

Gerry O'Pray

By Adam Wilson

Early Life and Enlistment

- Originally from Nova Scotia
- Was 18 when he enlisted in the military
- Joined the Royal Canadian Signal Corps



Signal Corps badge, Gerry's unit

Training

- Gerry was sent to Kingston, Ontario for training.
- Received basic training as infantry soldier
- Then received trade training as a teletype machine technician



Gerry's Signal Corps
belt



Teletype
machine

Congo Crisis

- The Congo Crisis occurred when the Congo claimed independence from Belgium
- Following this claim, the country was plunged into a power struggle between those wishing to be the leader
- As a result, the current leader, Patrice Lumumba asked for UN assistance.
- Peacekeepers sent to maintain order



Soldier during Congo Crisis



Patrice Lumumba

Deployment to Congo

- In 1961, Gerry was deployed to the Congo as a UN peacekeeper.
- He was to serve as a teletype operator for the UN troops
- Gerry describes his time there as “sobering”, as he beared witness to the affects of decolonization
- Gerry had a good working relationship with peacekeepers from multiple countries.



UN peacekeepers in the Congo



Gerry's lighter in the Congo

Congo Crisis



Gerry in the Congo



UN chief Dag
Hammarskjöld



Congolese militia



UN soldiers in the Congo

Suez Crisis

- The Suez Crisis occurred in 1956 when England, France and Israel invaded Egypt in the Suez region.
- It began when Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser claimed Egyptian ownership of the canal.
- This disrupted international trade, causing a international crisis and inciting invasion.



Suez Canal Blockade



UN engineers near the Suez Canal

Deployment to Gaza

- Gerry was deployed as a peacekeeper to Gaza
- Gerry was again to serve as a teletype operator
- He described his time in Gaza as “club med” due to the little work he had
- Gerry did experience the Anti-Israel sentiment among locals



Gerry with Miss Canada in Gaza



UN truck in Gaza

Suez Crisis



Peacekeepers at attention in Egypt



UN truck in Gaza during Suez Crisis

Importance of Oral History

- Oral History is an incredibly important part of education today
- By listening to the stories of veterans, we gain perspective that can not be taught with a textbook.
- This is especially the case with veterans such as Gerry, whose experiences are not highly documented, yet offer important and valuable insight.