



# A Force to be Reckoned With

**One of the last living members recalls the days of the Newfoundland Rangers**

By Elizabeth Whitten

Photos courtesy The Rooms Provincial Archives

Imagine being stuck in a tent made of flour bags, waiting out a wicked storm with a dog team and driver for three days in Labrador. For Cyril Goodyear of Deer Lake, N.L., it's not a dream, it's a memory.

Though he's just a few months shy of his 90th birthday, Cyril clearly recalls those harrowing days and the kindness of strangers that got them through it. When they ran out of food, they braved the trek to Korakaluk Brook, relying on the hospitality of a couple living there. "When supper time came, there wasn't a bite left in the house. And that'll tell you what kind of people they were; they gave us everything they had," he says. When Cyril and his driver eventually made the 50-mile trek back to Nain, he sent supplies back to the couple.

"It was a rough time, but I had a lot of times as rough as that over the years, you know," he says. Many of those rough times were during his tenure with the Newfoundland Rangers.

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**Left: Newfoundland Rangers Ronald and Cyril Goodyear**

## The Ranger Years

Before the RCMP came to the province, there was the Newfoundland Ranger Force. From 1935 until 1950, its officers operated in rural, often isolated communities of Newfoundland and Labrador. But they weren't just police officers, Cyril explains; they also acted as government officials. A Ranger could be called on to help with anything from building roads to processing customs. Though he's not sure, Cyril suspects he may be one of the last – maybe even the last – surviving Ranger.

His road to becoming a Ranger began when his first dream career ended. As a teen during World War II, Cyril wanted to be a pilot and was completing training when the war ended. "Because when Hitler knew I was in, he shot himself," he jokes. "About a week after I was discharged, I came back to Deer Lake and I met Corporal John Hogan." He suggested Cyril apply to become a Ranger.

But not just anyone could join the Rangers. "You had to have junior matriculation, that's the British Grade 11, and that was like a PhD at that time," Cyril says. Successful applicants had to be male, 21 to 28 years old, at least 5'9", and weigh 185 pounds or less. All Rangers signed on for a five-year term with the opportunity to renew.

Oh, and applicants had to be single. "You had to get permission to marry, and that's understandable because you were shuttled off to very remote places...The Rangers' wives were special Rangers," Cyril says. "They didn't get paid, but when we were travelling around in our districts, the locals



## Newfoundland Ranger Nelson Forward

would come and seek [their] advice and so on and so forth. They were a special group of people."

Once they'd completed training (which included being taught to use a typewriter), the Rangers were scattered all over Newfoundland and Labrador. Most were single officer postings. That's how Cyril's career began.

"I went to Labrador and I was in Battle Harbour first, where I did customs because that was a customs port then, you know. And there was a whaling station in Hawke's Bay, and my job was to enter and clear the whalers from Scotland and Norway and the salmon boats from foreign countries [including] Canada and the United States," he says. "And from there, I got

shipped up to Nain... I spent years up there travelling by dog team [and] small boat, and covered all that area by myself."

Life in such remote locations could be difficult, but "you did what you had to do and you learned how to survive. And I tell you...I worked with many, many people but some of the finest and most brilliant people I ever worked with were Inuit from Labrador and the Naskapi Indians from Davis Inlet area," he says. "Because I lived with them and travelled with them and so on. And my God, you've got to be a genius to survive!"

## Applying the law

"When I was in Nain, if there was some change in the law or whatever, I would get the elders together and we'd have a keg of hardtack and a cup of tea and I would, through an interpreter, explain the changes in the laws." But sometimes when explaining a new rule, locals would point out its absurdity, so sometimes the job called for a loose interpretation of the law.

Cyril recalls a time when the opening and closing dates for hunting coloured and white foxes were the same. But "some genius in St. John's changed that and there was a difference of 15 days between the two." He gathered the elders to share the news through an interpreter, but it made little sense to them. The interpreter told him, "Well, the simplest way to put it is, how do the foxes know that they're not supposed to get into the trap?"

"And I said, 'That's the most sensible thing I've heard in a long time. Forget it! It's not going to change.' So I just decreed that the season would remain and I never had a bit of trouble."

Being a Ranger brought Cyril all over Newfoundland and Labrador, but the end came quickly in 1950, after Confederation. "Suddenly, with only two weeks notice, they did away with the Newfoundland Rangers," he says. They were offered positions with the RCMP, but at a lower rank. At the

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time, there were 56 active Rangers, and all but six signed up with the RCMP. Recently married, Cyril felt he had little choice but to take the job, going from a first-class Ranger "to a second-class RCMP. But eventually I ended up being a sergeant."

Cyril went on to Halifax's Major Crimes squad, making his way to the top of that unit. When he retired in 1965, he took a job as a magistrate in Newfoundland – his law degree from Dalhousie University came later. He was eventually appointed chief of the provincial court and was elected mayor of Deer Lake for a term. He's also taken to writing books, the first being *Nunatsiak: Stories of the Big Land, Labrador and Newfoundland*.

While the Rangers might not patrol Newfoundland and Labrador anymore, their legacy lives on. The royalties from Cyril's books go to the Newfoundland Ranger Force Scholarship Fund for Memorial University students, established some years ago by former members. ☒