

BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Bill Morgan (BM) • Royal Marines

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 09.06.2005

K: What's your name?

BM: William Morgan.

K: And where were you born?

BM: Born in Fletcher Street Barracks, Bolton.

K: And what year?

BM: 1925.

K: What did your parents do? What did your father do?

BM: My father was in the Army, but we lost him in 1935 at the age of 44.

K: How old were you then?

BM: I'd be 10, roundabout 10.

K: So he was a full-time, regular soldier, was he?

BM: No, he was in the TA at the time, the Territorial Army at the time.

K: What was his job in the Army?

BM: He was a Company Sergeant Major and more or less in charge of the barracks in Bolton.

K: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

BM: Oh yes, Jack, George, Jim, Tommy. Five brothers, two sisters, one of which was also in the Army.

K: So a big family.

BM: Oh yes.

K: So were you the youngest, the oldest or in the middle?

BM: The middle aged.

K: Where did you go to school?

BM: St Gregory's in Farnworth.

K: When your father died, did you move?

BM: Well, we used to live next to the Greyhound Hotel on Bolton Road there, and from then the house was too big and we had to move house. We moved to Cemetery Road in Kearsley.

K: So that was near St Gregory's wasn't it?

BM: It was near, yes.

K: And, what did you do when you left school?

BM: I went into the mills to start off with for about six month. Then I went in the coal mines.

K: Which mine?

BM: Mosley Common, Number Two.

K: And how long were you there.

BM: I was there about six month and then, I think I joined up from there. 1942.

K: So, you enlisted did you? Volunteered as soon as you could?

BM: I did, yes.

K: Do you remember when War was declared, do you remember anything particularly about how you felt, or...

BM: Well it was more or less excitement.

K: Because you knew you were going to be involved.

BM: Yeah.

K: Your background, your father in the Army, did that mean that that's what you wanted to do?

BM: Certainly, yes. My brother was in the Navy. Brother Jack was in the Marines, along with me, he was older than me but I joined a fortnight earlier. Tommy, Tommy was in the Navy, and a sister who was also in the Army in the ATS.

K: So you went to volunteer, did you?

BM: Yes.

K: And you weren't old enough really.

BM: No.

K: Did you have to prove that you were old enough, or...

BM: You had an identity card during the War. Say I'd lost mine and I used my brothers, only I went and I got a kick up the backside - get out.

K: And you were only sixteen then?

BM: Yeah.

K: So you had to wait until you were what age?

BM: Until I was seventeen.

K: And you went to enlist or volunteer?

BM: Volunteered, yes. Oh yes.

K: Where did you go to, to do that?

BM: Mawdsley Street, I think. Mawdsley Street.

K: How long was it before you were told where to go?

BM: Oh, I were told to go to Stonehouse Barracks, Royal Marines when I were just over seventeen.

K: Did you choose the Royal Marines?

BM: I did yeah, at the time, yes.

K: What was it about the Marines that appealed?

BM: Well, I don't know, just thought I'd join them.

K: So how long did your training last?

BM: Trained for about eight months in actual fact, in them days.

K: Where did you go to train?

BM: I went to Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth.

K: What was the training like?

BM: It was rough... It was rough.

K: What, the food... or it was very hard or..?

BM: (laughs) Food and the work itself. You had to be fit!

K: The Americans practised for D-Day there didn't they?

BM: I remember that. Full of German E boats, then they were shooting their own men...

K: Was there a lot of bombing in Plymouth?

BM: Not really no. Some, but it never touched the barracks.

K: So after your training, where were you sent?

BM: After training I went to that landing craft, LCGL Large, landing craft guns.

K: Was that from Plymouth?

BM: From Plymouth, yeah.

K: Where did you land?

BM: First one was Sicily, Salerno, Normandy, Walcheren, out the Far East to Rangoon and on to Singapore. I finished up there at the end of the War. Then I joined The Guards - first place I went to was Singapore! (laughs).

K: So what was it like when you arrived at Sicily?

BM: It was a quick one in actual fact. That didn't last very long.

K: And then Salerno, Italy.

BM: Salerno's Italy yeah.

K: And then you were in the Normandy Landings were you?
BM: Yes.

K: What was that like?
BM: Well, it was rough. It was rough...

K: And did you see any of your comrades killed?
BM: Well there were some on that boat there that were killed, yes.

K: Does that ever recur, thinking about that?
BM: It doesn't now.

K: But it did, I expect didn't it?
BM: Yeah, oh aye.

K: When I was spoke to you briefly before I got on my notes that you were at Sword Beach. Well I suppose you must have had several lucky escapes really but is there anything in particular that sticks in your mind?
BM: Like these photos there, if it were six inches higher I'd of been a goner. That were at the Walcheren Isles, at Walcheren.

K: Whereabouts approximately was it?
BM: Just off the Belgian coast.

K: Ah ha.
BM: Lot of islands round there.

K: It was hit was it? It just missed you?
BM: Well it did aye. That's not me smoking at the back, it's where we got hit! I was on that when it got hit.

K: What year was that then?
BM: 1944.

K: 1944.
BM: Aye, 1st of November.

K: So, 1st of November 1944, the landing craft was hit at the rear?
BM: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

K: You were quite near by?
BM: I was, I was, on the other side, where the smokes coming from.

K: Was it hit by a shell or a...
BM: An 88, German 88.

K: Yes, I've written that down last time, Walcheren Isles, opened the pathway to Antwerp.
BM: Yes.

K: So did you land on Sword Beach then?
BM: Yes, I managed to get off at Sword beach because I was on this landing craft, right up close to the shore, very shallow draft.

K: And you landed then?
BM: Yes.

K: And advanced?
BM: No, stopped on the beach.

K: And did other men... Did you land other men then?
BM: Yeah, we took the ships in.

K: Yeah, I see, so you landed men and they advanced basically I suppose at Normandy and you stayed with the landing craft. And then you what, what did you do then?
BM: Then we came back to Southampton and had a re-fit and went back out again and that's when we got caught.

K: So each time you were taking men...
BM: We were taking ships in.

K: You were taking ships in, they unload, kind of thing, and your go back and get more, basically - is that it?

BM: Yeah.

K: Which was the most dangerous part of your War? Or was it all dangerous?

BM: Well, I think it was all dangerous really. We got hit there, could have got hit anytime, not many people seen that type of landing craft. Two 4.7 inch guns on it, that's what it was called landing craft guns.

K: So were you always in a convoy of sorts?

BM: More or less, yes. I mean at night time you'd work on what they call the 'trout line' which is defending the ships in the Mulberry harbour.

K: The Mulberry harbour yes.

BM: We did the same type of job as what that was doing. Going out at night time coming back in daytime.

K: Did you have much leave?

BM: Well not really, no. (laughs)

K: But you did have some?

BM: We'd some yeah.

K: Did you have chance to come back home?

BM: Yeah.

K: What was it like coming back?

BM: It was great obviously, having a bit of leave... not much.

K: What was your rank or job?

BM: In the Marines I was just a Marine.

K: And was that the only craft you served on, this particular one?

BM: Yeah.

K: So from 1942 to '45 you were on LG...

BM: LCG – Landing Craft Guns... LCGL which is Large... guns

K: Did it have a number?

BM: Err, 3.

K: Did you have any particular memorable experience in the War?

BM: Well we had our attacks and things like that and we were looking for them.

K: Was the Normandy landing the most important?

BM: Well, I'd say so yeah.

K: Have you been back?

BM: I went back, when was it? Last year, aye, my three sons took my, my three sons and my brother, Jack.

K: Where were you when War finished?

BM: I was abroad when War finished, yeah, we was on our way to Singapore.

K: Yes, of course, sorry. Right, ok, so you ended up at Singapore?

BM: Yeah.

K: What was that like, Singapore?

BM: Ohh, dirty, scruffy then. Its probably a lot cleaner now than what it was (laughs)

K: Was that after VJ Day that?

BM: Yeah.

K: So did you see men that had been prisoners in Japan?

BM: Oh yeah, we also, the Japs... we also sent them packing and they came through a big drill tent type of thing or a hanger, and we took off them what we wanted. Finish up you'd have a bag full of kit and you'd get another bag full of kit - take it off them.

K: When you got to Singapore though, the War was over, was it? Yes?

BM: Yeah.

K: So was it good to be back? Was it difficult when you came back to Bolton to adjust?

BM: Not really, no.

K: No.

BM: No, you just settled down.

K: Of course, you stayed in the Service didn't you?

BM: I was out for a month. Got de-mobbed in '46 and joined the Guards in '46.

K: Oh, so right you came back to Bolton, you got de-mobbed, (laughs), and then you re-joined?

BM: I joined the Scots Guards. Yes.

K: Scots Guards, and where did you go then, to...

BM: Back to Singapore!

K: So Singapore...

BM: Bandits, Malayan bandits, Malayan People's... something... I forget...

K: The War had finished, so it was a question of clearing up things really wasn't it, it must still be,,,

BM: I got my Military Medal out there.

K: Did you? You got that after the War then, that?

BM: Yeah, in the Guards.

K: Yeah, in the Scots Guards, oh yeah, (reads) 'For his courage, endurance and leadership, Lance Corporal Morgan awarded the Military Medal, first ever to be won by a member of the regiment in peace time, 1949.' Do you still remember exactly that?

BM: I remember that, certainly. A shame, I mean they killed three of ours. Now n my mind they shouldn't of been killed, they shouldn't have known what they did.

K: Yeah, three bandits were killed and three men of yours... Wonderful, so you've got your medal have you?

BM: Yeah, name on it somewhere, on the side.

K: At the side... Oh fantastic, yeah. So you were still in the Guards though when you came back to Farnworth? And then were you stationed in Bolton then or..?

BM: I was always down south. Children were all born while I was in the Army.

K: So did you always live in Army accommodation, mostly?

BM: I did, yeah.

K: And that was how many years you were in there then?

BM: What, Scots Guards? 23.

K: 23 years, so that would be up to about...1969

BM: 1969, yeah, I came out.

K: What did you do then?

BM: Well I got a job. I went for an interview for a job, which was at that time was health foods. The bloke who was doing the hiring , he wore the same tie, he was Irish Guards, so I got the job straightaway (laughs)

K: Because of the tie?

BM: (laughs), Yeah. Well probably so, but I don't know!

K: Yeah. So how long did you do health foods job?

BM: 18 years.

K: And then retired then?

BM: Yeah.

K: When you were awarded the medal... Where was the ceremony for that?

BM: I think the King was ill at the time, it was just presented on parade down in Pirbright, yeah...

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