

# Listening In Articles

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## Diefenbunker

Parks Canada website [www.pc.gc.ca](http://www.pc.gc.ca)

Built secretly between 1959 and 1961 just outside of Ottawa, the Diefenbunker was designed to protect government officials in the event of a nuclear attack. Nicknamed after Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, who ordered its construction, the Diefenbunker was a massive complex of office spaces, sleeping quarters, broadcasting facilities and decontamination chambers.

August 21, 1958, Prime Minister Diefenbaker ordered the construction of the shelter built in 1958, at the height of the Cold War. The Central Emergency Government Headquarters, as it was called at the time, was a four-storey, 30 480 m<sup>2</sup>, (100,000 square-foot) underground shelter just outside the tiny village of Carp. Although its construction was to be kept secret, the sheer size of the project forced Prime Minister Diefenbaker to acknowledge that the government was indeed building a nuclear fallout shelter for the country's leaders.

The Diefenbunker was designed for 535 people with enough supplies to survive 30 days. It was built using 29 248 m<sup>3</sup> (32,000 cubic yards) of concrete and 5,000 tons of steel. Surrounding it on all sides was a 1,52 m (5 feet) layer of gravel to absorb the shock of an explosion. The bunker entrance was located at a right angle midway down an open-ended tunnel. This design meant that an above-ground explosion would sweep through the tunnel without affecting the

double airlock door at the front of the building.

Inside the bunker, a CBC radio station provided a vital link to the Canadian public. A weather studio was equipped to monitor wind patterns and take radioactive readings. Other rooms - kitchens, bathrooms, food and waste storage, a hospital and a morgue - were dedicated to simple human survival. People entering the bunker would have had to go through a decontamination room with "radiac" equipment, showers and lead-lined clothing disposal bins.

Fortunately, the bunker never served its intended purpose, although the Diefenbaker government did make plans to use it during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The Diefenbunker remained operational for 33 years, mainly as a communications centre for the Canadian Armed Forces. In 1994, the Diefenbunker was declared a National Historic Site and described as "the most important surviving Cold War site in Canada."



*Stittsville/Richmond EMC*  
[www.emcstittsvillerichmond.ca](http://www.emcstittsvillerichmond.ca)

### Renovated, revitalized Diefenbunker opens its doors to visitors

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It stands as a symbol of the threat of the Cold War but today, it is a tourist attraction that has been renovated and revitalized.

The Diefenbunker was a nuclear bunker designed

to house top military and governmental officials in case of an attack on Canada. The 100,000 square foot hardened structure located in Carp, was decommissioned by the military in 1994 and a group of dedicated local volunteers saved it and turned it into Canada's most important Cold War artifact. It is open to the public year round as a museum and a National Historic Site of Canada.

For the first time in the Diefenbunker's history, visitors are now able to roam the rooms and halls of the formerly top-secret nuclear bunker on their own.



Monday June 28, marked the launch of an interactive audio/video guide, which leads visitors, with the help of a map and marked paths, through the maze-like National Historic Site. Previously the only way to see the building was accompanied by a guide to designated areas. Also set to launch are the Diefenbunker games on a new interactive website entitled "Project Rustic", and food service in the cafeteria in the form of Military Meal Replacements such as those which would have been eaten after a nuclear strike in a 30-day lockdown of the building.

A 31 track, one hour self-guided tour incorporates footage of atomic testing, 1960s public service films and Diefenbunker construction. This tour immerses visitors into the Cold War experience as it leads them through the four-storied nuclear bunker. It is available for download for viewing on personal media players and smart phones. Media players are also available for loan by the museum

## **CBC STUDIO**

The CBC Archives/les Archives de Radio-Canada and the Diefenbunker are working together to develop an interactive video display to present to visitors select examples of CBC/Radio-Canada reports of internationally important Cold War events. The Diefenbunker gratefully acknowledges the contribution and support provided by CBC/Radio-Canada.



This partnership between the two organizations will combine resources generously provided by CBC/Radio-Canada Archives to develop and interpret the Emergency Broadcast Studio inside the bunker.

## **PROJECT RUSTIC**

Project Rustic: Journey to the Diefenbunker is an interactive website that encourages Canadians to learn about the Continuity of Government Program and the role of the Central Emergency Government Headquarters in Canada during the height of the Cold War.

This project has a youth focus and uses humour and popular culture references to draw participants into a dark period in Canada's history and is supported by Heritage Canada.

## **CANX**

Attendees also have another opportunity to experience the Bunker as never before. Military style meal replacements are available for purchase and consumption in the Diefenbunker cafeteria.

Now visitors can experience how Bunker residents would have eaten during the latter stages of a 30-day lockdown.

Spaghetti, chili, vegetarian lasagna, various desserts, "Soldier Fuel" and beverage service will begin in the cafeteria. Full "Meal Replacement Kits" will also be available for purchase to bring home as a Bunker souvenir.

While June 28 marked a new beginning for the Diefenbunker, it also marked an end. The museum's first executive director, Alexander Badzak marked her final day that day. She has moved on to become chief executive officer and director of the Ottawa Art Gallery.

During her tenure as the museum's first executive director, the Diefenbunker significantly increased self-generated and grant revenue, launched a bilingual website, permanent exhibitions, text panels and e-newsletter, and also developed a following through social networking.

She also played a pivotal role in raising almost \$1.7 million for a fire retrofit project of the bunker which will increase its occupancy from 60 people allowed in the building to almost 500.

The retrofit project undertaken has seen the Diefenbunker receive a new generator, new doors, extensive sprinklers throughout the building and a series of roll down shutters which create a secondary means of exit and create a secondary egress - thus allowing for the drastic increase in building capacity.

The improvements will allow the museum, which has been seeing more than 36,000 visitors a year, to double its expected visitations within three to five years.

"We really want to focus on the community and grow with it," explained Diefenbunker manager of Programs & Public Relations Eric Espig, while showing off the facility's upgrades to the EMC earlier this month.

Along with offering tours, children can celebrate their birthdays at the Diefenbunker and Spy Camp for children aged seven to 12 is being offered in July and August.

The facility also offers group tours, movie nights, VIP tours, private and corporate events, overnight stays and conferences.

For more information, visit [www.diefenbunker.ca](http://www.diefenbunker.ca).

*Below: Amateur radio station VE3CWM in the Diefenbunker*

