

**Professor Maldwyn Mills 1926-2019. British Army  
Aberystwyth, Ceredigion**

West Wales Veterans Archive, National Library of Wales

Date of interview: 27.8.19. Aberystwyth

**Description**

Maldwyn Mills was born and spent his childhood in Cardiff. As a teenager he witnessed many of the Luftwaffe bombing raids in Cardiff during the early years of WW2. Maldwyn was conscripted into the British Army in November 1944, spending VE Day in Brecon before being posted to India and then Singapore. He was demobbed from the Army in 1948. Returning to university in Cardiff, Maldwyn then pursued a very successful and distinguished academic career, becoming Professor of English Literature in Aberystwyth University. Professor Maldwyn Mills passed away on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

**Early Life**

Born in Cardiff, Maldwyn Mills lived on Gordon Road (near to Richmond Road) with his four aunts. He witnessed many of the early air raids on Cardiff, especially around the City Road area. As the war progressed, the Luftwaffe turned their attention to the Heath district. He recalled *"for anyone who had been in a WW2 German air raid, the throbbing 'zoom, zoom' beat of the engines was unmistakable"*.

Maldwyn was not evacuated but he observed that many children were and for some, evacuation away from Cardiff to the Valleys took place, which he felt seemed a strange choice bearing in mind that industries important to the war effort were located in the Valleys. A factory in Treforest made comprehensive sets of model ships. Maldwyn had two of these model ships – the first one he bought was the HMS *Cardiff*.

**Conscription and Initial Training**

Maldwyn was eligible for call-up from June 1944, but it was not until November '44 that he received his call-up papers to the British Army. He was posted for Primary Training, attached to the King's Royal Rifle Corps and stationed in Strensall, some 6 miles from York. He recalls *"an accidental fusion of impressions"* and when arriving being observed wearily by 4 WRAC's one of whom said *"Going to t'army– poor little buggers!"*.

Following basic training he was posted to Brecon at the Dering Lines Camp to train as an infantryman which involved 10 weeks of Corps training. Given leave he then returned to Brecon to undertake 5 weeks' Battalion Training. Whilst Maldwyn was in Brecon, VE Day was announced.

**VE Day**

*"We were woken up by the joyful setting-off of smoke bombs all over the camp. In our Nissen hut, which was close to the parade ground, two lively lads had found some smoke*

*mortars and the whole hut was smothered in green smoke. There was a row over the mess. A pig had 'escaped' from the orchard and someone had covered it in painted swastikas!"*

Immediately following VE Day Maldwyn was sent on leave and then posted to nearby Crickhowell where the training included close quarter Sten gun firing against tin profiles of Japanese soldiers. Maldwyn observed the rather nervous disposition of the NCO leading the exercise as the Sten was notoriously unstable and would easily pull to one side whilst being fired.

### **Embarkation from Liverpool to India**

*"Because the war in Europe was over we were shipped on the 'Tamoroa', without escort, across the Med. There was no danger from U-Boats anymore. There were mistakes made by our commanding officers on the voyage which served to have a demoralizing psychological effect upon the men. They put on films for us including a pre-war film of the French liner the 'Normandie'; which of course was later sunk [NB by the British in 1940 with considerable loss of French sailors' lives]. Of course, we didn't know what we were being led into and so this extremely tactless choice of film did not help our morale".*

The *Tamoroa* arrived on the West coast of India and the troops disembarked into Deolali, entering the British Army Transit Camp.

*"It was there that I had my first experience of American packaged food including the breakfast of bacon and egg loaf. As a non-smoker I would trade my issue of Camel cigarettes for food including, after all the rationing at home, lychees and mangoes, which were a joy to taste for the first time.*

*"We then made a three-day train journey on the Great Indian Peninsula Railway which was tedious and not very comfortable. One of our group shot at a cow to try to liven things up. We went to Ramgarh and Ranchi. We were then warned by our officers and NCOs about the dangers of the locality and we even had to dye our underwear dark green for camouflage purposes. This was late 1945, early 1946, and we ended up under the aegis of the Education corps of the Indian Army".*

### **Singapore**

*"I was posted from there to Singapore on the troopship 'City of Paris'. I found Singapore to be a place of 'milk and honey'. I wrote home to say that we were having great fun feeding bananas to the monkeys only to receive a sharply worded response from home asking what on earth was I doing that for when in Wales nobody had seen a banana for years! I taught English and History but at times (as in India) it was simply too hot to teach".*

### **Posting Home and Post-War**

Maldwyn returned home to Liverpool and 'demobbed' in early 1948. He recalled the journey home on the *Scythia* being far more relaxed and care-free than the journey out to

India but their arrival in bomb-damaged Liverpool was a sharp reminder of the hardships suffered and faced by the civilian population.

Leaving the Army in Gloucester in 1948, Maldwyn resumed his degree studies in the University of Wales, Cardiff (now Cardiff University), gaining his BA in 1950, his MA in 1952, and then a DPhil from Oxford. After three years' teaching in Liverpool, he moved to Aberystwyth in 1959 to pursue a distinguished academic career lecturing in English Literature at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (now Aberystwyth University), eventually receiving a Personal Chair as Professor of English (specialising in Middle English Romances). He retired in 2003. Professor Mills passed away on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

### **Additional Notes re: Ships Travelled on by Professor Mills**

*Tamoroa*: built by Harland Wolff in Belfast, launched in 1921 as the *Sophocles*, converted into a troopship in 1940 carrying 1763 troops; in 1942 first ship into Bone in Eastern Algeria as part of Operation Torch, last voyage 1956. Broken up 1957.

*City of Paris*: launched as a passenger ship 1922; damaged by U-13 16.9.1939; converted to troopship 1940; returned to owners post-war and broken up in Newport, 1956.

*Scythia*: a Cunard liner, built in 1921; troopship from 1940 and also used as an evacuee ship from UK to USA. Took part in N. African landings, damaged by aerial torpedo 1942. Transported US troops to UK 43/44. At end of the war became a 'war-bride' ship from UK to US and Canada. Brought home British troops from India 1947/8. Handed to the International Refugee Organisation in 1950 to take European refugees to Canada; and again in 1956 (Hungarian refugees). Broken-up 1958.