

Morris Morgan

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

University of Alaska 100th Anniversary tapes

Karen Brewster asked Morris Morgan to tell her about his childhood. Morris Morgan said he was born October 19, 1920 in Grangeville Louisiana. His mother and father were Sadie and Dewitt Morgan. He was raised in Saint Elena Parish and the area was known as the Piney Woods. He explained the meaning of the Piney Woods. It was the strip of pine woods that went from the Atlantic Coast to Texas. Some of his earliest memories are about the schoolhouse, Forest Hill. He talked about yelling in the schoolhouse and thought he'd be suited for the teaching profession. His grandparents were interested in education. His paternal grandfather was superintendent of education of Saint Elena Parish for twenty-seven years. He paid for the construction of the Forest Hill schoolhouse and boarded teachers. His maternal grandparents sent their five daughters to college. They rented their farm so their daughters would be able to attend college. They were finishing schools. He wasn't sure what they were taught. His father attended Louisiana State University. ROTC was an important part of his college. His father then went to medical school in Memphis. His father didn't want to be a surgeon and came back home and was in the lumber business. His father inherited the family industrial complex which consisted of a sawmill, cotton gin and blacksmith shop. It was destroyed by fire and the family was unemployed and homeless. His father had borrowed money from the bank and after the fire they lost their home. Then the depression hit. They moved to Baton Rouge. His father tried several jobs. He attended nine different schools in eleven years. He said bullying did occur and was often settled with fights. His mother tutored him before he left for school to say his name and birth date. He was singled out as the perfect student and then hated by his classmates. He learned to avoid this attention. He had to tone down his academic achievements.

Karen asked him where they lived when they moved to Baton Rouge. Morgan said his father managed to find work to pay the rent. They moved from house to house. He remembers sleeping in an attic and was bitten by rats. One year they didn't have adequate clothing and all five of them just stayed out of school. Karen asked him about his siblings. Morgan said he had two brothers and two sisters and he was the baby of the family. He talked about the advantages and disadvantages of being the last in the family. His mother developed cancer in 1925 and then survived to be 101 years old.

Morgan said he graduated from high school in Louisiana. He was in a small class and was chosen as salutatorian. He made a speech at his graduation ceremony. Karen said it sounded like his life was difficult. Morgan said it was. They lived in a segregated society. They were homeless and unemployed. They lived next door to black folks. He talked about warning one

family that their house was on fire. He was rewarded with a bucket of clabber. Karen asked what type of things he liked to do as a kid. Morgan said he hunted. He was putting food on the table. He talked about the gun he used. He used to guide people on hunts for quail. At one point they were on an 800 acre farm. They and others would hunt for doves on the farm. He was given the leftover shells. His brother bought him a gun when he was 16. His father didn't hunt and he learned to hunt on his own. He would also fish and made bass fishing baits. He started to paint when he got out of the service. He saved all of his paintings. He worked in the industries in Baton Rouge. He talked about enrolling in college. Karen asked about the depression. Morgan said they ate less and wore their clothes out. He said his mother always provided a meal. His father did find work. He worked in a box factory. Morgan plowed fields for people when he was a teenager. He worked long days for 50 cents a day. He took his wages home to his mother. They bought flour in sacks and they used the material to make shirts.

Morgan said he was in LSU for two and a half years and then the war came along. He joined a parachute unit two months after Pearl Harbor on February 6, 1942. It later became the 101st airborne cadre. He volunteered for service. He was a buck sergeant. He went to Australia. They stopped at Bora Bora on the way. They were on the U.S.S. Uruguay. He joined the military for patriotism. He said it was an adventure. He went to New Guinea. Their mission was to secure airstrips. They had to land on an island because of bad weather. He got a battle star for New Guiana and for invading the Philippines. He talked about some of his experiences in the invasion. They didn't have any food. They captured a Japanese ammo camp that had landmines. After five days they got canned food. A lot of people got sick from food poisoning. They lost men from diseases. The war ended when he was in the Philippines. They knew about the atomic bombs and knew if it hadn't been for the bombs they would have lost millions of men. He returned to the United States on an old ship. They came home by points. They landed at Angel Island and went to the mess hall. There were German prisoners of war there who were directing the mess hall. He was discharged in December 1945. He met his wife and they were married for 56 years. She died in 2001. They met in Louisiana. He went to work in Texas working for the Texas Engineering Manufacturing Company where they built airplanes.

Karen asked Morgan about having served in the military during WWII. Morgan said he's glad he served. It enriched his life. He was scarred some. He said there were times of terror and times of boredom. They had humor. They devised ways to confound their commander. He told a story about taking a jeep. They had possession of General Suzuki's car for a few days. After breaking a bone he was told to stay at the hospital, but he returned to his outfit. He was marked as AWOL from the hospital. He operated a small crash boat for a while. He tried to enlist for Korea. He failed his physical. He stayed in the reserves for a year.

Karen asked about meeting his wife. Morgan said she was a nurse in Dallas Texas. She was visiting Louisiana when they met. He wound up in Dallas. Morgan said he met his wife at a dance. He knew her relatives and was introduced. He said they danced well together.

Morgan talked about the Liberty ship they took to the Philippines.