

THE OTHER DIEFENBUNKER

CFS Richardson Detachment 1962-1994

A relic of the Cold War, Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Richardson¹ lies abandoned, sealed, buried, and reportedly flooded, under a cow pasture 10 kilometers east of Perth, off Drummond Township Concession-1 between Richardson Sideroad and Burns Road².

Built in 1962, CFS Richardson was one of three remote sites supporting CFS Carp, the top-secret installation better known as the 'Diefenbunker'. Located on 500 acres in Concession-10 of North Elmsley Township³, the Richardson complex was a transmitter station, connected to Carp by a 50-kilometer under-ground land line, while the other two remote sites, at Almonte and Dunrobin, were antenna receiver stations.

The 'Diefenbunker', so nick-named for Prime Minister John Diefenbaker (1895-1979) whose government⁴ ordered its construction, was one of nearly 50 bunkers built across Canada in the early 1960s. The bunker program was intended to ensure continuity of government in the event of a nuclear weapons attack, by sheltering the prime minister, Governor-General, senior government, civil defense, judicial, police and military officials. The Diefenbunker, located at Carp, about 30 km (19 miles) west of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, was designated the Central Emergency Government Headquarters (CEGHQ).

The facility at Carp, the largest of the Diefenbaker built bunkers, was a four-storey, underground, steel reinforced concrete, nuclear fallout shelter, designed to withstand a nuclear blast of five megatons from 1.8 kilometer (1.1 mile) away. Stocked with supplies of food, fuel, fresh water, and other necessities it could house 565 people for up to one month. It included offices, conference rooms, sleeping quarters, a mess hall, the communication facility, an emergency broadcast studio for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and a vault to hold the gold reserves of the Bank of Canada.



*Unit Crest of CFS Carp
'Communicate and Protects'*

Using the then state of the art Signals Transmission Receiving and Distribution computer system (STRAD), the Diefenbunker was linked to five provincial centers across the country⁵. It also provided for communication with NATO, the North American Air Command (NORAD), and radar tracking stations. The support stations at Dunrobin and Almonte picked up incoming signals and relayed them through buried land lines to the main receiver inside the Diefenbunker. Communications from the Diefenbunker were transmitted through CFS Richardson, east of Perth.

¹ Officially 'CFS Carp Richardson Detachment'.

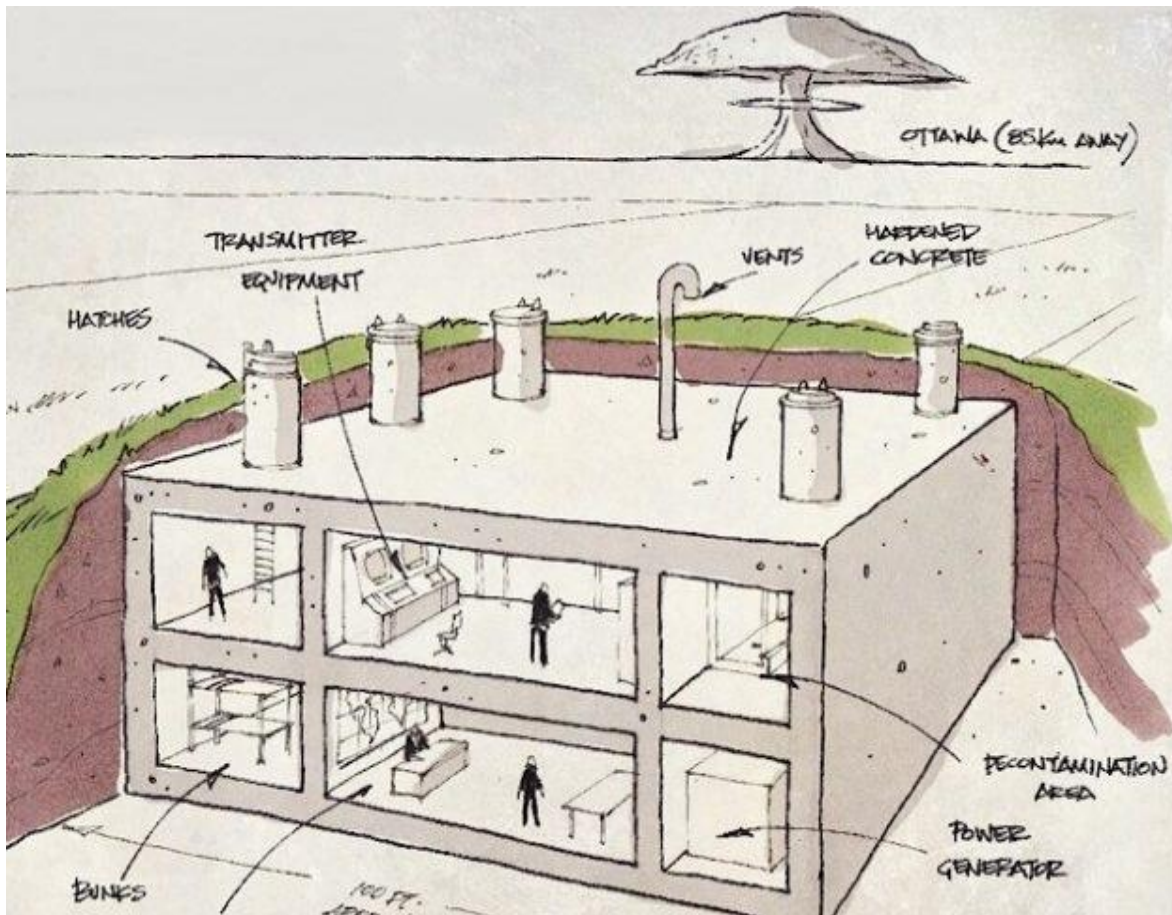
² 485 Drummond Concession-1.

³ North Elmsley Township C-10/L-8, L-9 & L-10.

⁴ John Diefenbaker was Canada's 13th Prime Minister, serving 1957-1963. Although implemented by Diefenbaker, the bunker program was actually planned by the prior government of Louis St Laurent (1882-1973).

⁵ Located in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Stations in Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba were planned but never completed.

The location of CFS Richardson, in the farm fields of North Elmsley Township, was chosen because it was far enough away to survive a nuclear strike against Ottawa or CFS Carp itself and was upwind of the fallout shadow that would have resulted from such an attack. It was also far enough away to reduce the risk of interference from its powerful radio transmitters with communications gear at Carp, Almonte and Dunrobin.



This illustration by Andrew King, taken from the Ottawa Citizen of May 31, 2015, is illustrative of the CFS Richardson bunker, but not very accurate.

The stations at Almonte and Dunrobin were both unmanned, above-ground facilities, but CFS Richardson near Perth was a mini Diefenbunker. Some details are still shrouded in secrecy by the Official Secrets Act, but CFS Richardson is known to have been equipped with 20 radio transmitter towers spaced around its antenna yard, all connected to a two-storey reinforced concrete bunker and fall-out shelter buried deep underground. It was staffed by about a dozen Royal Canadian Corps of Signals technicians and 25 civilians who did shift work and manned the site 24 hours a day.

Like CFS Carp itself, Richardson was designed to withstand a near-hit from a nuclear warhead and to shelter its staff for several weeks in the immediate aftermath of such a strike. Behind its heavy blast-proof steel doors the bunker accommodated the detachment's communications gear, a staff mess, sleeping quarters, offices, storage for food, fresh water, and other supplies, four 60kw diesel generators, fuel, and decontamination facilities. A positive air pressure system and filters prevented radiation infiltration.



Nothing to see here. The gates of former CFS Richardson Detachment on Drummond Township Copcession-1

In addition to the buried umbilical cord to CFS Carp, a second underground cable connected CFS Richardson to the Federal Department Relocation Site at Smiths Falls, located in a two-storey shelter beneath the Federal Building (Post Office) on Market Street North.

'Relocation Sites' were operated by the civilian Emergency Measures Organization (EMO), a government department established in 1957 to ensure protection of the civilian population and continuity of government. Like other 'Relocation Sites', the Smiths Falls facility was not a hardened bomb shelter, but a fallout shelter built, equipped and supplied to provide government officials safe haven during the initial post-attack phase of up to 14 days, and then emerge to manage the re-establishment of civil authority during the ensuing 30-day 'recovery phase'.

The Smiths Falls location also housed a Communications Relay Unit (CRU), one of a network of small short-wave transmitter-receiver stations, including those at Relocation Sites in Kemptville and Carleton Place⁶. CRUs maintained constant communication with the Diefenbunker which, in turn, coordinated a local communications network channeled through the Emergency Radio Relay (ERR) System at CFS Richardson. While the Smiths Falls Relocation Site was an EMO operation, it shared its space with personnel of No.1 Army Signals Squadron in charge of the communications net. The Smiths Falls facility could accommodate 80 people and was of particular importance because of its direct underground cable link to CFS Richardson in North Elmsley Township.

⁶ Relocation sites were also planned for Arnprior and Pembroke but never constructed. Perth had no similar 'Relocation Site' or 'Communications Relay Unit'. The only government funded Cold War relic at Perth was built in 1962 in the back yard of the former Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) District Headquarters at 14 Victoria Street. An above-ground structure measuring 8X12 feet with 3 foot thick walls (double rows of concrete blocks separated by sand), it was variously described as a "fallout testing center" or "fallout shelter" or a "bomb shelter to be used in the event of air attack".



Radio tower base, former CFS Richardson
(Photo courtesy of 'Dave's Cold War Canada')

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, CFS Carp was closed in 1994. Later that year it was designated a National Historic Site because it was considered the most important surviving Cold War site in Canada. In 1998 it re-opened as the 'Diefenbunker: Canada's Cold War Museum'.

Decommissioning the CFS Carp Diefenbunker dictated the simultaneous shut-down of CFS Richardson. All of its surface buildings were demolished, the radio antenna removed, and the bunker entrance and hatches sealed by filling them with gravel and concrete. Some undocumented reports say the bunker was flooded with water before the entrances

were sealed. The property was sold to a private buyer in July 1998 and, today, cattle graze around the antenna tower footings and over the mound beneath which lies the CFS Richardson mini-Diefenbunker.⁷

- **Ron W. Shaw (2022)**

⁷ The Almonte and Dunrobin antenna stations were also shut down. The Almonte site is now Burnt Lands Provincial Park.