



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Donald Madley Interviewed by Jerry Robinson

Track 1

Donald begins by explaining that he comes from a military family. His father was a Regimental Sergeant Major in the Army Pay Corps. His brother was born out in Germany during the First World War, and Donald was born at the Royal Artillery Arsenal in Woolwich, London on 13 July 1927. From the age of 5, he lived out in Egypt, as his parents were serving out there. Donald enlisted in the Army in 1944, on reaching the age of 18, entering the Royal Engineers, where a brother was an Officer, so claimed him. Given his knowledge of military life, Donald knew what to expect when going through training and what army life was like. His first posting was to Aldershot where he went to a physical training unit for a short time before being posted out to Gibraltar.

JR: What was your unit and what did you do in Gibraltar:

On arrival in Gibraltar, Donald joined 32nd Fortress Company, Royal Engineers, and was billeted in South Barracks. He went out there with two other colleagues, who became close friends. His first impression of Gibraltar was of a quiet place, as soldiers in those days didn't have a lot of money. He comments, that when the Americans, who were well paid, visited Gibraltar, all the local prices went up. Donald states that they linked up with the Cameroonians who, like themselves, were also broke. The Cameroonians suggested that they get it (money) off the Americans. He explains that at the time in Alamenda Gardens there were no blocks of flats as now but just a road running through the gardens. They used to go up there and call the Americans up before relieving them of some of their money. Donald admits that it was an old but true story!

On the departure of the Cameroonians, the Royal Engineers moved to Camp Bay where they guarded prisoners of war.

JR: Referring to Gibraltar:

Donald repeats that Gibraltar was a quiet place. He refers to getting to know the place by walking round it, particularly the pubs on Main Street and the Trocadero Nightclub, where the dancing girls came over from Spain to perform.

However, not having much money, most of the time was spent in the NAAFI, the usual pastime of soldiers being drinking.

Track 2

Donald stated that his first job was that of a driver. He didn't like the job as he wanted to be with his mates, so swapped jobs, ending up in the Works Company, where amongst other places, he worked on the airfield as well as about the Rock. Donald recalls how he used to erect gates, repair and build, as well as doing demolition. **He recalls that there was work going on extending the runway and that there was also tunnelling still taking place and that Germans were working in the tunnels, commenting, that they had no choice but to work. In the tunnels, the PoWs were employed shifting the spoil and in laying concrete and the roads. Donald states that guarding the POWs was fairly minimal, as most of them were just waiting to go home. However, they didn't have too much freedom. Donald mentions that just before he got there, there were problems with the Italian POWs as the Germans set upon them when Italy surrendered and changed sides, so they had to be separated. Most of the Germans were captured in North Africa. At the time, there were about 100 German POWs in Gibraltar, a lot being very young. Donald states that they never caused much trouble. Donald talks about taking one of the German POWs to the hospital with an eye injury. Day to day control of the POWs was overseen by British Officers and NCOs. Donald recounts about working occasionally on the extension of the runway and at how on one occasion he lost his false teeth in the sea, much to the amusement of the German workers.**

JR: How long were you in Gibraltar:

Donald stated that he was in Gibraltar for two years, from about 1945 to 1947. There were quite a few local families back in Gibraltar, as they had begun to return from the evacuation. He recalls that there was not much contact with the local people and you never really got to know them, although a couple of his colleagues ended up marrying local girls. Donald remarks that during his time there the garrison was being reduced and life was beginning to return to normal. Donald refers again to the Americans and how they found them rough and too flash with their money, which was the cause of fights whenever they came into the bars. Donald reminisces about when the Americans once participated in the Ceremony of the Keys, most of the Scottish contingent and other Regiments entered the square from Main Street and with the Americans already lined up at the back with their drums.

JR: What other off duty activity did you do:

Donald talks about swimming and sunbathing most of the time in Camp Bay/Catalan Bay. He speaks about the border being open and that some soldiers used to go over there to La Linea but that they were deterred as the Americans used to go there (to the brothels) and brought with them diseases. Donald again recalls how the average people weren't very friendly so most soldiers kept themselves to themselves.

JR: Did you enjoy your time in Gibraltar?

Donald admits that at first he didn't enjoy his time in Gibraltar but did afterwards. He states that it was a boring place as there was little to do. There was a cinema and plenty of football took place, but he wasn't interested in sport very much.

Referring to the accommodation at Camp Bay and the guarding of the PoWs (from photos – see supporting material), Donald described how he lived in corrugated tin Nissan huts, in rows. He describes the accommodation as quite good, as was the food. He recites that when the Americans came into town they used cycles to get about the Rock. The local soldiers used to steal the bikes late at night to get back to Camp Bay and then throw them in the sea at the Southern end of the bay. The Americans eventually found where the bikes were dumped but no one owned up. He stated that there were too many gates and enclosed areas to make walking round the upper part of the Rock possible.

Track 3

JR: The tunnels:

With some prompting from his wife, Donald describes the road which leads up to Catalan Bay, where there were a number of short tunnels which led to a hospital located inside the Rock. He recalls that he was on guard there one night, about 2am and had gone out to get water to make tea. On returning inside there was an almighty crash. Going back out, he discovered that there had been a large rock fall on top of the water point. He concludes that he was seconds from being killed. Donald talks a little about guarding the underground hospital but didn't know whether it was ever used. He recalls working in the tunnels where there were a lot of ammunition chambers. He used to have to repair the corrugated tin roofing which had rotted or leaked, and installed doors or gates. There were also a lot of workshops and other storage places within the Rock.

JR: Military presence and facilities of the Rock:

During Donald's time on the Rock (c 1945) he talks about how the military presence was being reduced as there was a lot of demobilisation taking place. He talks how he was involved in dismantling the gun emplacements situated all

over the Rock – the guns had already been removed, but he had to drill out and demolish the gun platforms and associated structures. He concludes that a lot of the defences were removed immediately towards the end of the war.

Track 4

JR: On leaving and returning to Gibraltar:

In 1947, Donald left Gibraltar on de-mob. He returned to Gibraltar several years later on holiday, where he and his wife stayed at the Rock Hotel. On retirement at the age of 60, they moved to Spain where they lived for 7 years on the Costa del Sol. Their youngest son, Mathew, lived with them, getting a job as a jeweller in Gibraltar and subsequently met and married a local Gibraltarian girl, so persuaded them to move to Gibraltar where they lived at 16 Sunnyside House in Hospital Road. There remained there for five years in the 1980s. Donald describes how when serving there he didn't like Gibraltar too much, but upon returning in the 1980s how it was a totally different place, which they liked very much. He describes how the place had livened up, there were shops and they had their son and family there. Donald stated that he soon got to know the military people stationed there and joined the local branch of the Royal Engineers Association. Donald talks about when a soldier, he knew a local guy who worked at a cigarette stall. Many years later, Donald's son married the man's daughter. Both Donald and his wife both tell how they found the place nice and were sad after five years having to return to the UK. They talk about the good social life and the welcome they received from the local people, totally different to that of the war time years. Having a Gibraltarian daughter in law also gave them access to different places, clubs and social gatherings. Donald and his wife described the local people as more British than British and far more patriotic. With the border open, they describe going across into Spain to do their supermarket shopping and how they took the coach to Seville and to North Africa. They were forced to return to UK to be near their daughter, but return most years to visit their son and his family who still remain in Gibraltar.

JR: Concluding View of Gibraltar:

Both Donald and his wife talk fondly of Gibraltar and how they would return to live there if they could. He speaks about religious tolerance between Muslims, Jews and Christians and how local people are extremely friendly. He believes that Gibraltar is a unique country. Concluding, Donald declares that 'Gibraltar was a place he never wanted to return but now would live there tomorrow if he could'. Donald believes firmly that Gibraltar should remain British and if younger would be prepared to fight to keep it so.

Post Script:

As an afterthought, Donald recalls during his service in Gibraltar, how one day an officer arrived and selected five soldiers. They drove up to the top of the Rock through some gates. At a particular spot, he then got them to start drilling into the rock face, where they broke through into a tunnel and passageway. They entered to find that it led to a large hidden chamber. One part was a big, comfortable place suitable for concealing the Governor or similar important individuals and at the other end the chamber had a commanding view down the side of the Rock. There was also a gate and passageway at the far end. They retrieved some dental equipment and other stores. Donald also took away with him four jars of rum. On leaving the chamber it was subsequently sealed up and concealed again. Recently, Donald had read about hidden chambers where important people could flee in event of sudden invasion and which could also be used as stay behind spy places. Donald is of the firm opinion that this was such a place. On recent visits to Gibraltar he and his son have tried to locate the chamber, but without success.

*Compiled: December 2013
Copyright Reserved FOGHS*