

NO. 26 CENTRAL ORDNANCE DEPOT

For almost eighteen years Cobourg was part of Canada's "defense plans so that we can play our part in re-establishing peace where we, the United Nations, stopped the red snare in Korea." It was with these words that Brooke Claxton, Canada's Minister of Defense, opened No. 26 Central Ordnance Depot on October 30, 1953.

In response to Cold War era tensions, Canada increased its number of bases and depots in the 1950s. The Cobourg depot was planned in 1951 and erected on Division Street, where Northam Industrial Park is today. According to an article in the Cobourg Sentinel-Star written a few days after the closing of the depot, nearly 2,000 people gathered for the opening ceremony.

A publicity brochure issued at the time explained why Cobourg had been chosen: "excellent transportation facilities, ready access to CPR and CNR mainlines...close to Great Lakes shipping...proximity to Trenton RCAF base... the site is not in a high priority target zone in the event of an atomic attack."

By 1971 the depot covered 178 acres and straddled D'Arcy and Division Streets. It included seven warehouses, a central heating plant, a fire hall, permanent married quarters, and administrative buildings. On the east side of D'Arcy there was an officers' mess and housing units, some of which have since been renovated by Habitat for Humanity. At its maximum it employed 738 people.

The depot provided supplies to other military facilities, but was also the Canadian Army's only respirator assembly plant and a detachment of No. 22 Works Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers.

In 1966 the depot was renamed Canadian Forces Base Cobourg (CFB Cobourg). However, as Cobourg didn't house two or more major units, it didn't qualify as a "base" under Canadian Forces' criteria and was renamed Canadian Forces Station Cobourg a short time later.

Until its closing, CFS Cobourg was home to a majestic mural entitled "The Battle of Ortona" painted by Gerald Trottier. It measures 48' x 8' and is now in the possession for The Loyal Edmonton Regiment.

In the 1960s several Army, Navy and RCAF bases were either downsized, merged or closed. In 1969 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced the closing of the ordnance depots in Cobourg and London with operations moving to Montreal.

On August 31, 1971 13 military and 12 civilian personnel left the Canadian Forces Depot in Cobourg for the last time. The next day the Ontario Development Corporation took over the property and it was turned into an industrial park.

Sources: Cobourg Sentinel-Star; Cobourg: "Early Days and Modern Times" by John Spilsbury; and "Abandoned Military Installations of Canada Volume I: Ontario" by Paul Ozorak.

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Pte. Ridout (1903) and Pte. Chenier (1963) on display outside the RCOC Mess at No. 26 Central Ordnance Depot. Ron Chenier recalls, "My years there were rather short...1962 to 1964, but a lot of fond memories of the depot and the town itself. I worked as an usher at the movie theatre for a while and went out with a young lady who used to work at a fish and chip store on the main street...it was boring at the mess. Yes...I had a good time there."

British anti-gas respirator of Korean War vintage



Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps -
Plaque on Depot site

