

Transcription
Owen Sanderson
World War I Veteran
- Interviewed March 8, 1993 -

Dave: There we go. Owen, when were you born?

Owen: 23rd of May 1894.

Margaret: He's going to be 99 this year.

Dave: Oh my goodness, 99. 23rd of May, 1894.

Owen: Yeah.

Dave: Where were you born?

Owen: Right in St. Catherine's here.

Margaret: In St. Catherine's on the farm.

Dave: Oh, okay. Did you come from a big family?

Owen: A fairly big family.

Dave: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Owen: I don't know. I was brought up by my grandfather, my grandparents. So that was that.

Dave: Who were your grandparents?

Owen: _____ Sanderson. Old-timers.

Margaret: One of the pioneers that came west in the cart.

Dave: Is that right? Where did they come from?

Owen: Manitoba I think. Yeah, Manitoba.

Margaret: Prairie area, like Winnipeg.

Owen: Down there in Manitoba. That's when the settlers went west, it was in Manitoba. Originates from the old Selkirk settlers.

Dave: So that's where they came from, one of the original Selkirk settlers?

Owen: Sure. They came from the old country too. _____ and England. Closely to that.

Dave: Right, right. I should just mention for the sake of the tape that I'm talking with Owen Sanderson. It's March 9, 1993, and his wife Margaret is also here with us. Margaret's correct, right.

Margaret: Yeah, I was born here too.

Dave: Alright. Actually I'll talk to Owen first and I'd like to get some of your stories too.

Margaret: Oh yeah, you talk to Owen, he'll tell you more.

Dave: Owen, do you remember when you enlisted to go to the first World War?

Owen: I think it was December of 1914. I think that, yeah in December 14 I think, 1914. I kind of forget this now you know.

Dave: That's alright, I forget too and I'm not nearly your age. What regiment did you enlist into?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: What regiment did you join?

Owen: The 5th. The first division. 5th battalion. 2nd brigade. See the 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th were part of the 2nd brigade. Old general _____ was _____ at that time. When I first went to war, I first went over to July 1915. That's when I went to France. Of course I was there for about 14 months you know, at the Somme, and that's where I got wounded.

Dave: At the Somme?

Owen: On the Somme. 26th of September, 1916. I got wounded there. I still got the scar right there yet. I might see it. My arm you know. 1916.

Margaret: Right in the neck too.

Dave: At the neck. Was it chrapnel?

Owen: It was chrapnel. But on my neck I got that on August 1918. Hit me in the back of the neck, _____. It was the 10th of August, 1918. And after I came back from _____ to Paris. I had been in Paris on leave you know, and when I got back _____ in August 8, 1918. So that was that. A lot of them dates now I forget.

Dave: I think you're remembering a lot of them. I think you're doing a really good job. Were you in infantry?

Owen: Infantry. The 5th and the 7th and 8th and 10th was all infantry. The first division was all infantry.

Dave: So you must have seen some pretty horrible battles?

Owen: Well, I seen a few. I didn't want to go back the 2nd time. I went back the 2nd time. The first time I got home and ended in the hospital with Imperial Soldier. That's the British you know. They said if I got back to England, he said I shant come back again. I told him I wouldn't come back either, but I came back. I was sent back. I did another 13 months in France. I spent Christmas Day, 1915 in the trenches. That was Christmas Day 1915. Parkstreet Wood.

Dave: What was life like in the trenches?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: What was life like in the trenches?

Owen: It was vulgar. Slept in the wet and cold and all of that. Not very good in the trenches. And you're only about a few hundred yards from the German lines you know. You would hear them holler ____ and fire. You'd hear the bullets whistle and all of that. Anyways, I smelt the powder and heard the bullets and heard the whistling and that was all I wanted to see.

Dave: I was talking with a World War I veteran by the name of Dan Pelletier who was at Vimmy the day they took the Ridge. He's 102 years old.

Owen: Well.

Margaret: And he's still living?

Dave: Yes.

Owen: Well you see. I wasn't at Vimmy Ridge. I got wounded in September 26, 1916. And Vimmy Ridge was taken April 9, 1917. I was England getting over my wounds you know.

Dave: Where you ever in the trenches or in battles when the Germans used gas?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Where you ever where the Germans used gas?

Owen: Oh yeah, in there yeah. I pulled that gas mask over. Over there several times when the gas came over. When that gas first came out in April 1915, and the major told us when you see that gas come over, you take your handkerchief out and you piss on it and you put that over your mouth and nose. So that's what we were told. That's when the gas masks first came out. They got them little later on. It says there in the early parts of the war. Had no gas masks then. So that was that.

Dave: So you must have been about 17 years old. 16 or 17.

Owen: I was about 19 then.

Dave: 19 then.

Owen: So that was that.

Dave: So why did you decide to enlist and join the army?

Owen: I seen a lot of others join up too, signed up too. They all said the same. They see somebody else enlist so they join too. That's the way it was. I guess that's about all I seen over there. But I seen enough anyway.

Dave: So when you joined the army did you go through any basic training?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Did you go through any basic training before they sent you overseas?

Owen: No.

Dave: No.

Owen: See, we trained in England. I forgot England. We trained there and then they sent us over to France. That's where I _____ and joined the 5th. We were in the trenches. So that was the way it was.

Dave: Before you left to go overseas, did you have any idea of what you were getting yourself into?

Owen: Oh no. I wanted to get there. All wanted to get there. The war might be over before we got there. We got there and got more then we needed.

Margaret: All a bunch of young men.

Owen: We were young and full of adventure. When you're young you go places. That's the way it was, in anything. When you're young you go anywhere.

Dave: So, was it worth it going and fighting?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Was it worth it going and fighting?

Owen: I guess it was. We seen all the things we wanted to see. The way things was alright. It was good adventure anyways.

Margaret: Defended Canada.

Owen: We did.

Margaret: Come back to Canada, that's where you came to live.

Owen: I seen all kinds of German soldiers too you know. They're all dressed in kind of a greenish grey. They call it dirty grey. A greenish grey. And boots on about up to there you know.

Dave: Did you ever take any German prisoners?

Owen: Oh, we took lots of them. Quite a few anyways. When I was over the top, over, we took a bunch. I know the heavy artillery kept lots of _____ and they gave up right away. That artillery was a bugger.

Dave: Yeah I remember I went to visit Vimmy Ridge about 3 years ago, and I couldn't believe the size of the craters in the earth created by those massive bombs.

Owen: Sure. Bombs and shells. Big bombs. We use to call that sausage. German sausage. By god it has quite a kick to the Jew. Canada lost a lot of men there in that first war you know. Killed, wounded and missing.

Margaret: And in the second war too they lost a lot of men.

Owen: Oh yes. Both wars.

Margaret: And today, men are getting lost. Both men and women.

Owen: And there's quarrelling and fighting among themselves yet.

Dave: Yeah it's a hell of a world isn't it?

Owen: Oh, it certainly is. Thinking traditions and the country is not getting any better as long as they're quarrelling, _____, starving and all of that. Conditions are not getting any better. Effects of war and all that. It's a bugger alright. No matter what politicians tell you about, conditions are not getting any better, as long as it's like this.

Dave: Do you remember when you were discharged?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Do you remember when you were discharged?

Owen: I think it was June 11, 1919, in Winnipeg. June 11, 1919, in Winnipeg.

Dave: I don't suppose you remember your regiment number?

Owen: Oh yeah. 440599. 440599.

Dave: 440599. Okay.

Margaret: Sure is a wonderful mind he's got.

Dave: That's incredible. When you came back did you get any sort of a pension for being wounded?

Owen: Oh yeah. I got \$12.50, and then I complained and they raised it up to \$24 I think.

Margaret: \$12.50 first and the next it was \$24.

Owen: And then they raised it up to \$24.

Dave: Was that \$24 a month.

Owen & Margaret: Yeah.

Margaret: \$12 and some cents in the beginning and then it went up to \$24 and some cents. So you can see how poor they were.

Dave: You were able to work when you came back?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: You were able to work when you came back?

Owen: I could do a bit you know.

Margaret: Not much. But you see he had a wound on the leg too and on his arm, he couldn't move his arm straight up. Just so far up. I know when we use to drive in _____ and then he'd finish it off. We'd work 2 together and made our home. We didn't build it or anything, we had it built, but I mean in little things. This is what the lack is today is the cooperation between the man and the woman. They have beautiful children to cooperate the marriage _____. It's work that they have to do. You can't go along in life without doing a little bit of work.

Dave: Absolutely.

Margaret: It might not seem much to the outsider or everywhere, but it gives it inside here. And she's got to work too. We both work together. We had a very small pension when we first got married. What was it again, \$23.

Owen: What is this?

Margaret: When we first got married, what was your pension again?

Owen: \$22.50.

Margaret: Yeah, \$22.50. We made it, we lived on the farm. That's how we could make it.

Owen: That's right.

Dave: Do you continue to receive a pension?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Do you continue to receive a pension?

Owen: A what?

Dave: Do you get a pension still?

Owen & Margaret: Oh yeah.

Margaret: Oh yeah we do. We get a better pension now. I said if I had a little quarter of that when I had my kids, my kids would have had a little more to do.

Owen: You see, I got half of what I get I would have been alright.

Margaret: Now we get a great big pension and he's not able to get out and spend it. This is where they're missing out. The ones that comes back from overseas, they should see to them right away. That's when the pension should begin and come into effect. They risk there lives to save you and I and our children. That's what he went through to save that generation. Not here, the one older. My generation too. I don't feel better about it. Each and everyone of us learn by it. Today they have lots of money and they don't know how to use it.

Owen: That's right. There's all kinds of money in the country. All kinds of money.

Margaret: But they don't know how to use it.

Owen: They pay millions of dollars to the ballplayers and football players and all of that. There must be money someplace.

Dave: That's right.

Margaret: And hockey players too.

Owen: Hockey players, yeah.

Margaret: All sports are well paid now.

Owen: Well sports, it's not sports now. It's business. It's all business now. They make a business out of sports. I'm going to tell you we use to pay half a dollar to watch a hockey game. You can't do that now.

Dave: No, that's for sure.

Owen: A dollar to see a professional hockey game. That's all we paid there was a dollar. That was when the old Western Canada league was operating then.

Dave: So after the war do you remember there being any other benefits for veterans from the government, like land benefits or anything like that?

Owen: Well, you _____. But we had to pay that back you know. You'd get loans to buy a farm and equipment but it had to be paid back. But it got pretty reasonable at that time. Some did alright and some didn't.

Dave: So how did you travel back and forth from overseas?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: How did you travel back and forth from Europe?

Owen: Went on the boat to England. Went to France. Went on the boat there again you know, at night. We had to travel by water to go from England to France, you know.

Dave: Do you remember the names of the ships that you travelled on?

Owen: I just forget now. I went overseas on the Scandinavian and I came back on the Ardorway I think. But I went to France it was a troop transport that we went over on. Ships was made into transports to transport soldiers across the channel to France.

Dave: Did they ever use horses in the military?

Owen: Pardon?

Dave: Did they use horses?

Owen: Oh yeah, they used a lot of horses. Calvary and all of that. This last war was all mechanized, tractors and all of that you know.

Dave: So they used, did they ever use horses right in battle?

Owen: Oh yeah. The calvary. Yeah, it was calvary alright.

Dave: Were they very successful using horses?

Owen: Well, they had to chase the Germans back and break up the artillery you know, and all of that.

Dave: So after the war you sort of worked at farming did you?

Owen: Yeah, I tried to farm. We didn't have too much money, but I got a new wheelbarrow anyways.

Dave: So you stayed on the farm right up until you retired?

Owen: Yeah, right now. Still on the farm. I like the farm anyways.

Margaret: The same farm that we're on now.

Dave: Is that right. Margaret, maybe I'll get you to tell me a little bit about your background.

Margaret: Pardon?

Dave: Could you tell me a little bit about your background, your parents, that sort of thing?

Margaret: My parents were Andrew and Christina Whitford. The Whitford's and all of them came from Manitoba too, _____. My mother's father was James Agister and he married Margaret Bear. They had a big family. James and Margaret. So that was it. And they went out anywhere and anything. Oh I travelled around a little bit, but not that much. I come to him and that was the way it went.

Dave: So, when did you two meet?

Margaret: We got married on the 12th of November, 19 what?

Owen: What's that?

Margaret: The day we got hitched up.

Owen: Oh, 1946. That's what it was 46.

Margaret: So you see, it was about 46 years ago.

Dave: Right, right.

Margaret: How long have you been married?

Dave: I have been married for 7 years.

Margaret: 17 years.

Dave: 7 years.

Owen & Margaret: 7 years.

Margaret: Oh you're just a spring chicken then. Do you got any family?

Dave: Yes, we have three. We have two boys and a girl.

Margaret: We were lucky enough to get two. A boy and a girl. Of course we were pretty old when we started out, but that didn't matter. We got two and that was all we wanted. Our girl is in Prince George.

Dave: What does she do in Prince George?

Margaret: Well she's married and lives there and takes care of her husband. She's a hairdresser by trade, but stays at home, but no children. So I got no grandchildren no where. Roddy, he stays home with us here. He takes care of us. He wanted us home. So we come and we're glad that he asked. He built this home and it was his in the beginning, but he went to the hospital and told his dad, he says Dad, you're coming home. I want you home. That's the happiest words we could hear.

Dave: Yeah, I bet.

Margaret: When you go old and your children do not want you, it's very few that do. You see it on everyday life. You see that everyday life. They don't want you. But if you have money they want you. So make sure you have a few dollars left. (laughs) You'll get the old pension and

Dave: That's a sad sort of problem with society. We just don't treat our old people right. We've got a lot to learn.

Margaret: But of course now they put them in good homes, but you spend pretty lonely lives at the end.

Owen: You can't beat the old original home.

Margaret: This is what we put up with, this is what we built up and this is what we made and this is what we sacrificed to build. They wanted to put us in a home but I didn't want to go. I'm kind of stubborn. He was in the mood where he would go anywhere, but he had to come with me. I had to go with him, so we decided to come home here. Roddy said come on home dad, we'll take care of you. That's the best words we ever heard.

Owen: I heard that.

Margaret: Now we have our health. You never know when your sick years are coming. So don't plan on it too long. As long as you and your old girl is together, you'll be happy. Cheer up.

Dave: Those are good words of advice.

Margaret: Yep, that's life. You got to share and take. And take is the main thing. (laughs) One side, not only one side, but both sides. He had to take a lot from me and I had to take a lot from him. We both made it together. Now we're not a bit sorry about it. I am not and I don't think he is either.