

Ancestors distinguished themselves in the health field

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Northumberland Today

COBOURG — There are as many reasons for Lakeshore Genealogical Society members to take pride in their ancestors' achievements as there are ancestors.

At the group's 2011 Mystery Ancestry night, two members related the contributions their ancestors made in the field of health.



For Maebelle Cowan, Rosella Cunningham was a first cousin, once removed and a close friend.

Many people who lived in Cobourg and Port Hope in the 1950s and 1960s would remember her as the Cobourg health nurse.

Cunningham and her brother Victor were born in the Cobourg Armoury, where her father was the caretaker and the family had an apartment. They moved to Swayne Street in 1921, when Rosella was 10. She and Victor (who would become a teacher in Cobourg) attended school on George Street and Cobourg Collegiate Institute.

Rosella went on to the University of Toronto where, in 1936, she was in the first graduating nurses' class. She worked with the Victorian Order of Nurses in several communities, including Carleton Place, Windsor, Ottawa and Woodstock. She moved back to Cobourg in the 1950s to work with the town's health unit and also was a school nurse.

At 50, she returned to the University of Toronto. From 1967 to 1980, she was professor of health nursing at the school. She retired back in Cobourg, and died in the Cobourg hospital in 2001.

Cunningham was pretty well grown when Cowan was a child, and she remembers playing with Rosella's wonderful dollhouse. Her daughter has it now.

Cowan was living in Port



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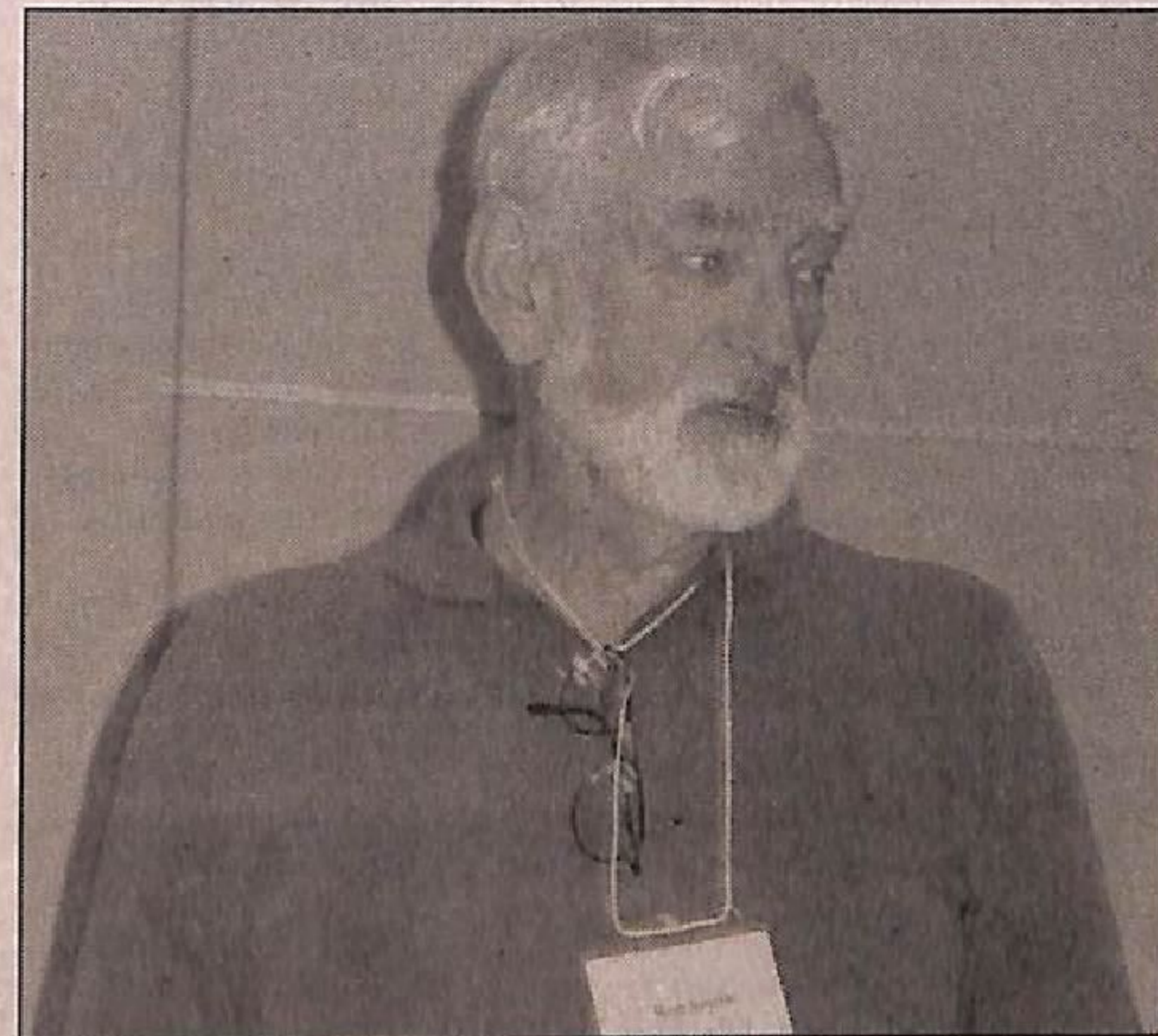
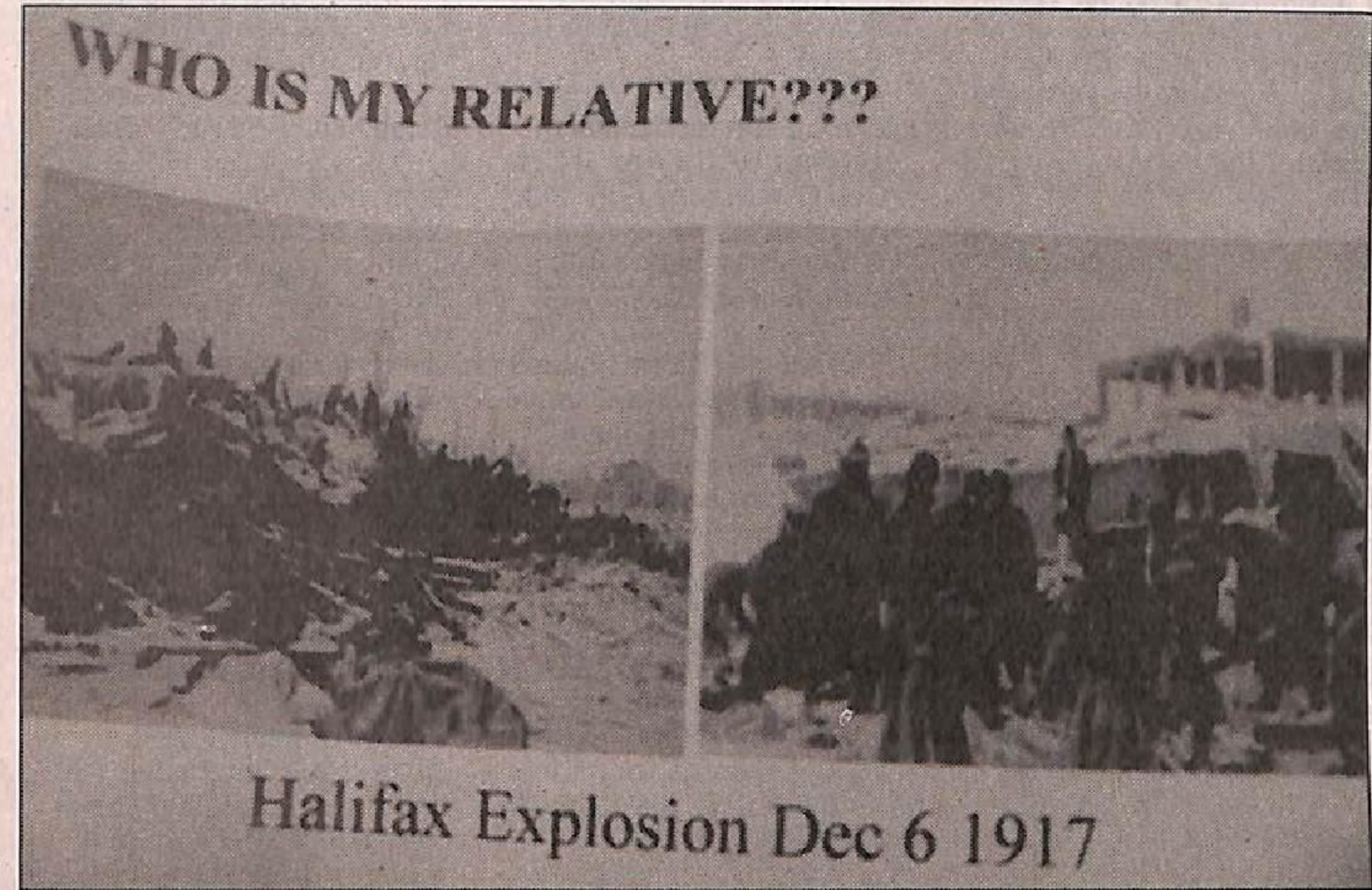
Lakeshore Genealogical Society member Maebelle Cowan is very proud of the accomplishments of her first-cousin-once-removed Rosella Cunningham.

mother and brother in 1957. After that, despite their 20-year age difference, the women became very close.

When she retired to Cobourg, she brought a roommate with whom she bought a big house on Walton

The contributions of Ron Smith's ancestor Herbert would be in the field of mental health.

Herbert Smith was born north of Cobourg. After high school, he moved to



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Above: Lakeshore Genealogical Society member Ron Smith's ancestor Herbert was on leave and asleep in Halifax when the explosion hit on Dec. 6, 1917.

Left: Ron Smith's ancestor Herbert did pioneering work in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

RON INSTALLED THE CEMETERY RECORDS ON THE LIBRARY'S COMPUTERS

Saskatchewan to live with some older brothers and became a teacher.

Smith earned an arts degree from the University of Illinois, bachelor-of-education degree from the University of Alberta and doctorate in education in California. He would return to the University of Alberta, where he would be on the faculty for 25 years. He became the school's dean in 1950, and retired five years later (making \$7,000 a year). He died in 1969.

He served in both World

Wars, and was in Halifax on Dec. 6, 1917 — the day of the Halifax Explosion. At the time, he was on leave and enjoying the chance to sleep in a quarter-mile from the blast. The roof caved in on him, but he emerged unhurt and assisted with rescue efforts.

Smith became interested in psychology and mental-health issues, and established Mental Health Association branches in Edmonton and Alberta.

After the Second World War, he was active in getting recognition for soldiers returning

from the war, that their mental illnesses could be treated.

"One thing I find most interesting is, because he had been in the war, he was a leader in treating soldiers for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), which they called shell shock," Ron Smith said.

"He did a lot of work letting people know this is mental condition. They are not just crazy — it's something that can be treated."

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