

Veterans' Voices

Ian Forsyth

Transcription



My full name is Ian Ritchie Forsyth.

I was born on, 23rd December 1923. I think I was born in Hamilton but I'm not sure about that. What I do know, was eh, that as I was born the church bells were ringing, it was snowing. That's what I have been told.

A Military Family: 1 min 3 secs

When I was young my father had been in the army and all his brothers and my grandfather as well and life was very hard because there was very little work. I started going with milk when I was seven years old, for which I was paid two and sixpence a week. I did that for nine years and I still got two and sixpence a week.

War Announced: 1 min 42 secs

I was at church on the Sunday morning, when the beadle came in and whispered to the minister and the minister announced that war had been declared. I couldn't understand why some of the older ladies were crying. But when you are a boy you don't think about these things. I mean this was going to be an adventure. Eh and it's only in later years I appreciated the fact that my mother couldn't talk to me. When she knew I was going away. Her words when the papers came in, "You'll be happy now" and then she went quiet.

Harsh Reality: 2 mins 51secs

We landed at Gold Beach and took part in the battle of Normandy. And it was only then that you began to realise that you weren't the great guy you'd thought you were. You weren't going to liberate Europe. You weren't going to be a hero, which we all thought we were when we joined the army. Boys have a habit of romanticizing quite a bit and just to be in uniform was your big aim but it wasn't long before you realised this was a life or death struggle and it didn't take long to change your character quite a bit, when you were facing somebody who was intent on killing you.

Belsen: 4 mins 14 secs

First thing that I noticed before we got there was the terrible smell. I remember asking the gunner if he could recognise what that was but we couldn't eh, we just knew that there was this greasy sort of smell. When we got to near the camp, we were aware of a number of people who were looking through the barbed wire. We were very conscious of the bodies that were lying around, we did not know then that they were dead. But they were everyone. It was, the strangest feeling, we knew there was something wrong but we didn't know what. We looked at them and they were like skeletons with skin. So we carried, each man had six days rations, so over the fence, in spite of being told don't feed them. Over the fence went some of that, but the people who ate that would die because some of them hadn't eaten for days, maybe weeks but what we did was very wrong, but we were very ignorant of what we should do and what we shouldn't do.

Homecoming: 6 mins 23 secs

I was scared what was I coming home to, I didn't know, I didn't have a job, as such. I couldn't see the future and it was a coincidence that I met the girl I actually married, on the first day I was home. Funnily enough, not funnily enough but eh, luckily for me she was very understanding because I don't think I was much of a gentleman when I came home. I had seen too much, I had done too much and I'm quite sure I was pretty rough. But for some reason or other, I got from that from that girl what I didn't get at home. You're home, it's over, it's done with, we don't talk about it, but that's the worst thing. We don't talk, you've got so much inside you that's got to come out and if you are forbidden that privilege, it just boils up and boils up.

Looking Back: 8 mins 14 secs

Now at my age, I've seen so much, I've learned so much. If I were to go back in time, I think I would probably do exactly the same again. What I don't though is to see my grandsons and great-grandsons having to go through what I went through. I would do anything to prevent that.

And that is why I feel compelled to talk about it to people, to pupils, to students, to try, I don't know if I am successful or not, but to try to get into their heads that there are other ways of doing things.

You have to listen. I have to listen. You've got an opinion. I've got an opinion. But you can never settle that out by fighting. And you've got to give as much as you take. Otherwise my life is wasted.

Link to interview: <http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/veday75/vv-ianforsyth/>