

## **Harold John Morgan (known as Jack)**

17<sup>th</sup> August 1914 – 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Jack's birth was recorded on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1914 by his mother Ethel; his father John is listed on his birth certificate as a butcher/journeyman, their home in Violet Place, in the Gas Street area of Birmingham. Jack's father was killed in a railway accident, leaving his mother to cope alone with young Jack and his younger sister. By 1919 Ethel was struggling to care and provide for the 2 growing children and Jack was frequently seen scuttling around the streets gleaning anything that could be of use at home. One day, spotting some knobs of coal which had fallen off a coal merchant's delivery cart he dashed into the street to garner them but was knocked down by the cart and injured.

A baker witnessed the accident from his shop and went to the rescue, lifting Jack onto a bread tray to take him for treatment. The baker had seen Jack on previous occasions, with his sister, and arranged for the children to be taken into the care of Ladywood Council. A place for Jack was found at Gosden House, with Lord Wandsworth's Charity.

His education began at Gosden House, moving to Shalford School when he was of primary school age. Aged 14 he went on to Lord Wandsworth School and drew huge benefit from an education which ranged from academic subjects through animal husbandry and horticulture to practical 'trades' such as woodworking, mechanics and driving. Jack spoke warmly of the food at LWS, mostly grown on the farm; he commented, maybe in comparison with his early privation, that the boys were fed 'like fighting cocks'.

He remembered with affection and admiration the staff at the school, many of them veterans of World War 1. In particular Colonel Julian who gave him particular support when he left the college to take up his first job as an ostler and chauffeur to Paul Sainsbury. Jack was unhappy in the post and returned to LWS. Colonel Julian arranged for him to take up an apprenticeship at MG's factory in Abingdon, drove him to Abingdon and helped him settle into lodgings.

In 1933 when the country was in deep economic depression Jack was laid off by MGs. With no home to return to he enlisted in the RASC, and served 6 years as a Mechanic and Driver. During that time he served in Egypt and Palestine as well as in Britain. Photos taken during his overseas posting indicate that he enjoyed his time in the middle-east, with views of dhows on the Nile and the wailing wall in Jerusalem amongst pictures of his comrades-in-arms and their trucks.

His discharge came on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1939. Within a week he was called back into the service and deployed to France.

Part of the WWII British Expeditionary Force, Jack and his unit were in western France when the enemy invaded. Plans were made for them to be evacuated back to Britain, on the ill-fated RMS Lancastria, which, during the loading of military personnel and civilians, was sunk by enemy bombers whilst at anchor off St Nazaire. Being a good swimmer (having helped to dig the first swimming pool at LWS by hand and shovel then learning to swim in it after completion), Jack climbed over the side of the stricken ship and, keeping underwater for as far as his lungs would allow to avoid the fuel oil that was blazing all over the surface of the water, swam to safety outside the ring of fire. Casualty numbers are variously reported, but at least 4,000 people died. The bombing and sinking of the Lancastria is considered the largest loss of life in a single incident during WWII and in British

Maritime History. Jack, who had handed his life-jacket to a Scottish soldier who was unable to swim, received a commemorative medal for his part in the disaster from the Scottish Government in 2015.

He served the remainder of the war based in Kent, and, having undertaken training courses during his service, on discharge had reached the rank of Regimental Quarter Master Sergeant.

When demobbed from the Army in 1946 his Army Record stated that his conduct was 'exemplary'. His commanding officer wrote the following report *'An efficient and capable warrant officer with a sound knowledge of book-keeping and stores accounting, who can with confidence be employed in any position of trust. He is an excellent supervisor and a willing, cheerful and conscientious worker. I have known him many years and have complete confidence in him'*.

Having married in 1942, and now with a young son, Jack returned to Abingdon, where he took a post with the General Post Office. Starting as a postman he engaged in further study and training courses until he achieved the post of Postal and Telegraphist Officer with a range of roles including inspection of sub-post offices, managing stores and accounts and dealing with customers at the High Street post office in Abingdon. He moved on to a more senior role in the main post office in Oxford. He was a staunch advocate for the 'working man' and as a member of the Union of Post Office Workers, was a shop steward.

He remained with the GPO until he retired in 1979 – serving more than 40 years.

After retirement he lived quietly, in the home for which he had made furniture using cabinet-making techniques to a high standard. He built his own radio & Hi Fi system, and the cabinet to house it in. He cared for his home utilising all the skills acquired through life, and learned some new ones, such as building his own computer and surfing the internet. He cooked, looked after the garden and house and cared for his wife, Edna, during her later years. They were married for 62 years, and were delighted to receive congratulations from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of their Diamond Wedding Anniversary.

After Edna died in 2004 he stayed determinedly independent, doing all his own cooking and bread-baking, and still keeping his mind active with the day to day challenges of maintaining and repairing his home.

He found contact details for LWC on an internet search and contacted the college by email. Jack was thrilled to receive a reply and subsequently a visit from Gill Kelly, who brought him a school cap to wear.

Maintaining his independence, when the time came that he was unable to look after himself, he made the decision to move into a care home. Supported by his three sons he took up residence in a new environment where he was 'content' and occasionally 'happy'. He retained his desire to understand everything in his environment, and never stopped organising his things in ways that he understood.

He leaves three sons, 2 daughters-in-law, 6 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren and 7 great-great-grandchildren. He is a great example to us of a life well lived. He is much missed.



