

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Right. OK. So it's recording. So this is Robert Millington being interviewed by Mrs. Edwards and Mr Keene. OK, so what would you like to share with?

00:00:11 Speaker 2

Well, really I only found out about what my dad's exploits when I was I was at work and I was actually driving my van.

00:00:20 Speaker 2

In work and there was a thing on Radio Merseyside about prisoners of war, and I knew my dad had been a prisoner at war and I knew.

00:00:27 Speaker 2

He'd escaped and got home. I knew I knew that.

00:00:30 Speaker 2

But apart from that, he only ever talked about it when he he'd had a few drinks, or if something come on the telly like Von Ryan's Express.

00:00:40 Speaker 2

He always said that's how they escaped because it was a mass breakout.

00:00:46 Speaker 2

So there was a.

00:00:47 Speaker 2

A number on Radio Merseyside, so I I goes home, gets on my computer and puts my dad's info in and, what I knew, and.

00:00:59 Speaker 2

All this stuff come up.

00:01:00 Speaker 2

And one of the things that come up was from the War Office, and I was linked to.

00:01:10 Speaker 2

Medals and, you know, recommendations. So I thought because I knew he had medals, he's got six medals, you know, but they're all campaign stuff cause he fought all over the world, used to fight all over, well everywhere really.

00:01:25 Speaker 2

And when I looked it up, I found this stuff which the the the the granddaughter's brought.

00:01:31 Speaker 2

Where he was.

00:01:34 Speaker 2

He got taken prisoner and was. He was, first of all, he was he was a DEMS gunner. You know do you know what that is? It it? They, they were military conscripts who were taught to fire guns. And during the war when the the country was getting blockaded the, the the Germans were.

00:01:57 Speaker 2

Sinking a lot of our ships, so they used to put guns on the back of merchant navy ships and they used to have DEMS Gunners go and and and and and and **doing it [?]**. My dad was one of them and he he he.

00:02:16 Speaker 2

He got torpedoed five times.

00:02:19 Speaker 2

And survived because they always used to say he couldn't sink and he. Yeah.

00:02:24 Speaker 3

And he clearly liked that.

00:02:25 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, he was. He he was just he he was. He was 5 foot 8 and and and then he got and then I knew he was taken.

00:02:34 Speaker 2

Prisoner of war, and obviously and he escaped. But he never told us.

00:02:38 Speaker 2

No, so I I.

00:02:40 Speaker 2

I got the information that Katie's got.

00:02:44 Speaker 2

And already when you read it, you think, why didn't you tell me any of this? You know, I mean, because he wasn't like that, you know, he.

00:02:53 Speaker 2

Just wasn't.

00:02:59 Speaker 2

So I investigated some more right and then have pieced together a little bits of what I know.

00:03:06 Speaker 2

And what I know is he was taken prisoner of war, escaped, got home, and when he got home, a lot of the people were were getting were dying, you know, in the Far East and in Europe, from dysentery. There was more soldiers dying at the time from disease.

00:03:26 Speaker 2

Than what was dying from bullets.

00:03:28 Speaker 2

So when these people got home from prisoner of war camp, obviously they were in a bad state.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

So they took them, 'volunteered', and I'll have to put them in inverted commas, they 'volunteered'. They got taken down to Shenley Mental Home.

00:03:45 Speaker 2

Like where the experimented on them. But what they what they did, right, it's one of the few things my dad told me, that they they scraped his bowel, but they had to do it without anaesthetic.

00:03:55 Speaker 2

Because the anaesthetic the other time was killing any of these things they wanted to save.

00:04:02 Speaker 3

Germs and infections.

00:04:03 Speaker 2

And the only thing I know about that that my dad said was that he heard sweat for the first time in his life because he could hear it coming off his forehead, hitting the pillow. He was biting. So.

00:04:17 Speaker 2

He he done that. Now, my dad came from a family of seven brothers and a sister and.

00:04:24 Speaker 2

What they did was, the ones that were available, they went down to Shenley Mental Home and he escaped twice.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

He he got out of Shenley, right, so consequently he was on the run then.

00:04:39 Speaker 2

And they got him home, so obviously he he couldn't stay at my my grandmother's at the time because the Redcaps would get him so he he was hiding out in, you know the Williamson tunnels?

00:04:51 Speaker 1

Ohh God.

00:04:52 Speaker 2

He were in. And he, he, he said.

00:04:54 Speaker 2

There was a lot of people there, hiding out.

00:04:58 Speaker 2

And then, again, you could also make a film out of that, but.

00:05:05 Speaker 2

They they they come and put an amnesty because there was people there for all sorts of reasons. Like my dad wasn't deserting the army per se. He just didn't want to be in Shenley Mental Home.

00:05:16 Speaker 2

So he had an amnesty, he went back and he was lucky enough to take part in D-Day.

00:05:23 Speaker 2

Yeah. And then he went up and then he was. I think it's Dieppe.

00:05:28 Speaker 3

Dieppe, yeah.

00:05:27 Speaker 2

It's in the thing I gave to you. And and then he was attacking Dieppe and he was in [?] and his division got cut off. And my dad attacked a machine gun post on his own as well.

00:05:47 Speaker 2

Which, if you knew him, you wouldn't be that surprised really.

00:05:51 Speaker 2

So that's about all of them.

00:05:54 Speaker 2

The only thing I I I will say he was recommended for the distinguished conduct medal.

00:06:01 Speaker 2

Now the officers and above they get the distinguished.

00:06:07 Speaker 3

I can't remember the name.

00:06:08 Speaker 2

Yeah. And the other ranks get the distinguished conduct. It's one of the highest medals you can get for gallantry. And we haven't got it and I I.

00:06:18 Speaker 3

But who awarded it? Who put them through [?]? Montgomery?

00:06:20 Speaker 2

It it it's on the things you know when he's recommended by his, you know he's he's recommended by his squad and then he's recommended by the leader of his platoon and then everything and then and then at the bottom it's signed by Montgomery.

00:06:34 Speaker 2

So that's there.

00:06:34 Speaker 3

But he never he'd never ever pick that medal up.

00:06:36 Speaker 2

He never collected it.

00:06:39 Speaker 3

He never collected it, never spoke about it.

00:06:41 Speaker 2

Katie's dad and people say you should get it, and I don't know really. Cause if he didn't want it, there must have been a reason.

00:06:47 Speaker 4

That's a tough one, isn't it.

00:06:50 Speaker 2

Yeah. So if he didn't want it, you know what I mean? I I feel a bit.

00:06:54 Speaker 3

They they they never thought they were doing anything heroic. They were just doing what they were told to do really.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

He never, he never. He never. But but just as as an antidote antidote, the wife's a Catholic, but I was brought up as an Orangeman, you know where [?]

00:07:13 Speaker 2

All my family were, you know what I mean, and me dad, where we lived in the Dingle, Toxteth, where we lived we had it was like an enclave. There was a lot a lot of orange people there, you know so.

00:07:28 Speaker 2

There was a Catholic family across the road and the Catholic family across the road the girl was was going to do her communion, the young girl, and we we were friendly with the family. And my Dad gave her a set of rosary beads. And he later said that a priest, because we think he was he was held prisoner by the Vichy French. So a priest gave them.

00:07:56 Speaker 2

They ask for a knife to cut the bread because they never had a knife to cut the bread and the bread was hard, so the the priest said 'you won't do'. And he said 'No father. We'll only do God's work'. So it's it's interpretation **that, isn't it [?]**. So they give him a knife and he sharpened it up on pebbles or whatever it was.

00:08:15 Speaker 2

And to escape, my dad had to cut an [?] head off, right? So he had the rosary beads that the police gave him and he carried them up until about 1960. I'd think I'd just started work about 66 and he gave them rosary beads to the the little girl across the road, but he'd had them all that time. Yeah, it's just one of them things.

00:08:43 Speaker 1

That is unbelievable. What a story.

00:08:46 Speaker 5

Have you have we got your dad's name? I don't think we.

00:08:47 Speaker 2

Robert Edward Millington, his name was. All his information's with the stuff our Katie gave and his his serial number and yeah, and and all that.

00:08:54 Speaker 3

It's all been photocopied, hasn't it.

00:09:00 Speaker 1

So when he was taken so he was taken into.

00:09:04 Speaker 1

He went to Shelby Shenley.

00:09:06 Speaker 2

Shenley mental home.

00:09:04 Speaker 1

So why was he why was he sent there?

00:09:10 Speaker 2

Because the the

00:09:10 Speaker 3

They were experimenting on them.

00:09:12 Speaker 2

They were experimenting on them because the the, the, the, the dysentery bug, they didn't have any medication. You're talking about 1940, it must have been 41. So before the Americans, 39, 40, before the Americans sort of got involved so. Well I don't think Americans have the answer.

00:09:29 Speaker 2

But a lot of the people who were fighting, certainly in the Far East and certain parts of Europe, dysentery was killing a lot of people. You know the conditions they were living in and they had you never had medication to treat it. So they were experimenting. And the only way they could experiment was to get live germs.

00:09:52 Speaker 1

Wow, so they chose soldiers to go to the.

00:09:53 Speaker 2

And you've got to remember.

00:09:55 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, as as as I say inverted commas, they all volunteered.

00:09:58 Speaker 3

They said they volunteered, but I don't think it is a volunteer, you know? 'You're going and that's it'

00:10:04 Speaker 1

And where so where was he held prisoner of war, do you know?

00:10:07 Speaker 2

I don't. I don't.

00:10:10 Speaker 2

I think it was the Vichy French who had him. I think it was somewhere around there. He he North Africa, around there.

00:10:17 Speaker 1

Right. And he never spoke about it, ever?

00:10:19 Speaker 2

He wouldn't. He wouldn't.

00:10:19 Speaker 3

No. Ever.

00:10:21 Speaker 2

The only thing is when Von Ryan used to be on over Christmas and he he'd be sitting in, particularly when he was used to come to our house for Christmas,

00:10:30 Speaker 3

He would when you'd ask them a question, he'd go 'Oh, you wouldn't be interested'. Changed the subject.

00:10:35 Speaker 3

And whether it it was too painful to talk about.

00:10:38 Speaker 3

But, you know, as I say, they they didn't think they were doing anything heroic. They were just doing what they had to do. Yeah.

00:10:47 Speaker 2

Well you have to, don't you, I suppose.

00:10:49 Speaker 1

Yeah. Yeah. Wow, that's fascinating. What a story.

00:10:53 Speaker 4

If you could like describe like people who participated in the wartime generation in three words, what would they be?

00:11:00 Speaker 2

Bigger than me.

00:11:03 Speaker 5

Good answer.

00:11:04 Speaker 1

That's a very good answer. That's perfect.

00:11:10 Speaker 1

Why so why do you think it's important to share stories like this?

00:11:15 Speaker 2

Because my granddaughter said I had to.

00:11:17 Speaker 1

You were told to.

00:11:20 Speaker 3

No I think I think the generations that have come up, it's something they need to know. You know, rather than sitting on an iPad and a phone, this needs to be out there.

00:11:29 Speaker 2

It's, it's again, it's about linking it.

00:11:31 Speaker 2

Isn't it?

00:11:32 Speaker 2

It it's about linking it. She's linked because her dad was very close to my dad, so he's always been interested and he so.

00:11:44 Speaker 2

But other people haven't got that, you know what I mean?

00:11:46 Speaker 3

Yeah, yeah.

00:11:47 Speaker 2

I mean, we're we're 72 now. You know what I mean? And and you you think.

00:11:53 Speaker 3

You don't have to brag about that.

00:11:56 Speaker 2

There's other people, right, who have lost all sort of contact with that, you know what I mean? Some of these girls who who come into school, some of their grandparents.

00:12:04 Speaker 3

Have died young. They **haven't been told** [?].

00:12:05 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or or or some of their grandparents, younger than I can even imagine, you know what I mean? It's it's just the way things have evolved.

00:12:11 Speaker 1

Yeah, yes, yeah. And it's lost that that personal connection, isn't it? If you know someone that that was there, it makes it more.

00:12:21 Speaker 3

And I think it does need to be told. Yeah, because of what went on.

00:12:23 Speaker 2

Yeah. When I was growing up, I I, as I say, I grew up in the Dingle, South End. Then there was a place down at the bottom of the Dingle, by the Gaumont facing the Gaumont Picture House, facing Toxteth Chapel.

00:12:37 Speaker 2

And there was a place there called Turners Memorial Home.

00:12:40 Speaker 2

And Turners Memorial home was basically full of their veterans, and they all had legs missing, you know, and stuff. And they used to come out, in the summer, they used to push them out and they used to all be, because you used to get the sun outside along the wall, and the there was a bus terminus used to be there and it was the bus terminus was the the the number one and the number three. So there was always people there and all these fellas, you know, maybe.

00:13:10 Speaker 2

They were [?] nearly at the time, when I think about it now, but they used to be in their wheelchairs and or on the those benches, they'd come out on the crutches and that, you know, I mean, but they'd communicate and people'd stop and talk to them, you know, and give them ciggies and different things and sit and talk and communicate and there's that. But there's none of that now, is there? You don't see that. The only time you see a war veteran is Church Street, with a little placard in front of him, with a tin.

00:13:35 Speaker 3

In November. Yeah, November. Yeah.

00:13:39 Speaker 2

You know, you just don't see it now.

00:13:41 Speaker 3

I mean, most have gone anyway.

00:13:46 Speaker 2

Well there's always going to be war veterans, love.

00:13:48 Speaker 1

Just depends which war, doesn't it.

00:13:47 Speaker 3

Oh yeah. It's just basically the Second World War, [?].

00:13:54 Speaker 1

Well, I mean, yeah, we're talking obviously the Second World War is what we're talking about, but you're right, you were talking about war is.

00:13:58 Speaker 1

It's still relevant today, isn't it?

00:14:00 Speaker 2

It's always gonna be, yeah.

00:14:00 Speaker 1

It still happens and there will always be veterans.

00:14:02 Speaker 4

And as a student myself, like all wars are connected in some way or form.

00:14:05 Speaker 3

Yeah, yeah, yeah, they are.

00:14:08 Speaker 2

Oh, that's a bit deep.

00:14:13 Speaker 1

That was absolutely fascinating. Yeah, I could talk to you for hours. Thank you. Honestly, thank you.

00:14:14 Speaker 2

Is that OK?

00:14:15 Speaker 1

It was brilliant.

00:14:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, I think you have to buy me a pint.

00:14:21 Speaker 1

You know, you're on. Thank you.