

Transcription
Ora Madden
World War II Veteran
- Interviewed March 9, 1993 -

Dave: I'm here with Ora Madden. It's March 9, 1993 and Ora has agreed to have an interview for the Métis War Veterans book that the Gabriel Dumont Institute is producing. When were you born?

Ora: On the 30th of June, 1922.

Dave: Where about's where you born?

Ora: In Wynyard, SK.

Dave: Where did you go to enlist?

Ora: I went to Prince Albert in the first place I went to enlist.

Dave: Why did you enlist?

Ora: Well, I lived on a farm in MacDowell area and there wasn't much money around, and a lot of young fellows were joining the army so we all. From this area there were 93 guys taking in the whole area of soldiers that left MacDowell. All volunteers.

Dave: Did you enlist with any of your friends or relatives or anything like that, or did you go by yourself?

Ora: Just with friends from the area.

Dave: Do you remember there names?

Ora: Yes. Joseph Flanders, and Roddy Hudson, and Leonard Smith, we all joined together.

Dave: What regiment did you join?

Ora: We went up to join in Saskatoon, we went and had a couple of glasses of beer and 3 of us showed sugar. So we had to wait a day and we were going to join the Canadian Armed Core. They made a mistake and joined the Canadian Army Service Core, which is a real good mistake. So they told us that we made the mistake so the next day we went in and past our medical and we joined the army service core.

Dave: Where did you do your basic training?

Ora: I done some in Regina and advanced training in Red Deer Alberta.

Dave: Was that training the same sort of training that all sort of newly enlisted people take or was that specific to the regiment that you joined?

Ora: No, everybody had to take the military training, and advanced training like. We were truck drivers and we had to learn to drive them without, you know, get qualified drivers.

Dave: So, did you go overseas?

Ora: I went overseas in 1942, March of 1942.

Dave: Where did you end up when you first got there?

Ora: We landed in England, and we were in Sessex area for, we were just about 2 years in England before we went overseas.

Dave: What happened after that. Where did you first sort of go into battle I guess?

Ora: Well, we went, we were on a convoy going to North Africa. And we got shelled in the Mediterranean, and they sunk 3 ships and we ended up in Cecily. But Cecily had already been, like I was just reinforcements. Cecily had already been conquered. The main fighting was over on the mainland of Italy. So we spent, we went across to the mainland of Italy and I spent 16 months in Italy, attached to the 1st and 5th Canadian divisions.

Dave: When you're in the army service core, you're basically transporting food and ammunition and that sort of thing to the front, is that it?

Ora: Yeah, we were general transport. We hauled everything. Even meals. We hauled meals up to the mountains for them. We unloaded them up there. There was snow up on the mountains. It was cold on the mountaintops. We hauled everything. Anything at all.

Dave: Do you know a fellow by the name of Marshall Putra. Joseph Marshall Putra?

Ora: No.

Dave: Have you ever heard the name?

Ora: Is he from Cochin?

Dave: He's from Fort Qu'Appelle. That's where he lives right now. I know he lived at Lestock for a little while. He was in ammunition core, he was a driver as well.

Ora: No, I never met him.

Dave: You must have had some pretty crazy experiences. Do any of them stick out in your mind? Some of the more scary experiences I guess?

Ora: Oh yeah, we had lots of that alright. Like when we were moving up all the time, sometimes you'd go till you see the tracer bullets fly and then you figure you're up a little too far and then you turn around and come back. Maybe sleep in your truck all night. Find your own outfit. That happened a few times, lots of times.

Dave: What are tracer bullets? I've heard that a few times?

Ora: Well, it will leave a light streak like. It shows where it hits. About every 3rd shell could be a tracer. If they're shooting at something it would show where to hit.

Dave: Did you ever have any run-ins with artillery or anything like that?

Ora: Oh yeah, we hauled ammunition to the big guns, like on the Hitler line. We hauled ammunition, we had no windshields in our trucks. And we hauled into the big guns and well the Americans had been in there for 5 months and we went in there for 72 hours. They flattened, Hitler line now. Gee I kind of forget the name of the place. Anyhow there's 2 or 3 little Italian towns where nothing stands higher than the doorcase. When we got out on the way to Rome, they were on the run then and then the Americans took over and drove through them.

Dave: Did you ever come under attack from German airplanes or anything like that?

Ora: Oh yes. We were looking at an open air show one night in a valley in Italy. There was about 200 of us. We had the

screen kind of broadside to us. And just beyond us there was some guys welding. And a lone German plane comes in there and he coasted in and he opened his machine guns up just about over top of us and he killed them 3 guys that were welding there. Of course that ended our open air shows, we never had any after that. But he flew out of there, and the search lights were on and he never did get hit. Just brighten up all around him. They new that guys name, that was a German mad major, he'd pull things like that on his own. They knew the pilot. He was a hell of a pilot. He'd pull that kind of things.

Dave: So where were you when the war ended?

Ora: I was just in Germany, just past Eurtrek. Just, we were already hauling everything. Ammunition, everything.

Dave: How did you feel when the war ended?

Ora: Glad. It was kind of. I spent some pretty rough times.

Dave: Did you have any regrets at all about having gone and been in a war?

Ora: Not really, no. Only thing when you come home the land is all bought up and people are all moved in. It was kind of a shock.

Dave: So there was quite a bit of land when you went that was still available?

Ora: Yeah, and when we come home the Ukranian people had moved in and it was all bought up.

Dave: And that's right in this area?

Ora: Yeah, right in the area.

Dave: Were you ever eligible for any of the benefit programs from the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Ora: Well, I did get a little help one time. I got a _____ for farming. But that's all I ever got. Then after my kids had pretty well grew up, I got a chance to get a veterans loan for my house that I have here. But I got it way too late. My kids were, some were just about leaving home when I got it. But that has been the best deal I had in my life, was that veterans loan. Like the first \$6000 was 3% and the 2nd was

5%. I'm still paying on it, but it's a really good deal. I should have had it a lot sooner, when my kids were smaller.

Dave: Yeah, what happened. Did you not know you were eligible or did they not inform you?

Ora: No, they wouldn't give it to me?

Dave: They wouldn't give it to you?

Ora: No.

Dave: Oh really. Why is that?

Ora: Well, they just anytime I put in for it they said I wasn't making enough money and they couldn't go for it.

Dave: But then they finally did?

Ora: Finally did, yeah. The guy that gave us that he was really a good guy. I don't know how long he stayed in there, but he really was helpful for us.

Dave: So do you remember when you were discharged?

Ora: Yeah, 19th of January 1946 in Regina.

Dave: So what did you do after that?

Ora: My son and I got an old truck and we worked in the bush. Then we hauled wood, worked pretty hard at it. Finally I got a job on the forestry and I worked for them for 31 years. Well, I use to work summers and do a little trapping. Sometimes I'd be short of stamps and I'd have to go work somewhere else. I worked in _____ falls for Showquest construction and painted one year and worked for a school unit. I've done lots of different things. But they'd always lay me off one week short of stamps. The government for years and years. So I'd have to go out and get another job somewhere else. My kids were small and it was kind of bad. But I still, the house has been the best deal that I've ever had, from the government, veterans.

Dave: Did you get any veterans pension of any kind?

Ora: Now I get a 5% pension from the government, a little under \$100 a month.

Dave: Is that in addition to, you must also get the old age pension?

Ora: Oh yeah I get the old age, Canada Pension and I paid into a retirement thing all the time I worked for the government for forestry.

Dave: Did you have any relatives who went and enlisted in the war, in World War II?

Ora: Oh yeah, I had lots of cousins and that. I met a couple overseas. No, none from around here. They were from Sessex, New Brunswick. Some of them were in the American army.

Dave: Oh, is that right. What are there names, do you remember them?

Ora: One was Frank Madden. He's from Sessex, New Brunswick. I'd see him a couple of times. He was in the engineers.

Dave: What about World War I. Do you know any Métis veterans specifically? Probably most of them have died.

Ora: Yeah, they're all gone.

Dave: Do you know any of there names?

Ora: I guess Sven Scott was one name. Sven Scott. There was quite a few I guess from around here, but I just don't remember.

Dave: Oh, that's okay. Sven Scott. He was from here was he?

Ora: Well close by, yeah.

Dave: Would you happen to know what regiment he was in?

Ora: Gee, I don't. He was in both wars, he's dead now, he died. His son lives along the Shellbrooke highway somewhere. Morrison Scott.

Dave: Morrison?

Ora: Yeah.

Dave: Okay. Was there anything else you wanted to add about your experiences at all?

Ora: No, just that we had one real bad winter in Italy. We hauled gas pretty well everyday in our trucks and we had canvas' at the bank. I'd sleep in there or out in the tent and it rained. And cold. Sort of like B.C. weather. I've got arthritis pretty bad from that I think. In the knees. I take pills all the time for arthritis.

Dave: All the dampness.

Ora: And the neck. I've got it extremely. Shoulders and everything. We couldn't go in any buildings. They wouldn't let us in any buildings. And it was just a cold, damp winter.

Dave: Why wouldn't they let you go into any buildings?

Ora: On account of lice and stuff like that.

Dave: Oh really.

Ora: Yeah, so we couldn't stay in any buildings. So we stayed in the back of that truck. We hauled gas all day and smell the gas sleeping in there. But it was better than sleeping in a pup tent when it's raining. Every night when you go into your blankets you slept with all your clothes on and it's just like you're crawling into a wet bed like. And then you lay there and your body heat would kind of warm it up and that's the way you were in the night. I hardly had a day to dry your blankets. It was damp all the time. We had enough blankets, but it was a pretty rough winter. Of course we were young and we didn't seem to mind at the time.

Dave: Did you ever get leave at all to take a break from it?

Ora: Oh yeah, I'd come home on leave a few times. But, no I went overseas in 1942, oh we had passes and leaves to. We didn't have that much money to spend. I signed half of my pay over to my parents. My dad was quite old and badly crippled up. We didn't have that much money to spend really. Well, I got \$1.30 a day and I sent half of it home. Yeah, that's the only thing that really bugs me when we come home and the land was all gone and nobody cared. The guys that did get a loan, they had land. Some of them never got married and they got veterans loans and got help all the time. And the rest, some had 3 or 4 kids and we couldn't get nothing. I think it was kind of unfair the way it went. But now like, well this house I really appreciated that. I'm still paying, but the payments aren't that high and it's really good.

Dave: When you came home were you hoping to buy some land?

Ora: I thought I would be a farmer. But I guess it turned out just as well. I worked with forestry.

Dave: What did you think of that meeting. You were at the meeting in Saskatoon, were you?

Ora: Yeah.

Dave: Do you think that there's a good thing that there's a national aboriginal veterans association?

Ora: I kind of think so. Sure it is. Like when we were joining up, a lot of times we didn't know what outfits. We were just joining and they'd put us where. We didn't. Like a lot of guys that were in the infantry, my God they had it rough. Graveyards over there like you wouldn't believe. Young fellows. But I got, we were lucky enough. I drove a truck with A13 on it in Italy. And the guy in A14 backed over a tape line where we were hauling in _____ and blew the back end off his truck and 2 of the engineers got chrapnel in there legs. He ended up coming out of a minefield. He ended up 50 yards inside of the lines. Where the white lines were, and he walked out. He's in Calgary now. I talked to him 2 years ago. He came to Calgary and a friend of mine was in Alberta and he use to see him all the time. He knew I was here and I knew he was there, but we just never got together. I was in Calgary one day and I phoned him. I got him at first call. But you know, we got treated okay. We had enough to eat and stuff like that. It wasn't always the best, but always enough.

Dave: The kinds of issues that who was it, Gordon Ahenekey was talking about at that meeting. People not getting the right pensions or not accessing land grants and loans for land and that kind of things. Are there issues that you see are just issues that just Aboriginal veterans had a problem with, or do you think there was something wrong with the way the DVA basically administered there benefit programs and that kind of thing?

Ora: I tried quite a few times. And they said, well I had a quarter of land from my parents. They would never give me nothing. They said it wasn't enough. I couldn't make a living on it and they wouldn't help me at all. Not one little bit. They said if I'd of had more land they'd probably help me. I

couldn't buy any. It was all bought up. And anytime I'd go for anything, they wouldn't help. We tried to get some help, we were both veterans, to get a better truck like. For when we first started in the bush. They wouldn't give us nothing. We were both volunteer veterans overseas. I was 4 years and 7 months and he was longer.

Dave: Who was your partner?

Ora: Andy Johnson. He's dead now. He come home and he had TB when he come home. He was in, they went to the _____ after he come home, and eventually that might have had something to do with his death.

Dave: Was he aboriginal?

Ora: No. (end of side 1)

Dave: What do you think of the kinds of things that are happening in the world today as far as the wars and that sort of thing? Do you think we'll ever see an end to things like war?

Ora: Gee, it's terrible. I was really surprised on how accurate the missiles and things are now. If there is another war it's going to be a different war then we were in. I can't understand all these countries. They're really bad the way they're going. Everybody is unhappy with everything. But I was kind of glad that they slowed down Sadam there. I think he's another Hitler.

Dave: He had the same sort of fanaticism?

Ora: Yeah, that guy has got to be stopped.

Dave: Yeah, they certainly have the high tech weaponry these days.

Ora: Do they ever.

Dave: You don't even need to get close to the enemy.

Ora: That's right. They're so accurate they can hit anything. It's wonderful.

Dave: I did an interview with Edward King.

Ora: Yeah, I know him well.

Dave: He's talking about how sometimes they would get bombed by there own people or that sort of thing. Sometimes those targets weren't as well eyed or whatever. Did you ever have any experience with that?

Ora: Yeah, the Americans. The American airforce was kind of, Jesus, they didn't seem to know who they were going to bomb next. And well when we went overseas driving in, we had just like little salt shaker lights on our trucks. When the Americans came they had the big sealed beams and pretty near blind us. (laugh) So we weren't very long tearing them out. But Hitler at that time I think was running out of gas and we would have had a lot more trouble if he'd of have lots of gas for his airplanes and that. Cause we got a few air raids from them, but not that many.

Dave: Did you ever take any German prisoners at all?

Ora: Well, we hauled lots. We hauled them. The German SS were just terrible. They were terrible guys.

Dave: Why do you say that?

Ora: Well they wouldn't give up. They were mean guys. They were real Gestapos. But at the last they didn't have no boots left on hardly on there feet. They were ready to quit. A lot of them are kids.

Dave: Hitler youth.

Ora: Yeah.

Dave: So where would you take them?

Ora: We'd take them back to prison camps, and just haul them back like. (end of tape)