



**SUPPLY  
LINE**

## Elmon Lichti Conscientious Objector

Elmon Lichti's religious beliefs led him to refuse military service that might force him to kill. Conscientious objectors like Elmon were often unpopular in wartime society.



Elmon Lichti (*left*) with his brother Stanley. Both were conscientious objectors. Courtesy of the Lichti Family

### Before the War

Elmon Lichti was a young man from Tavistock, Ontario. As a member of the Mennonites – a religious group – he believed in pacifism and non-violence.

When the Second World War broke out, Elmon faced the same decision his father had to make during the First World War: serve in the military, or request an exemption allowing him to maintain his religious beliefs.

## Alternative Service

Like his father before him, Elmon registered as a “conscientious objector.” In exchange for an exemption from military service, conscientious objectors had to agree to perform alternative service on the home front.

In late 1942, at age 21, Elmon was called up by the federal government. By January 1943, he was stationed at a work camp at Montreal River, Ontario, building roads with other conscientious objectors.

The crew helped clear the way for the Trans-Canada Highway north of Sault Ste. Marie. The gruelling work was carried out in brutally cold weather, for very little pay.

In the spring, Elmon was sent home to serve as an agricultural labourer for a neighboring farmer for the summer. This was followed by a stint at a work camp in British Columbia, where he worked in forestry.

Almost 11,000 Canadians performed alternative service as conscientious objectors. Some Canadians did not think it was fair for them to avoid military service by remaining on the home front, and they were often called “conchies” (shortened from conscientious objector).

Of the young men whose membership in Peace Churches qualified them to register as conscientious objectors, some decided instead to enlist for military service, either because of social pressure or for personal reasons.

## Remembrance and Recognition

Elmon died in 2005. After his death, his wife and daughter found a pair of work boots that he had worn as a conscientious objector.

They were featured in a Canadian War Museum special exhibition called **Peace**, and are now part of the Mennonite Heritage Centre collection in Winnipeg.

## Vocabulary

### Conscientious objector

A person who for reasons of conscience claims the right to refuse to perform military service, including for reasons of religion or personal belief.