

## No.1 Manning Depot - 20 April 1942

William Gerald Phelan enlisted in Toronto and he was then posted to No.1 Manning Depot. These are two images of No.1 Manning Depot in Toronto I once found on the Internet and that I posted on my blog about the BCATP.





Letter from Frank Sorensen to his parents who was there as a security guard.











Source

<https://colinfranksorensen.wordpress.com/2019/10/20/chapter-two-march-26-1941-the-fourth-letter/>

March 26, 1941

Security Guard Training

#1 Manning Depot, Toronto

Dear Mother & Dad;

Oh, I'm tired tonight, good and tired. I just came from a free show here in the building, it wasn't much of a show hardly worth while seeing.

Get up at 6:00, make my bed, polish my boots and buttons, wash and go for breakfast. P.T. parade at 7:45 in fatigue clothes, we are marched outside and the Corp. chases us round the place. It's just wonderful to have P.T. in weather 10 degrees above. One really has to work to keep warm. After P.T. we have squad drill until 11:30. Then I go to my bunk and rest a bit. I am a little tired especially my shoulders but the more it hurts the more I work with it. Tomorrow I don't think I'll feel anything. After dinner I have to be at another parade or route march at 1:30 and at 4:15 we are through for the day. I go to my bunk, rest, shine my buttons, I am awfully tired but after my daily shower I feel perfect. I shave twice a week. Supper at about 5:00, then I line up for my mail if any and I wish again that my name began with anything but S.

I go to my “home” again (bunk) play the banjo or I go to the lounge to write. I might also go for a walk along Lake Ontario – alone – believe me or not. You see, I realize now how expensive it is to fool about with women and what a lot of waste of time. Of course I wish I knew a real girl, but I’ve got plenty of time.

If I keep on spending money at the rate I am now I should be able to send  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my money home. I’ll get \$40 a month, \$1.20 a day. It’s not much money, but I don’t see why I should spend it on food or anything of the kind when I get all the food I can eat (plenty of butter and apples). For the last week or so I have had 38 cents in my money belt and yesterday I spent the last bit as I missed my supper (because I have no watch). We’ll get paid next Monday for the first time. The \$5 Dad gave me soon went on a money belt, boot polish, Brasso, etc. You don’t get everything in the army. It’s lights out now so goodnight.

Friday – I didn’t get my mail yesterday so I got your letter today. I was going to make this one a long letter but your letter reminded me that Dad was soon leaving so I’ll send it now. I just had my dinner and I have about  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour to get ready for the afternoon parade. I’m on what is called Security Guard Training which lasts for about 10 days so I won’t be here very long. The day Wilkins was in town we all marched down town. He stood on a platform as we marched past. In the evening we got free tickets to hear his speech and I went. As he was through he got up on the table and he nearly fell down. I went out before the others and stood in the front row as he got in the car.

Last week I went to “Lille Norge” and had a talk with them. They also take Danish subjects. I spent an evening with a fellow Nielsen. I must go.



Love Frank

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There are several descriptions on the Internet on how life was for recruits at No. 1 Manning Depot in Toronto. Here's one description that I once found which is not available anymore...

### **Training of Ground Crew Trades**

The mightiest and most powerful air forces would soon find themselves short of serviceable aircraft if it were not for members of the ground crew who maintained, repaired and in their eyes "owned" the aircraft that the aircrews "borrowed".

At Recruitment Centers across Canada the recruits for these trades were judged on their work backgrounds and aptitude tests. Although some knew what trades they wanted to be trained to from the very start others were steered into what was thought to suit them. And being in the military what you wanted and what you were best suited for was not always where you ended up.

### **Manning Depots**

Once accepted and upon receiving orders by mail they headed to their Recruiting Office. From there they would be sent to one of the many Manning Depots around

Canada. The two primary ones at the beginning being Brandon Manitoba and Toronto, with more added as the war went on.

For those lucky enough to be sent to Toronto it would provide them many great places to see and visit. If you could get a pass for the night, which was not all that freely given out from what my father wrote. And of course there were the lavish accommodations provided at No. 1 Manning Depot in the Canadian National Exhibition fair grounds namely the Equine Building or what most called the Horse building. Four to a stall and as my father wrote the horses had a better deal, they at least each got their own stall. My father had been a stable boy in his youth and many of the recruits were from rural towns and farms, to them it was familiar if not fully comfortable. To the city born recruits, even without there being many horses in the building, they found the accommodations more colourful and aromatic than they were used to.

Manning Depots took the civilian and, as my father wrote, ever so gently awakened them to the pleasures of military life. It was the place where you were given uniforms that didn't fit and needles you didn't want in places that were already aching from the last needle.

The new recruits were taught marching, saluting, personal grooming, hygiene and basically learning the ways of military life as the bottom peg in a system. For my father it was not completely new. His whole family had been Seaforth Highlanders for many generations.

Training for some of the newcomers was transferred abruptly from Toronto to Brandon. So my dad and a whole train load of recruits left sunny oh so warm

Toronto late in the fall and arrived in the middle of a blizzard in Brandon with only their Summer dress uniforms to wear. Brandon didn't have all the amenities of Toronto, but it didn't matter. Passes were still just as stingingly handed out here as they had been in Toronto.

Here is another description...

*To start with, they sent us to manning depot in Toronto, and we arrived there, and then, you know, you were allowed one suitcase when you left home, so you packed, you got into your best suit, best coat, best shoes, and all your best things were in the suitcase, and you went to Toronto and six of us from Saskatoon, went together. In manning depot, the manning depot was housed in the Toronto Exhibition grounds, in the various cattle barns and the horse barns. Well, the winter fair had just finished when we arrived, and I recall we were all lined up and a sergeant came out and said, "Okay," he said, "First of all, how many of you here can ride a motorcycle?" So a number of eager chaps stepped out and they were marched off and we were marched off behind them in our suits, civilian clothing. They were all handed a wheelbarrow and we were handed pitchforks and shovels and brooms and we cleaned out the stables, the stalls in the horse barns.*

Last description... and I guess you now get the picture...

*Life at manning depot was strenuous, rigorous, and gave recruits their first introduction to military discipline and organization. Flight Lieutenant Asbaugh describes the daily regime of life at manning depot, which he remembers as being a shock to new recruits unused to military life:*

*Manning depot was quite a shock...It was our first introduction to the air force and military discipline...We were in the cow barn, in double-tiered bunks. There was just a mass of people in there...And we had drills and marching, and learnt to use the Ross rifle, and all that good stuff...The food was terrible; it was really shocking...They had some sort of arrangement with a caterer, and he could make the best rubber eggs you ever had in your life. The one thing that was really good about it was you got all the milk you could drink and all the bread and butter you wanted. The rest of the food was bad.*