

Transcription
CBC Interview
Native War Vets
(Vital Morin)
- November 11, 1992 -

(music introduction)

You see at least in Duck Lake at Fort Carlton, the Indians would make a treaty, they didn't want to talk. It was 2-3 days they were there nothing, not doing nothing. All talking I suppose and they asked the Commissionaire and the governor if they couldn't pray first. So the priest had their holy communion here and the Indians had as they call it, ceremony. Pipe ceremony. To me it is the holy of all holies. You're entering into something here that I suppose a lot of people think of. Anyways, the Indians had there pipe ceremony here and the white people had there wine. Bread and wine. The body and bread of Christ. And the other ones smudged themselves with sweet grass. Each one of the Indians there was smudged. Then as sons of God, and you can never break a treaty when you take God's name into consideration or use God. And then they went into treaty. You see, we didn't have. We didn't write. So the word had to be supreme law, because that's what my grandfather said. He told me, he says we prayed. And for that reason they can never break our treaty, because they used God.

I was taught that and when I heard them they use to sit in a circle I called them the council of elders. And they were talking about Kaiser. They were talking about Hitler and what is going to happen when they take the King then in 39. What is going to happen to us. Is he going to break the treaty this man they claim is very, very powerful, this Hitler. He's been preparing for war for years. Just a matter of time till he gets it. They said maybe we'll have to go over there and help, help our queen and king. So that's howcome I joined.

When payday came around, 2 weeks pay was \$6, and there was quite a few fellows from Meadow area. We jumped in there to see the _____, first time I seen Meadow Lake. Meadow Lake was really small then, really small. But yet it was kind of a little community and a few stores and a hotel and stuff like that. And I seen a couple of my cousins from Green Lake, a couple of Morin boys in uniform. They just joined up. And I says how did you get around to getting uniform, how do you do this. I was kind of, really didn't know any better. He says there's a recruiting office just across the street. He said, if you want to do it go

over there and join up. You just go and talk to, I think it was the Sergeant sitting behind the desk. Just tell him that you want to join the army. So I didn't know any better. I walked over and talked to this sergeant and sure enough he made the application and after we were done, he gave me a little paper and said, about 2-3 doors down the road, I know a doctor there. Go and give you a rough checkup to see if anything is wrong. And if there isn't you'll bring the paper back, so away I went.

While training here, we were always down there. We were not included in these special functions that they had. We were always on the sidelines. But I was use to that, because of my hometown and the town surrounding. I found out that in France, Belgium, Germany and Holland, when you're in a war, you're a very close family. Why that is I don't know. Maybe it's because each depended on each other for life and whatever. When you're in the war you think of your parents. It's funny, I really thought of them. What if they get a telegram that I've been killed in action. I use to think that. I don't think I was that worried about myself. Of course I was young, I was just 19, not taking care of anything really. And I don't think I really thought of death that it may come. I use to pray a lot that they could take me through so I could help my people in days to come or years or many moons.

That was a close family while we were at war, an awfully close family. People would do anything for each other, even risk your life. And the other thing I noticed too was, we went on scouting missions. I had moccasins, that's what I wore. Because an army boot is that thick, and you're always pretty well in the bush, not on the prairie. And if you step on a twig, you can lift your foot up notched up and look. That's how quiet you are. Whereas the white guys wore the thick boots and they wouldn't know when they step on a twig. Sometimes it's like a rifle, especially if the Germans are 100 yards from you and you got to cross their line and you got to come back. If they had knew you had gone through them already now they're watching. And you got to hurry before daylight. If you want to go and maybe look at how many tanks they have or _____, where the batteries, artillery are. Stuff like this. Lance Corporal would give that report to the Sergeant and the Sergeant would relay that to where the artillery is for one thing. And we knew where we were going, because it was a strange land. We don't really know where are the lakes, where are the rivers.

They trained us a year and a half or more. They trained us in all the time in England too while we were there. We were being

trained. And I started off enlisting with the Canadian Armed Core, that's the tanks. That's why I took my advance training in Borden. Then they were assured of reinforcements in the infantry so they trained me in England as an infantry man and put me in the Regina Rifle regiment. And that's where I landed with the infantry, with the Regina John's. Then I went all the way through with them, all the way across there through France, Belgium, Holland and then Germany. Just got into Germany in the _____ of the _____ forest. That's where I got captured and I was a prisoner of war.

They didn't treat us too awfully hard. They didn't force us to do anything. The only thing was that they never fed us anything. Just one meal, just soup or turnips. Mostly vegetables in it. And a piece of white bread. That's your meal for all day. I guess they were getting really down and didn't have very much themselves. They were unable to feed us. I lost nearly 30 pounds there in 3 months. I was lucky I only stayed there 3 months. I was captured in Feb. 44 and I was liberated in May when the war was over.

Interviewer: So you were captured in Feb. 45.

February 45. I'm behind here. Yes, 45.

It seems to me that wherever the hardest to penetrate is where the Canadian soldiers use to be sent. There always was a place where the toughest is going and then they'd send the Canadian soldiers to penetrate through there in advance. For some reason I guess they were almost I'd say the best army that they've ever had as far as the infantry regiment and also tank core and all the reinforcements and everything that we've had. They were just classified as being the toughest. They were very well disciplined and also the training was good, they were good fighters.

Quite interesting about that Henry Bouldry. He was captured there. He went ahead kind of a scouting mission and he got up there too late in the morning. It was already becoming daylight. And the Germans weren't up yet. We were fighting. So he had to hide. So he hid in a boxcart, not much bigger than this those boxcarts over there. So he stayed there, he couldn't get out. The Germans were right there, even standing, leaning against that boxcart. They never thought to look in there. He stayed there 4 days and 4 nights. And when they were sleeping, you know these icicles, that's what he had for 4 days. That's what kept him alive. So finally he said well they're going to

kill me anyways. So he went and walked, he couldn't ride anything. This was the Northern part of Italy, and I guess it was _____, is that what you call it, up there into Germany. Finally got there. Walked all the way, at nights only he'd walk. He'd study the situation during the day. Hide during the day and study a house you know the houses. Houses here and the barns here together. So he would look, look, look and he'd see chickens. So at night he'd sneak over there and steal eggs and then that's all he'd have. He couldn't make a fire. Eggs is all he ate until he got to the Rhine river and then he stayed at the bank all that day in the bush. So he looked for a shallow place. Finally he found it and he put his overcoat on top over here so he knew he could walk. So he walked across that. So he sneaked through the German lines, and came to the Americans during that morning. But that overcoat he had was Mongolian so finally he could see the Americans and the Germans were over here. And he yelled at them, they were going to shoot him. So I guess he said I haven't used God's name very much in my life, but I told the American's honest to God I'm an Indian from Canada. So they finally took him and sit him back just outside of London.

When we were just in _____ forest and we were just settling down there and we got surrounded by the Germans, I was on the Bren gun and I had a Lance Corporal in charge of the Bren and a loader to load up the magazines. And both of those were killed on each side of me. I was in the centre and I didn't get it. They were fairly close friends of mine. I didn't even have time to think. I just stayed there and finally just gave up and I got a kick in the ribs by a German. Looked up and here was a barrel of a gun facing right into my head. I knew they were the enemy so I had to just get up and give up because I had no choice.

You see in 46-47, the memo had come out that each Indian would get, treaty Indian Veterans would get \$5000. That was the war allowance in the veterans lab administration. That was there decision. But when it came to Indian Affairs they said it's far too much money. They don't know how to handle money. That's the truth. I got that on records in my files. So they brought that down to \$2300. But what happened was that we did not get that \$2300. The VLA gave it but it got stuck in Indian Affairs and I don't know what ever happened to that money.

I went farming when I came home. You were suppose to get, I think the white people got \$90-110 a month when you go farming. That was to keep you there, help you out with your farm. Gas

was about \$8 a barrel then. They did _____ horses. We didn't get that. I got 2 cheques. That was in July and August. I was suppose to get it for 12 full months, but the point is that we didn't know that. We were not informed of those things.

We drank a lot. That was the report of the Indian nation. Some of these people are drunks, have become drunks. That \$2300 is what you were referring too. Some of them are not interested, which is not true. Some of them are just not ready for it, may be true. All those years that we qualified for a pension of some description, there's more than one. There's disability, war veterans allowance, and allowance, what do you call it, civilian war allowance. We didn't know those things and yet I don't think it's the government. It was the Indian Affairs that never informed us of those things.

No telephone, no nothing, no power, no such thing, even no roads. Our first gravel highway was built, completed in 1958, before it came to the community here. It was the first gravel highway, all weather road. You can see that there was no communication. We didn't know about all the benefits that veterans were getting. VLA, land grants, people wanting to go farming, but a lot of them were getting housing, and machinery plus cattle and land. Stuff like that. I don't know if it was all _____ or part loan or something, I think it was part loan. But anyways, those benefits we never known about anything of those kinds up in this part of the country. Nobody told us or nothing. By the time we realized that those things were being in existence it was too late. The program was already cut-off.

They wrote to me and told me that they're sending me an application to apply for some kind of a compensation for prisoners of war. I sent in the application, and God I never heard from them or nothing. Then all of a sudden from Ottawa and they wrote a letter to my wife instead of me and they said that I was not eligible because I wasn't quite in the prison camp 90 days, I was short about 30 days or so. I wasn't eligible for the compensation because I wasn't in 90 days. Also they said that they were sorry to hear that your husband had past away. They told her to go to the nearest DVA office and apply for a widow's pension.

It's one of the reasons why we started a Métis Veterans Association. We were trying to see if there was anyway that some of these benefits could come back, or come to us. And we haven't succeeded into anything. We've made proposal to

governments to try and give us a little funding so we can continue with our association. We haven't got first base for that as yet and this going to 3 years now since our association establish. We're unable to get together due to no funding.

I'd like to see a little bit of benefits here before we die. Surely there should be a little of something for us, after serving for 4 years in World War II, I think the government should come across and compensate us with something. This is why we think that by being notified and not being aware of those programs that we could have at least applied for and being out in the bush here, we didn't know about these things. By the time we realize that there was some benefits for veterans, we were too late. The program had already expired.

There was one guy in _____, I know him. He was hit in the leg. He got drunk after 45-46 in those years. Drank, drank. But ever winter when it was cold his leg would swell up, his knee. So he never did anything because I think we were disgusted with Indian Affairs. It's no use asking them for something, because get out of here, this office. They were kings and they lived on the reserves too. So finally his pain was so bad that he went to Broadview and went to the doctor. This is years and years later. And the doctors looked at his leg. This was in the wintertime. What happened to you. I was hit in the leg in France. Oh, well are you getting anything for it? Oh, he didn't know. No. Well, that guy picked up the phone and phoned the DVA in Regina and got him an appointment and about 4-5 months later he got his disability pension. You see, these are the things that bug me. I don't think that we're asking for something that isn't ours.

If I had a chance and I was young enough, if they'd take me, I'd go. I'd still go and defend our country.

Interviewer: Why?

If they'd ever use me. I'm proud of my country. I think we should stay the way we are and be free. Our life the way it is. I don't think we should be ruled by anybody else but our own people.