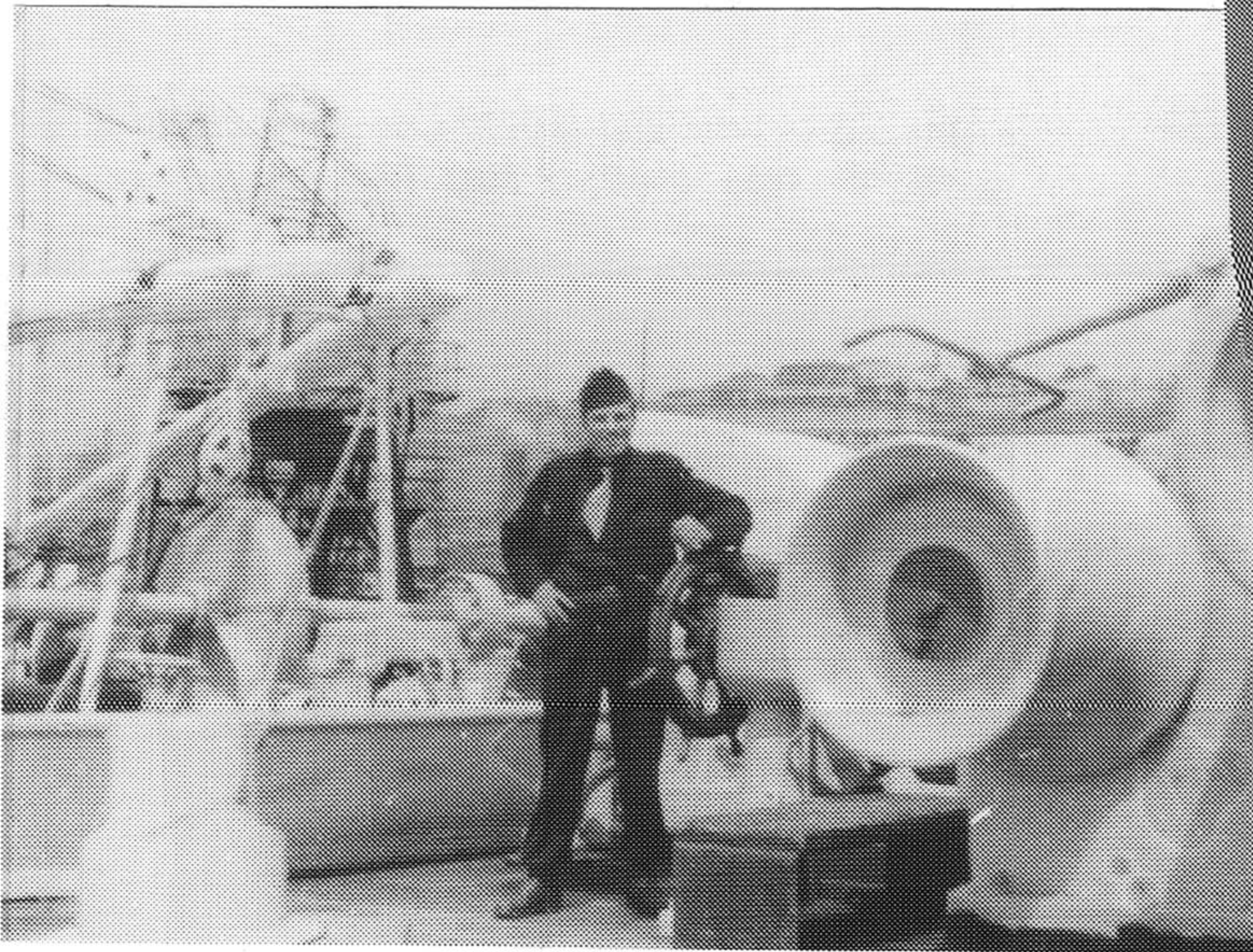
Before we boarded the ship in Naples, an American officer came to see us. We were all lined up and as we filed by him he shook our hands, thanked us and wished us good luck in our new country. He was sitting behind a table and out of the cash box that he had, he gave us \$5.00 each for beer money, which was very nice. We didn't expect that.

We took off from Naples, Italy on the evening of May 30, 1949. The sea was very calm. We sailed through the Mediterranean Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar. We stopped in Lisbon, Portugal and took on more passengers and supplies.

I sent a letter home to Poland from Lisbon to tell them that I was on my way to Canada.

The next day on May 31, 1949 we set out across the Atlantic Ocean heading for Halifax, Canada. The sea was a bit rough.

The ship was a huge passenger liner. The cabins were very nice, and had bunk beds. I shared my cabin with another person. We flipped a coin to see who would get the top or bottom bed. I got the bottom one which was much better.



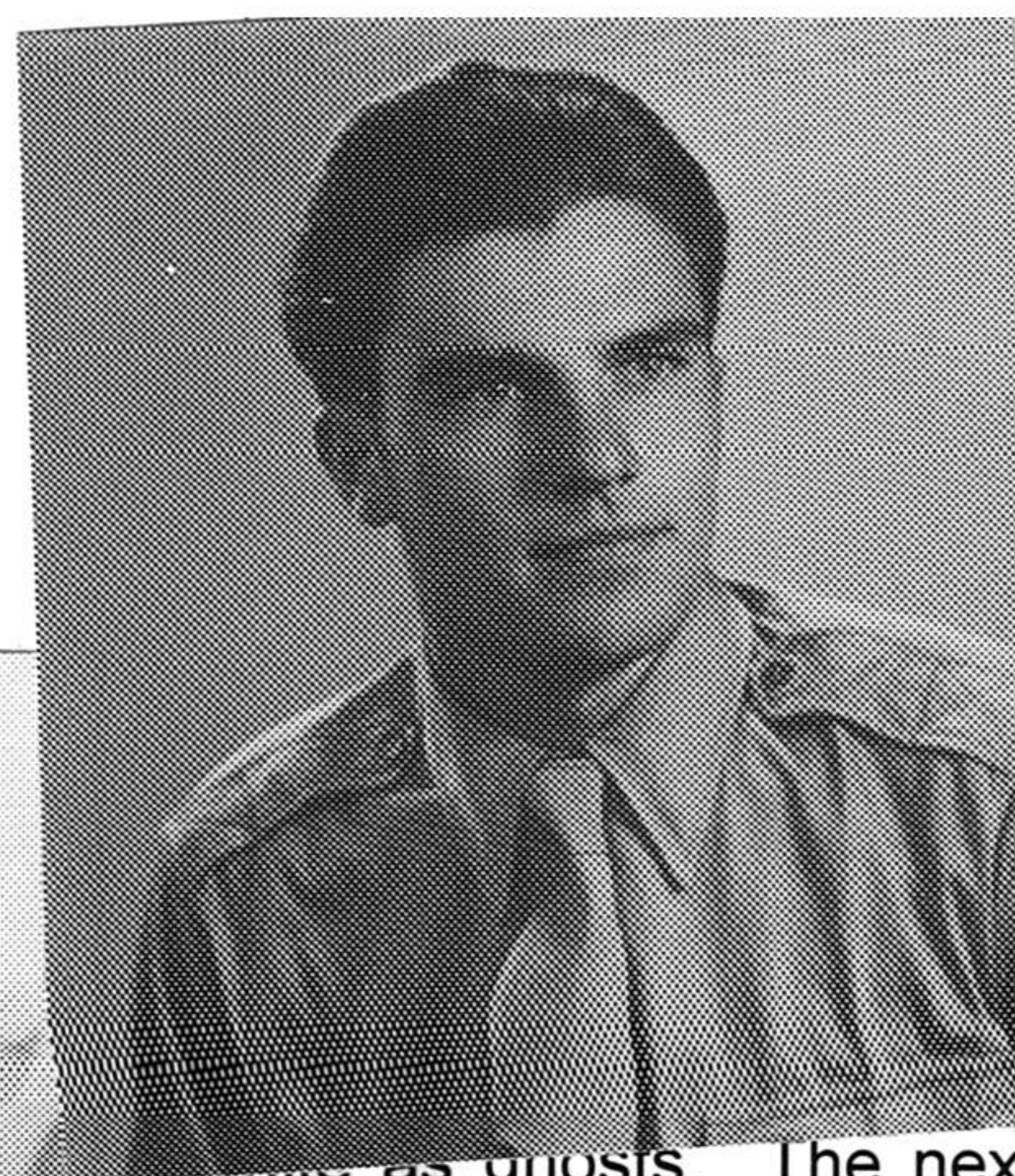
John on the Nea Hellas crossing the Atlantic, 1949



John and Tony Maj on the Nea Hellas

The meals that were served were just out of this world. I enjoyed that! There were movies and dances every night. There was a swimming pool on the ship. The pub was open most of the time, and the beer was ten cents a bottle.

I enjoyed every minute of my life on the ship, and I didn't get sea sick. Mind you, this one time I just about did. It was when we hit a storm. We were at sea for about six or seven days. Huge waves hit the ship. We were all ordered to get on top of the deck and put on life



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like as ghosts. The next day the weather cleared up and it was clear sailing until we landed in Halifax on June 11, 1949.

We were welcomed by many people at the harbour. 250 of us U.S. Polish Army soldiers slick in our blue uniforms, got off in Halifax. Then the ship proceeded on to New York, U.S.A.

We went through the Canadian Customs and then we were sent to the immigration office. There we were informed that there was no work on the railway for us.

Many people were disappointed. The immigration office gave us some other choices of various jobs such as: farm labourers, factory workers, mining and cutting pulpwood in the bush. My choice was the farm of course, as I was familiar with farm work. There were four of us out of the 250 men who signed up for farm work in Saskatchewan. They were Antoni Maj, Felix Salwa and Bruno Pasko besides myself. We were assigned to farms in the Yorkton, Saskatchewan area. The remainder of the men went to different cities all across Canada, but most of them settled in the Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg areas. We stayed overnight in Halifax, boarding the train the next day. We took off on our new adventure, heading west.

Looking through the coach windows we viewed the Nova Scotia landscape. That was our first view of Canada. It made me wonder, "Where was the wealth" the people told us about? There was nothing but hills, rocks, bushes and some cattle grazing on the hills. We pulled into Montreal at about 11 p.m. Then we saw the glitter; the whole city was lit up. It looked beautiful and I thought to myself, "that's more like it."

We stayed at the Montreal station for about

three hours, boarded the train again and proceeded west. We talked to different people on the train. We met some older people who had immigrated from Poland in earlier years. They told us about the tough times in Canada during the depression of 1929. Some people said that we came at the right time and some pessimists said that we were heading into hard times.

I listened to all of the stories with sheer delight, but the words that I wanted to hear the most were not even mentioned in the conversations. The "Freedom of Choice" was what I came to Canada for. I already had the most important kind of wealth like my good health, a good attitude and a good outlook on life and now I had "Freedom".

Some people said that during the depression they didn't have any money, but they did have lots of food to eat. I thought to myself that if I had that kind of a depression in my teen years I would have just loved it.

On June 14, 1949, Anton, Felix, Bruno and I arrived in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. A government employee met us at the railway station and took us to the unemployment office. We were assigned to different farms from there.

We had a fun time in the office. I already knew a few words of English and so I thought that I should be the interpreter for the other guys. I soon found out that what I had learned from the English books didn't help me at all. Not only did I have a heavy Polish accent, but no one could understand what I was saying.

They told us the conditions and what kind of work we would be doing on the farms. It was tough to understand what they were talking about, until someone said, "We have a girl here who can speak Russian." They had brought in a Doukhobor girl who worked in the office there. I said, "Good. I speak Russian better than I speak English." So we resolved the language barrier. I had learned Russian in Tautenburg where there were Russian prisoners.

We ended up with our assignments. Anton, Felix and Bruno stayed in the Yorkton area. I boarded the train for Archerwill, Saskatchewan about 100 kilometers north of Yorkton. I arrived in Archerwill at around 5 p.m. on June 14.

Fred Misfeldt and his two year old son, Pat,



The Misfeldts; Janet, Fred, Dawn and Pat

were waiting for me. His wife Janet and three month old baby daughter, Dawn, were at home. Janet was cooking supper. Fred and I hit it off right away. I could see that he was pleased with me, especially since I was a soldier.

Fred had been in the Canadian army and served overseas in the Second World War. He drove a 1941 Dodge car. As we drove the 21 kilometers west to Dahlen, Saskatchewan we talked as best as we could, not really understanding each other.

I saw beautiful fields of wheat all lusciously green already. I was fascinated by the wide open spaces of Saskatchewan, and by the fact that the farmers had so much land and were spaced so far from each other by about four or five kilometers. Not like where I came from, where farms were small and spaced a few meters from each other.

When we arrived home, Fred introduced me to his wife Janet, baby daughter Dawn and their boarder, an older man in his sixties who was a school teacher named Ian Avery. He then showed me to my room which I was to share with his hired man whose name was Oliver Hedin. I wasn't too impressed with Oliver. He looked like he was allergic to soap and water.

I washed up and we had supper. We had pork chops, potatoes, vegetables and pie for dessert. I enjoyed that very much. It was like a



Fred and Janet Misfeldt with John and Minnie, 1985

banquet. The next day at breakfast I had a choice of corn flakes or porridge with real cream on it, bacon and eggs, coffee and juice.

I thought that maybe these meals were especially made to welcome me, but I found out that they were like this every day. The food was just out of this world. Janet was a good cook. I liked that very much.

So here I was in Canada at last, and it was more than I expected. I fell in love with Canada and I liked everything about it.

Fred introduced me to all of his neighbours. They were very nice people, mostly Swedish,

Norwegian, Danish and one Latvian named Anton Jankauskas and his wife Medora. He spoke Polish and we became very good friends. I soon got to know some young people. They always picked me up when they were going to the movies or to dances. I had fun. My English was improving every day. I asked lots of questions and I adjusted myself to Canadian living very well.

It was a big change for me. For four years I had an easy life in the army practically doing nothing and now I had to work for a living, but I just loved it.

Some of the work was done with horses. Fred also had thirty head of cattle, three milking cows, two horses, some pigs, chickens, a dog named Lassie and a few cats. He farmed one section of land or 640 acres. My contract was to work on the farm for one year for fifty dollars a month, room and board included.

The money was the last thing on my mind. I enjoyed working on the farm to the fullest. Fred bought me some clothing as a bonus. Wherever we went he always paid my way. Like going to the beer parlour, for instance, he always said, "That one is on me. You are my guest." He always praised me to his friends about what a good worker I was. I was very well

respected by the people in the area. Of course I thought the world of them too, and I told them how fortunate the people in Canada are. They quit complaining about the depression of the thirties when I told them the kind of life I had before I was liberated. I told them that my dream was if I could only eat all the bread that I wanted, I would be happy. So here I was with all the blessings I had wished for and much, much more.

I learned how to milk cows. That was Fred's job. He was good at it. I was slow at it because I didn't like to do it and I didn't really

want to learn how. Fred didn't care how long it took me. He said, "You'll learn eventually." So I was always dawdling, until one time a bunch of the guys came calling on me to go to town to the movies. They were waiting for me and said that if I didn't hurry up they would go without me. That evening I learned how to milk the cows really fast. I think I broke the record. After that I was just as fast as Fred, maybe even faster.



Clarence Bow and Willis Fraser waiting patiently while I finished milking the cows

The crops were looking good. We were getting rain at just the right time. By the end of July we were getting ready for harvest by checking the machinery. Fred had two tractors and a binder. A binder cuts the crop and ties it into sheaves. The sheaves had to be stooked to dry. This was an extra busy time of the year because all of the sheaves that were cut down had to be stooked. This was hard work and we had to work long hours. Fred had a portable threshing machine. He was custom threshing for farmers around that area. Threshing time was fun time. There were six teams of horses pulling wagons with hay racks on them to haul the sheaves to the threshing machine. The threshing machine was powered by the tractor. Oliver, my roommate, was warning me how tough this job was going to be. He said that I would be lucky if I lasted three days on this job. That's exactly how many days he lasted. He got sick on the third day and after that he was just

the water boy. I spent thirty-two days on the threshing crew, working from 5:30 a.m. to sometimes 10 or 11 p.m. when we wanted to finish the field. Most of the time we were quitting at 8 p.m. At threshing time I got paid \$8.00 a day besides my \$50.00 a month. It was threshing time that I enjoyed the most. The food was just great. The people that we were threshing for put up the meals. We had

creamed chicken, potatoes, eggs, the whole bit for breakfast. Big dinners, suppers and lunches in between time, and lots of beer to quench our thirst and it tasted good on the hot days.

I was 22 years old, in good shape and I just loved it all.

That year in 1949 Fred had the best wheat crop ever. It was No. 1 wheat, and in one area it ran 65 bushels to the acre which was just about a record. It averaged to about 50 bushels to the acre. Fred was very pleased after the harvest. It was getting on towards fall. Oliver Hedin wasn't working for Fred anymore as Fred didn't need two hired men. There was barely enough work for one. We went to town quite often for beer. When

the farmers met they would try to out talk each other. I had fun listening to them. They were pleased when I agreed with them, which wasn't very often.

There was one thing I noticed on the farm and I was amazed at what I saw, as I had never seen this before in my life and that was seeing the dog and the cat eating out of the same dish together. Here were two common enemies eating out of the same dish at the same time. I thought to myself, this is really and truly Canada - "land of plenty." There was no need for fighting. It was a beautiful sight to me. I will always remember that.

It was fall time. Harvest was already over so there wasn't very much to do besides the daily chores like feeding the cattle and pigs, milking the cows and cutting the fire wood for the cook stove and fire place.

I helped to make a community skating rink which was located by the school in Dahilton. We

played hockey in the evenings and there was never a dull moment.

I hunted rabbits, prairie chickens and spruce grouse as there was a lot of bush around us and game was plentiful.

One day Fred and a couple of his friends went hunting and shot two elk. They were huge. We had lots of elk meat that winter. I made some wine out of raspberries and pin cherries that I had picked. This was shared with friends when we went to dances.

We took some of the wine to the dances in St. Front, which is a French settlement located eleven kilometers south of Dahlen. Our friends thought the wine was just great.

One time we had so much fun in St. Front, dancing and partying that I didn't get home until 6:00 a.m. I didn't bother to go to bed, I just changed my clothes and went out and milked the cows. I wasn't even tired. It was fun. I had many friends. They always included me in whatever was going on and I was grateful for that.

In the winter time, we used a team of horses and a sleigh with a caboose on it to get around. There was a wood burning heater inside the caboose and a coal oil lamp for light. That was fun. We sang songs as we travelled around the countryside. One of the songs we sang was, "I've been working on the railway." I liked that song.

One night I saw the northern lights for the first time. I was flabbergasted at the sight, as it was all very new to me.

The first Christmas for me in Canada was in the year 1949. It was different for me.

We had a special Christmas Eve supper. I don't remember if I had a shot of scotch or not, but I do remember that there was no church service in the Dahlen area. I missed that.

Christmas day was quiet. Fred's sister, Mildred and her husband Bill Benz and their family came over. They lived close by in Dahlen. I missed church and my family in Poland and our traditional Christmas Eve supper with all the special goodies Mom would make.

I must tell you about the first dance I went to in Dahlen, Saskatchewan at the Katpwa Hall. It was walking distance to the hall from the farm. I hardly knew anyone in the village at this time.

I got all spruced up, put on my best army uniform, put a little "grease" on my hair and I was all set to go. Fred spoke up and said, "Just a minute John, before you go, I have something for you." He reached to the top of the cupboard and got down a bottle of scotch whiskey and poured me two or three ounces in a glass. He said, "You better have some of this. There will be a lot of French men there from St. Front and you don't want to be out-danced by any of them." I downed the scotch in one shot. That was something he hadn't seen before. The scotch hit the spot. Since that day scotch has been my favourite drink. I had a great time at that dance. I danced every dance and I met many people there who became my good friends.

There was another time when I was surprised. Mr. Ian Avery (Janet and Fred's boarder) went to a school teacher's convention. He asked Janet to pack him a lunch. He said that since he was paying room and board he shouldn't have to buy dinner. He was indeed a Scotsman, and lived up to his name. He never married. He said that a wife cost too much to keep. He gave me heck for buying a 5 cent chocolate bar, saying that I had all the food I could eat at home. I met many characters in my day up to that point, but Mr. Avery was unique. I couldn't imagine anyone being so cheap.

That winter of 1949-1950 I cut a lot of firewood in my spare time for Fred and his neighbours.

One weekend Fred let me go to Yorkton to see Anton Maj. He worked seven kilometers southwest from Yorkton. He thought that it would be nice if we lived closer to each other. I agreed. I told Anton how nice the people were in Dahlen. So Anton decided that as soon as he finished his one year contract he would look for another job. I told him that maybe someone in Dahlen might need a hired hand.

The winter of 1949-50 went by very quickly. Spring came and with it seeding time. Fred and I did the seeding in good time. We even helped some of Fred's friends with theirs. Summer came and the crops were looking good. We picked raspberries, Saskatoons and pin cherries. Janet did some canning and we made pin cherry wine. Fred bought a new combine and tractor. He thought that if everything went well



John hamming it up in the car at Fred Misfeldt's farm in Dahlton, Saskatchewan. Fred's house is in the background

it would be paid for in two years. Harvest time was getting near.

I told Fred that my friend Anton would like to come and work in Dahlton. The news spread fast. Fred told Orville Neumedahl about Anton and Orville came over and asked me to write to Anton offering him the job at \$75.00 a month. I wrote Anton the next day. Anton came the following week and he liked the Neumendahl place very much. He lived two kilometers south of Fred's farm. Anton and I got to be very close friends. We both fit into the community very well. We visited Anton Jankauskas just about every Sunday and played cards. His wife Medora treated us to lunches of her delicious cakes and special sauerkraut soup with pork in it. Medora was an excellent cook. We complimented her on it many times.

Fun on the Farm

When my friend Anton Maj came to work for the Neumedahl family in Dahlton, Saskatchewan, I soon filled him in on "all the goings on" in the area. I told him about all of the friendly people and about the great Kitako dance hall. He too became enthused and on one particular evening got all dressed up in his Sunday best to attend a dance.

On the way to the hall, he came across a cute little black animal with two white stripes

down the middle of its back. Thinking it would make a great pet he started to go after it and after capturing it he suddenly found out that he didn't smell too good. He soon let it go. Anyway, that didn't deter him - on he went to the dance hall.

Upon entering the door the people suddenly cleared the hall. Where were all the friendly people John had told him about - they certainly weren't friendly at all! He sniffed the air - what a smell - could it really be coming from him? Yes it was! We convinced him to go home and bath. This he did and then came back to the dance. He still smelled though, and no one

would dance with him, which he couldn't quite understand. He found out a little later that he had tried to catch a skunk for a pet. We all had a good laugh at his escapade and he soon found out what skunks were. That was one animal that was not native to Poland.

Anton Maj and I liked this life style. We thought that maybe someday we would become farmers too, which we just about did later on.

My second harvest time in Dahlton was just around the corner. Some people were getting ready to combine, but most of the crops were cut with a binder and stooked. Threshing time was upon us and I looked forward to the fun time again. This time Fred paid me \$12.00 a day for hauling the sheaves to the threshing machine. But threshing only lasted thirty days because some people had already combined and that cut down the work. Threshing time out on the field was on the way out.

Fred was very pleased with the harvest even though there was an early frost. Most of the wheat was in sheaves already stooked, so the frost didn't hurt it.

Fred and some of his friends were talking about joining the co-operative way of farming, which eventually they did. I thought that was a bad idea. But who was I to tell them what to do. Just like when the cattle prices were high at thirty-two cents live weight. I told Fred to sell them all. "Just keep the milking cows", I said,

"and in the fall you can buy more cattle for half the money." Fred and some of his friends laughed. But they quit laughing two months later when the prices plunged to as low as thirteen cents a pound.

Fred and his friends Fred Thirsk and Gordon Hedin formed co-operative farms. Fred knew that I would be leaving them that fall of 1950.

Fred bought a quarter section of land with a log house on it and a water well. The house belonged to the original owner, Mr. Bow. Anton and I thought that it would be nice to buy the house and live there for awhile doing nothing and live off the land. We bought it for \$150.00. It was a two room house with a bedroom, kitchen, attic and root cellar, and there was a wood stove in it. That was all we needed.

In the meantime, we wrote to Felix and told him what we were doing. He was still working in Sturgis, Saskatchewan. One day Felix showed up with a suitcase in hand standing on our doorstep.

So here we were the three of us settling down in a log house located north of the road between Archerwill and Naicam.

The house was surrounded by spruce and poplar trees. North of us there were a lot of bush rabbits and spruce grouse in plentiful supply. There we were for \$50.00 a piece we were now "houselords", not landlords. We only had a house without any land. We thought that we were on top of the world. Most of the people couldn't believe that we would even consider living in this house. Especially when Fred had said that this house was offered to a native family and they turned it down.

We ordered our beds from the Army and Navy store in Regina and the mattresses, bed sheets, wool batting and material for quilts from the Eaton's catalogue, Regina. While waiting for them to arrive we hauled two loads of straw up into the attic for insulation and we also used it for our beds. The quilts we made ourselves with the help of some of the farmer's wives.

We cleaned the house and papered the walls and ceiling in the bedroom.

Fred gave me a little plot on his land for a garden. The garden produced a bountiful supply of vegetables, more than we could use. We had beautiful cabbages. The best in the

area that anyone had ever seen before. These we shared with our neighbours.

We stocked up our root cellar with potatoes, beets, carrots and cabbages, and we even made some sauerkraut. We were preparing for this all summer and it was fun.

Many people came to visit us just for curiosity's sake. They were amazed at how clean we kept the house. There was a wood plank floor which we scrubbed every day just like in the army.

Our meals were very simple but good. Our bread was baked by a farmer's wife and we also bought milk from them. We cut firewood for the farmer in exchange for the bread and milk. We also cut firewood for Mr. Skokshut in exchange for a butchered pig. This pig we hung in two halves in an old granary and in the winter as we needed the meat we would chop the frozen carcass with an axe and get the meat that we needed. We had a bag of porridge and a bag of dried peas as some of our staples. Our pea soup was delicious and so was our sauerkraut soup with lots of pork meat in it. And to change our diet, the bush rabbits and spruce grouse roasted and creamed with fresh sweet cream rounded out our simple menu. We drank lots of tea as our beverage.

By the end of November when the weather plunged to -30° and -40° F we had iced tea. The house wasn't insulated so by morning our water was frozen and all the tea that was left in the cups was solid ice. We called this iced tea.

That is the time we decided to buy a heater for our bedroom. It worked good until this one time when the temperature plunged to -35°F. We cleaned out the ashes from the heater which sat on the wooden floor. That night before we went to bed we stocked up the heater with wood and went to bed. Around 3:00 a.m. Felix smelled smoke. He woke Anton and me up. The heater got very hot and because there were no ashes in the bottom of it, it burned a hole in the floor. I could see the flames around the heater as the floor was burning. We were so cosy in our beds none of us wanted to get up, so we argued as to who would get up and put the fire out. Finally I couldn't stand it anymore so I got up, grabbed the heater and threw it out the door. I put the fire out and went back to bed. Anton and Felix never even got out of bed.

It all seemed like a dream to me when I woke up in the morning. We realized how close we were to burning our house down, and our \$150 investment would have gone up in smoke. We didn't have any insurance on it.

I bought a .22 caliber rifle for \$7.00 from a farmer friend. This is what we used for hunting rabbits and prairie chickens and for shooting flies in the house!

Sometimes the room was so warm in the daytime from the heater, that the flies would come out of the cracks and would buzz around. One time Felix said to me, "Hey John. There is a fly sitting on your pants," which were hanging on some deer horns which we used as a clothes rack. I picked up my .22, aimed and bang - shot at the fly. I don't know if I hit the fly but about four days later when I was wearing those pants to go to Archerwill, I felt something in my pants pocket. It was a .22 caliber bullet.

That .22 was used all of the time. Anytime something didn't work, it was automatically shot at.

This one time the stove wasn't burning too well, so I went outside and shot a few holes in the chimney pipe knocking the soot down, and the fire soon started roaring.

It sounds as though we were under the influence of alcohol, but we were not. We were just young and foolish and having the time of our lives doing our own thing. We had fun!

Of course there were times when we did have drinks, socially of course. Like this one time we thought that we should have some wine for recreation.

The closest liquor store was located 25 kilometers north from us in Tisdale. So I thought about how we would get there. I got an idea, so I put it to work. I asked Fred if we could borrow his truck to go and see the doctor in Tisdale. (We were in the best of health of course). Fred was very concerned about our health, so he said, "By all means, take the truck." We did, and we went to Tisdale, pulled up in front of the liquor store, went in and bought three gallons of wine at \$2.50 each. We drove home and pulled into Fred's yard just before supper. The first thing Fred asked us was what the doctor had to say. I said that there was a chance that we might live, and that we got a prescription and had picked up the medication.

Fred was very serious. He asked us to stay for supper. After supper Fred's friends, Fred Thirsk, Gordon Hedin and their wives came over to play cards and we joined them. Fred told them that we had gone to Tisdale to see the doctor and that we got some medication. Gordon wanted to know what kind of medication we were prescribed. I said, "Would you like to try some?" "No, I can't use your medicine," he said. "Sure you can", I said. "It is good for anyone who is over twenty-one years old". So I stepped out to the truck and got one gallon of the wine. We all started sampling the "medication", and soon after midnight we started on the second gallon. The card game turned into a party that lasted until 3:30 a.m. Everybody said that was the best medication they ever had.

After that evening was over Fred said, "John, anytime that you need medicine, you take the truck and go and get it. Don't wait until it's too late." We did use Fred's truck on two or three different occasions.

We had lots of fun in this log house. Especially when the mice moved in. They would run back and forth between the wallpaper and the ceiling as there was about six centimeters of space between the ceiling and the heavy paper which we put up. We were never alone and it sounded like the horse races as they ran around. There were times that we were annoyed by the pitter patter of little feet on our ceiling, so of course we would get out our trusty .22 which we thought would cure anything and took a few pot shots at the ceiling hoping that maybe by some chance we would hit one of the little critters. It did quiet them down for a few minutes only to begin again. We got so used to it that after a while we didn't even notice it anymore.

It was December, 1950 and my second Christmas in Dahlton. This was a special Christmas as we were on our own.

Anton, Felix and I were preparing for Christmas day. We had our three gallons of wine and a bottle of whiskey. The rabbits were skinned and ready to be cooked. We were going to eat whatever nature provided.

We had a nice Christmas Eve supper, then we got all dressed up and went to visit our neighbours Chester and Kay Skolos who lived

one kilometer south of us. They were nice people.

We told them how much we missed going to church at Christmas, especially Midnight Mass. We mentioned to them that there was a Catholic Church in St. Front, and we wondered how we would get there, it being seven kilometers away. To go on foot would be out of the question.

Chester caught on as to what we wanted after the second shot of whiskey. He said, "Take my team of horses and sleigh. You will still make it in time for the service." So we did. We arrived just on time. We put the horses in the community barn as the weather was extremely cold, about -35°F. It was midnight when we walked into the church. All eyes were on us. We wore our army uniforms and looked sharp. We enjoyed the Christmas service very much, even though we didn't understand a word the preacher said. The service was all in the French language.

We had communion which was very important to us. We felt very good about ourselves. After the service we talked to the preacher on the way out of the church. He was pleased that we came to church from so far away and on such a cold night.

I felt very warm inside, especially when the people came up to us and told us how nice it was that we came to church and commented on how good we looked in our uniforms.

It must have been 3:00 a.m. when we got back to Chester's place. Chester and Kay were already sleeping. We put the horses into the barn and we walked the one kilometer home.

When we got home our log house was just as cold inside as it was outside. We made a fire and warmed the place up, went to bed and slept until 10 a.m. Christmas morning.

I got the stove going and made a breakfast of homemade bread and jam. It was a special occasion.

Our Christmas presents were good wishes to each other. We thanked God for our blessings.

Our Christmas dinner consisted of five bush rabbits with sweet cream on them. They were delicious. We have people who can vouch for it!

Later on in the day Cliff and Willis Fraser came over. They were two brothers who lived

alone as their mom and dad had passed away. They lived about seven kilometers west of us and worked for different farmers in the Dahlton area. They came over on horseback. We covered the horses with blankets to keep them warm.

We had a nice party sipping wine, eating the bush rabbits and talking small talk. They stayed until midnight, saying that it was the best Christmas that they had ever had.

The next day Fred and some of his friends came over. We treated them with our hospitality. They enjoyed their visit with us very much and so did we.

There were no cows to milk or feeding the stock. The time was our own to do with as we pleased. We were our own masters.

After Christmas there wasn't much to do. We had cut enough firewood to last the people around there for two or three years. So we stayed home most of the time. We visited some people, played cards, hunted and listened to the mice going to and fro on our ceiling.

January was a very cold month. We stayed home most of the time.

One day there was a very heavy blizzard and it was extremely cold. It was not fit for man or beast to be outside. We heard a knock on our door and upon opening it we saw three men who told us that they got lost while looking for their horses. They had no idea where they were, and were thankful that they came across our log house.

They were just about frozen. We welcomed them in. First we gave them some hot tea to get warmed up and then we got acquainted with one another.

They told us that they lived about twenty kilometers east from us. When we told them the area where we lived, they couldn't believe how far they had wandered away from their home. The area around our house was flat and bushy and they did not realize how close they were to the road because of the blizzard.

We were preparing bush rabbits for dinner. They said that they had never tasted rabbits before. After a few glasses of wine, they joined us for a rabbit feast. They said it was the best meal they had ever tasted. We had a nice visit with them and they were very grateful that we had saved them from freezing.

They decided to give up searching for their horses, so after they had warmed up and were fed they were ready to go home.

As they were leaving, the horses showed up in our yard. They couldn't believe their luck. They fetched the horses and went home. It was a true miracle for them.

A few days later the news had spread about their adventure and how lucky they were to have stumbled upon our log house in the blizzard, and the hospitality they had received. We were their saints and heroes.

Everybody wanted our recipe on how to cook rabbit. I think since that day Dahlton's special dish is roasted rabbit with sweet cream on it and of course, wine is a must to accompany this succulent dish.

Speaking of wine, one of my memories of Dahlton was the "special" wine I made while living there.

In the summer I picked raspberries, telling people that I would be making raspberry wine. This one time though, I made raspberry juice instead. I needed it to temper the home-brew that we had made along with a guy who lived in the St. Front area.

I mixed the raspberry juice with the home-brew and that was my special homemade wine. No one knew what my secret ingredients were. They couldn't figure out how come the wine was so high in alcoholic content which was about 50%. When Fred had his friends over he used to say, "How about some of that raspberry wine, John?" After they had a couple of glasses, they would turn red in the face just as if they had run a fever. They liked my wine. It sure loosened their tongues. Until this day nobody knows how it was made.

Ontario

Life in the log house was super at that time, but we knew it couldn't last forever.

By the end of February the days started getting longer and we were getting restless. We were planning to go and search for jobs. I told Fred that I would be leaving Dahlton. Fred owed me \$1250. for my work which I did not collect every month as I did not need it, so I let him keep it for me. Fred was worried because he didn't have the cash to pay me. He was

going to sell some cattle in order to pay me. But the prices for cattle was at an all time low. So I said to Fred, "Don't worry about it. I am not buying anything, so leave it for now." He gave me \$400.00 though with \$850.00 still owing me. There was no agreement signed only a word of trust between us. Fred was amazed that I trusted him so much. When I told some people what I had done they thought I was crazy. But my attitude was different, which was hard to understand for some people. I told Fred that I would come back some day and maybe buy some land and start farming myself. Fred said, "Good Luck!"

So at the end of February we packed our suitcases, said good-bye to our friends and caught a ride to the Archerwill railway station.

We boarded the train to Yorkton, Saskatchewan and changing trains in Yorkton we headed out to Winnipeg. We got off at the Winnipeg C.P.R. station. There we found out that there were trains going everywhere from Winnipeg. So we decided to take the first train going out of Winnipeg either to the east or to the west.

We had a few hours to kill, so we went looking around Winnipeg. We came across a sign saying, "Men wanted to work in the bush cutting pulpwood." We thought; Oh boy. This is right in our line as we had some experience cutting firewood back in Dahlton. So we walked in. There was a guy sitting there who was kind of a smart alec, and asked silly questions like if we liked girls. Now I see what he was getting at, but at the time I wondered what that had to do with our job. Anyway, we got hired. We received train tickets to Kenora, Ontario and \$4.00 each for a meal on the train. When we arrived in Kenora there was a limousine waiting for us at the station. It took us into the bush about 25 kilometers from Kenora. We got into camp at about 1:30 a.m.

We were assigned to our quarters which was located on the lake. They were floating cabins on pontoons in the summer time and stationary in the winter time.

The next day our foreman came and introduced himself. He took us to the camp clothing store and we were equipped with proper clothing and boots. He also showed us the dining area. The food served was just out of

this world. Everything was of the very best and all you could eat. We had chicken quite often and we were each served one whole chicken and all the trimmings. The dinners at noon were always brought to us out in the bush by sleigh and horses about 4 or 5 kilometers into the woods. There were about twenty of us men in this camp.

The work was very strenuous. We cut logs into lengths of two and a half meters long by about half a meter in diameter. The landscape was very hilly which made it very difficult to stack the cord wood. The wood had to be stacked into cords so that it could be hauled by a caterpillar tractor to the lake. In the summertime the wood was tied together by long logs and hauled by a tugboat to the paper mills.

It was hard work but we enjoyed it and we stayed there until the spring thaw. On April 15, 1951 we were all done. We didn't make very much money after paying for our clothing, room and board and of course it was a short season. But we lived a good life and we were in great shape.

We took a taxi to the Kenora railway station, and caught the train to Toronto, Ontario. The next day we arrived in Toronto and took a taxi to an unemployment office on Spadina Street. On the way down we asked the taxi driver how it was for jobs in this city. He said that you couldn't buy a job here. We got to the unemployment office and sure enough there were about three hundred people standing in line. About two hours later we finally got registered. We didn't have a place to stay, so after we registered we went and found a room and board for \$45.00 a month each. Then we telephoned the unemployment office and gave them our address and phone number. The next day we went hunting for jobs. We never got discouraged about the high unemployment rate in Toronto. Anton and I got a job with the Landy Fence Co. Felix went on to Oshawa, Ontario to work for the General Motor Company.

The next day after we had found a job at the Landy Fence Co. the unemployment office phoned us and offered us jobs. So the unemployment situation wasn't as bad as it sounded. Anton and I stayed in Toronto and enjoyed our jobs. We built chain link wire fences. We travelled all over the Toronto area

building fences for industries, schools, churches, etc. Our foreman's name was Bill. We had a half ton truck, a cement mixer and all the necessary equipment with which to build fences. We worked five and a half days a week and our pay was \$1.35 per hour, which was good money then. It was fun and we got to know Toronto very well.

The summer of 1951 went by very fast despite the fact that we didn't like the city of Toronto. The people weren't very friendly. We were spoiled by the western hospitality we had enjoyed before heading down east. We always talked about the friendly people in Saskatchewan.

One time I was talking to my boss (the owner of the Landy Fence Co.) about the intentions I had of going back to Saskatchewan to buy some land and become a farmer. He said, "Are you nuts to go to the dust bowl?" He offered me a foreman's job and encouraged me to settle in Toronto. I couldn't imagine staying in Toronto for the rest of my life. So by the end of summer Anton and I went to see the boss again and asked him if he would give us a leave of absence for the winter. We told him that we planned to work for six weeks picking tobacco (the tobacco picking season was from around July 20 to September 15). The pay was very good and room and board was included. After this we would go to Kapuskasing to cut pulpwood for the winter. It would be piece work. He was trying to talk us out of it, but he finally gave in. He said that we were good men and that when we came back he would have a job for us. We felt good about that.

So we went to a tobacco farm 100 kilometers north of Toronto to a place called Barrie, Ontario. Picking tobacco was the hardest job I had ever done in my life. You bend down all day long. For the first few days we were walking around like cripples. But after that we got used to it and it was fun. By the end of September the tobacco picking season was over.

We took two weeks off and went to Angus, Ontario, about twenty kilometers south of Barrie, Ontario where we stayed with a friend named Stan Krul.

I decided to take the train and go to Daulton, Saskatchewan to see Fred and Janet.

I had a nice visit with them and also with all the other people I knew in Dahlton too.

Fred told me about his poor harvest. Frost came early and as a result there wasn't much of a crop to harvest. He was worried about the money he owed me.

I told him that I didn't need any money yet. He was relieved. So he gave me \$50.00 and said that it was some interest on the money he owed me. It was in ten dollar bills. I gave ten dollars to each of the children, Pat and Dawn and thirty dollars I gave to Janet and said, "This is for being such a good cook." Fred and Janet were experiencing hard times because of the poor harvest and prices on cattle were low.

They had just formed what was called "co-operative farming" with Fred Thirsk and Gordon Hedin. This meant that they would share the work, machinery and any income received between the three families.

I visited with them for about three or four days and then I went back to Angus, Ontario.

By mid-October we took off for the Toronto unemployment office where we were given railway tickets to Kapuskasing, Ontario. There we were picked up and taken about sixty kilometers north of Kapuskasing into the bush camp. There were many men working there with new men coming in all of the time, but very few stayed. They couldn't stand the conditions. We got up at 5:00 a.m., breakfast was at 6 a.m. and by 7 a.m. we were heading out into the bush, a five kilometer walk. We packed our own lunches to take with us. We worked until sundown, came back to camp, washed up, had supper and by 9 p.m. lights were out and we were all in bed.

On Saturday night we were allowed to stay up until 10 p.m. That was our treat. Out of twenty of us who came in that day, only seven of us stayed, and the rest had quit inside a week's time. I felt like quitting myself, but this old timer bush man told me to stay and said that it takes about three weeks to get used to it. He was right. It took that long to get into the groove.

Every bone in my body ached, but after that I just loved it. We were finally conditioned for the work.

There were about sixty of us in this huge barrack-like building. There was a wood heater

at each end of the building. The kitchen and the dining room were separate as were the washroom, showers and steam bath. There were about thirteen different nationalities there. We had fun communicating with each other. Most of us spoke English. The only trouble we had was with the French men. They knew English but would only speak French, and they were very pleased when we tried to learn French.

The food was just excellent.

The work was all piece work. We got paid \$8.00 a cord of wood and we could work seven days a week if we liked to. I always took Sunday off and so did some of the other men. We had fun on Sunday reminiscing about our adventures and talking politics.

There was a strip foreman who assigned each of us a strip of the forest. We cut the trees down and cut them into four foot lengths, then we stacked them. In the middle of the strip we had to cut the trees very low to the ground so that the sleigh could get through to haul the wood out to the main road. The strip foreman would come and measure how much wood we had cut and recorded it. Every month we received a statement as to how many cords of wood we had cut and how much money it was worth.

Christmas 1951 was celebrated sixty kilometers north of Kapuskasing. The temperature plunged as low as -62°F. The average temperature was between -40°F and -50°F. There was no church service. We had a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. It was a nice Christmas. Nobody worked that day. I thought about my home and my family in Poland and wondered how they were doing.

Soon we were back to our old routine. In January the foreman asked me whether I would like to haul cord wood with a sleigh and team of horses out to the main road. I said yes. That was hard work. Two men were assigned to a team of horses. It was piece work too. Each cord had to be loaded and unloaded. I averaged up to \$35.00 a day. That was just about a record. My mate was a Frenchman. We worked very well together.

There were many characters in this camp. Some had worked there for twenty years. Some were from forty to fifty years old. I was twenty

four years old then, so forty years old was really old to me at that time. I was fascinated by some of those old fellows, especially when they talked to themselves. At that time I was determined that if a man doesn't get married by the time he is forty there is no hope for him. There were some fellows there who had worked for years and saved every cent that they had ever earned and bragged about how many thousands of dollars they had in the bank. Then there were other fellows who couldn't wait until they got about three or four hundred dollars so that they could go into town and blow all their money, then come back to the camp three or four days later only to repeat the same routine again and again.

By March the weather got milder and we were thinking of heading back to Toronto. There wasn't any more wood to haul out, so the camp would soon be closed for the summer months.

We received our earning slips for the whole time we were there. I was pleased with the money I had made. We quit for the summer and we also made arrangements to go back there for the next winter. The boss said that he would be happy to have us back again.

The camp provided transportation back to Kapuskasing. We stopped at the Bank of Commerce and cashed our slips in. I had \$1400.00 due me. I deposited \$1200.00 and put \$200.00 in my pocket and we took off for Toronto.

This time we rented a light housekeeping room at 96 Seaton St. just one block off Queen St. We decided that we would cook our own meals. In our room we had a hot plate (electric table top stove with two burners), sink, table and chairs, a few dishes and two single beds.

The next day we went to see our boss from the job we previously had when we were in Toronto (Landy Fence Co.). He was kind of surprised to see us, but he welcomed us with a big smile and said, "What's new with you guys?" We told him about our winter time adventures in the bush. He asked us what we were going to do now. I said, "We came back to work for you." He smiled and said, "You couldn't have picked a better time. I was just going to hire some more men." We got our old jobs back at \$1.45 an hour, five days a week with Saturday and

Sunday off. We were old veterans in this job. Our work went just great. We were in good shape, so the big jobs were little jobs to us. We were doing extremely well.

This company had many working crews and some people worked in the shop. Each crew was assigned to a specific job and there also was a time limit to each job. We always had our work done ahead of time. There were times when the boss came on the job to check the crews out and he would openly praise us for our fast and efficient work. Many times he let us take Friday afternoon off with pay so that we could have an extra long weekend.

There was a big work project for General Motors in Oshawa, Ontario going on and we were picked to go there with another crew because of our excellent work record and because we were trustworthy. The boss knew he could rely on us to get the work done. We were there three months and we enjoyed our stay there.

There were a lot of places to go to in Toronto. We went to the Polish church on Sundays. There was a Polish Canadian Club hall which we went to, but we were not too impressed with it, as there were too many "stiff necked people" who went there. I really liked the Polish restaurant. The food was very wholesome, good and cheap and we could eat all we wanted.

I spent a lot of my free time in the parks meeting all kinds of characters, beggars, winos, addicts and the like. It was interesting to talk to them. Some of them were well educated people. Many were business men who had lost all that they had because of a drinking problem. I thought to myself; here we are in a great country with great job opportunities and the freedom of choice to make a good life for ourselves, and there on the other side of the coin was despair and discouragement with guys literally in the gutter, mostly by their own choice.

I realized how taking the freedom we had for granted, could make or break a person.

This encouraged me so much more to save my money, so that I could buy what I wanted the most in my life and that was a new car and maybe some land in Saskatchewan.

I had about \$2000.00 saved up, not counting what Fred owed me so I started

looking for a car in the used car lots. There were a lot of cars to choose from. 1951 models were selling for up to \$1800.00, but buying a used car was risky because you didn't know what you were getting. I thought to myself if it wasn't good enough for the guy who traded it in, why should it be good enough for me. I didn't need someone else's troubles. So I decided to go for a new car.

On May 20, 1952, Sunday morning at 6 a.m., a friend of mine from Saskatchewan, Eddie Kulchewski, picked me up and we took off for Glencoe, Ontario where his uncle ran a small car dealership. He dealt directly with the factory in Oshawa. When we arrived there we went and had lunch and visited with Ed's uncle. Then Ed told him that I was interested in buying a car. He said, "I have just the car for you." We went to his garage and there were two brand new Pontiacs sitting there - a four door grey one with a standard transmission and a two door maroon one which was a deluxe model, torpedo style roof with an automatic transmission. The price was \$2500.00. I thought the maroon one was my style. I took it for a drive and I was very impressed.

I was short \$500.00. He said that was fine. All he wanted was \$1250.00 and the rest would go on payments at 6% interest. So I bought the car. My dream had finally come true.

I didn't have a driver's license as I couldn't get one on Sunday, but that didn't stop me. I drove the car to Toronto without one.

I arrived home late in the night. Anton was already sleeping so I woke him up and showed him my new car. He was surprised that I bought one.

The next day, at work, we told everyone that I had bought a car. Buying a car was a big deal in those days. Not too many people had cars and some of the guys were a little envious of me. It wasn't easy to save up \$2500.00 for a car.

I then had to get a driver's license. It was a long process because everyone in Toronto had to go to driver training school (unlike Saskatchewan). Whether you knew how to drive or not you still had to go to the school. I had my army driver's license but it was not recognized in Canada. So I drove my car for about five weeks before I got my license and I

got away with it.

Anton and I travelled all over Ontario on the weekends. We went to Niagara Falls, saw one of our friends in Angus, and sometimes we went fishing. We had a new found freedom.

All of this time we were planning to take holidays and travel across Canada, but not until we worked one more season on the tobacco farm.

So at the end of July we went to see our boss and asked him for another leave of absence. He said, "What's the matter with you guys? Can't you settle down?" "No", we told him, "Maybe this time we will go for good, but just in case it doesn't work out, we would like to know that we have a job to come back to." He offered us foreman jobs which we turned down. He couldn't believe that we chose to go to Saskatchewan, "that dust bowl". But we had made our decision and nothing could change it. He said, "I hope that you guys will come back. You can have your old job back anytime you want it."

So we took off for the tobacco farm near Angus, close to where our friend Stan Krul lived. We didn't waste any time. The next day we were picking tobacco. We spent six weeks working on this tobacco farm. The farmer who operated this farm was a Hungarian. He was a comical guy with a good sense of humour. We worked there until the end of September. After the tobacco season was over we celebrated with a big party.

There were kegs and kegs of homemade wine. This wine was made the previous year after the tobacco season was over. It was made out of wild grapes which were picked by the tobacco pickers. These crews were sent out into the bush to pick bushels of grapes. The farmer made wine out of these wild grapes which were very special and delicious. After a few glasses of this wine the farmer was ready to sell us his farm. We had fun there.

After the tobacco season was over we went to Angus and stayed with our friend Stan for a few days. We then threw our suitcases into the trunk of the car and headed west.