

S WALES TALKING MAGAZINE – AUDIO INTERVIEW MAY 2002
NORMAN HOPKINS TALKS TO DEREK KNEE ABOUT HIS INVOLVEMENT
IN SIGNING OF SURRENDER DOCUMENT WITH GERMAN HIGH COMMAND IN MAY 1945

FOR ‘THEIR FINEST HOUR PROJECT’ APRIL 2024

**This audio file has been submitted separately along with a transcription document under my name Susan Moore and my father’s name Norman Hopkins - with the title
“ NORMAN HOPKINS TALKS TO DEREK KNEE AND THE SURRENDER SIGNING IN GERMANY, MAY 1945”**

DURATION 13 MINUTES 27 SECONDS

April 30th 1945. Hitler was dead. May 4 1945 Montgomery meets with German delegation to discuss certain matters of importance to us. Derek Knee was involved due to his language skills and was used as translator. Montgomery interested in complete surrender of the German forces which was done on May 8 1945. The letter was later given to the Imperial War Museum.

Of the 7 who met on the first and following day – the 2 senior Germans both committed suicide afterwards. Another 2 killed in a car accident. Montgomery and vice Admiral Wagne died in the 1970s & 1980s – so only one left and that is Derek himself!

Transcript of audio interview

Norman Hopkins talks to Derek Knee about his wartime experiences April/May 1945 and his involvement during the signing of surrender document with the German high command.

Derek became an Infantry officer in the Army after a year at Cambridge that included some training in University Cadet Corps (military school for boys). After a long period, he was transferred to intelligence work and found himself a few days after D Day at HQ of the 2nd Army in Normandy. His job there was called Enemy Order of Battle and consisted of plotting and recording enemy strength, characteristics of all units involved opposing the British Army, their weapons, personalities and their intentions. He did that job until May 1945 when he found himself just outside Hamburg beside some municipal tennis courts in the town of Lunenburg.

On evening of April 30th 1945...great excitement in their HQ..... announced on the radio that Hitler was dead and replaced by Grand Admiral Karl Donitz. Also rumours that Germans force were about to ask for ceasefire or surrender and were sending delegations to the British to make this request. Derek was asked to get over to HQ of commander of 2nd Army, General Dempsey, ready to do any interpreting that was needed.

On Morning of May 2nd two delegations appeared...one wanted to surrender city of Hamburg & prevent any more death & destruction in that city, whilst the other was higher level delegation and wanted to negotiate with the Commander in Chief of all the allied forces in N W Europe, Field Marshal Montgomery with a view to surrendering the German forces.

After some confusion, they got 2 delegations separated and took one of them off to Montgomery's HQ which was on Lunenburg Heath surrounded by the silver birch trees and heather...& also the caravans which he always used.

Montgomery kept the Germans waiting & lined them up under the flag- the same flag that was flown over Haig's HQ during WW1 and started off conversation, with questions

"Who are you and what do you want?"

The head of the German delegation Admiral Von Friedeburg, who was Donitz' successor, produced a letter which explained that they'd been sent by the head of the German forces General Keitel to discuss, as the letter put it ...to discuss certain matters to us. Derek translated the letter and then put it in his pocket, but letter was later given to **Imperial War Museum**.

Montgomery re-iterated that he wanted an immediate full surrender of all German forces. Germans said they had no authority to negotiate a full surrender. What the German delegation was doing was they were playing for time and trying to get their troops away from the advancing Russians.

They were told they had no time left in order to negotiate. The Germans were given lunch on their own in a tent and afterwards received a briefing by Montgomery himself. They were in a hopeless situation and caused them a lot of concern and one of them broke into tears. They still thought they had a chance in the Hamburg area. The British were far beyond Hamburg.

Their communications were not really good. They had no choice but to sign but firstly two of them had to return to Flensburg to get permission to sign. They were taken away and then brought back the next day (May 4th) with another officer (suggestion that he may have been a Gestapo man).

There they were taken into tents in Montgomery's HQ. Journalists had gathered there and BBC microphones and a commentator Chester Wilmot - all ready for a PR treatment. Montgomery read out the surrender document in English and called the Germans up, one by one and asked them all to sign. Then ceremony was over and wished them goodbye. They had to take them back to Hamburg.

This happened on May 4th 1945. A lot of preparations had to be made before May 8th - Victory in Europe Day. A lot of work to be done with the Americans and also surrender due with the Russians who had to meet the Germans in Berlin. Teleprinter lines were red hot with all the things that had to be tied up.

Among the seven who met up on that day & reassembled on 2nd day ...

The two senior Germans Admiral Von Friedeburg & General Kinzel both committed suicide later. The two staff officers, British Col Joe Ewart & German Major Freizel were killed in road accidents shortly afterwards.

Montgomery and vice Admiral Wagne both lived to a good age & died in 1970s and 1980s so only one person still alive....and that's Derek Knee!!!

Duration of Interview : 13'27"

A longer audio account of Derek Knee's life (4 audio reels) can be found online at Imperial War Museum's archive – "Collections"

PS After retirement Derek retired to Barry, South Wales.

He died May 2014, aged 91 years