

Normand Orford

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Question: So you got shipped to Auckland?

Answer: Yeah, at first down to Auckland, and I was there for -- was there about a month. And then they sent us back to the States. And I said Doc, please just put me together and let me get back in there. I owe them one now. And they figured anybody who would want to go back into that must have something wrong with their head so they shipped me back to the States. (laughs) I couldn't move, I couldn't walk, I mean, I didn't move this arm any farther than that for six months. Until finally they found out that that arm wouldn't work and they had to take and operate on it again and cut all that stuff off and patch it and like that. But I don't know, I got -- I was -- I got 18 major operations. And I got more stitches in my body than you got in the clothes you wear. But see the left side of my face was burnt off and part of the ear and like that. And so there are little scars but you can't see them now. At one time they were very, very prominent, I guess. That's where my helmet caught fire. And so (laughs) And the interesting part of that operation, I think it's interesting. I think it's funnier than heck. And most people don't. Is that, they needed some skin, they just need a thin layer of skin that wouldn't even show. But the only place they could get it was from the cheek of my rear end. Because I sat on my parachute and it caught fire and half of my butt was burned to where I had to sit on a rubber donut for three weeks. But the other half was clear. And so they rolled me over, they took that patch off there and stuck it on here. (gestures) And so I had a lot of fun with that. (laughs) Here, kiss me. Boy I thought -- I thought it was funnier than heck. My wife hit me more time across there, smart alack, pow. (laughs) But it was just one of the things -- that -- there were a lot of funny things that happened, I mean, in the hospital everything is funny because you're there. I mean I -- the fellow they wrote up on the San Francisco. When the plane came in and crashed and he was in the -- he had his 20 millimeter and he stayed up and he kept shooting at it until the plane finally hit him. Well he got a Navy cross for that for bravery. He said bravery, hell, the damn strap was caught around my back and I couldn't get out. He says I was working like this and shooting with one hand. The plane hit, and I got a medal for it. Another guy I knew -- Rafferty, he got shot right through the knee. And of course when a bullet first hits you, it's dead -- I mean you're dead. You can't feel anything. And so they just brought him, he was laying there, this bullet hole right through the knee. And so they went to work on him, he says Doc, I feel okay, go take care of these other guys over there. So they thought gee this guy is great, donating his time, you know. And he got a medal for that. He says 30 minutes after the thing was hurting so damn bad I was screaming. (laughs) These things are funny, you know, they've always been to me.

Question: Now, while you were in the hospital, here you are broken up.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You've been in this plane crash. In fact people that served with you thought you were dead.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You never contacted your mom, right?

Answer: No, I was very lucky. I landed in Oakland. And the ship landed in Frisco, and we come into Oakland and I told the fellows aboard ship, I says I live here. I says now if we stay in San Francisco, we'll go to the Presidio, the hospital there. If we go across the Bay Bridge, if we turn to the right in the middle of it, we'll go to Treasure Island. If we get across we turn to the left and go on up, we'll go to Mare Island, if we turn to the right we'll go to Oak Knoll, and if we go to Oak Knoll we'll drive down the street I lived on and pass the house I

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lived in. And we did. We went to Oak Knoll. So actually that day I -- I -- about 4 o'clock in the afternoon and like that, we actually passed my house and went to Oak Knoll. And so I phoned home that night and I had the phone number or anyhow I looked up the phone number. And I called up about, oh, it must have been 5 o'clock, and my -- the girl who is my wife now, who incidentally was there when that telegram came, she was living at our place because she -- she was going to university and like that. She answered the phone. I says, hello, hello, hello, Marge. Yeah, this is Marge. I says this is Norm. Who? I said Norman. She said Norman who? And I said Norman Orford, God damn it, I'm home. She dropped the phone and my mother picked it up and everybody had the phone like that. And so I told them where I was -- out to Oak Knoll. And she said we'll be right out. I said no sense of your coming out because I -- I don't know whether I can see you or not. I'll call back in a little while. So I asked the doc and he said oh, yeah, tell them to meet you at the gate. And I was in Ward One which was very close to the gate. And so it took me an hour and a quarter to walk about a hundred yards. As they wrote in the Hurley Marine Works Magazine -- my Dad worked for the Hurley Marine Works and he was a driver for them. And the quotation was I was carried aboard ship in New Zealand. I said I'll walk off in the United States. He says and he did but nobody knows how he did it. Nobody could figure out how I could get up and learn to walk in that amount of time. But I did, and I walked off and so that night I walked down to the main gate and it took me about a little over an hour to get as far as I could throw a baseball now. And so my folks come out and I got to see them and my mother was there and my wife was there and my dad was there and a friend that drove them out, all that kind of stuff. And so I got to see my family. Of course we lived around there and so the next day all the relatives come to see what, you know, to count, see if I got two legs and two arms and like that. They were all disappointed cause I had them all and I never saw another one of them. They never come out and visited me again. It was good. But just the way it happened, my wife of course was going to Cal University and of course she was pretty. She looked pretty as a picture. And so she'd come to the ward and everybody would whistle at her like that. And we weren't married then. She come out every day and told me she finally had to quit school because she's had to missed so many classes. But then after I was there for about, oh a little over a month, we got married. And of course I knew then, no chance of me ever going back. I was there. So when I got married, my arm was in a sling, I was on crutches, my dad had just had an accident, he was on crutches. And so anyhow, we managed to stand up long enough to get married. And an old girlfriend of mine and her father's a preacher in the church I used to go to and he come up and married us and like that. But that was 57 years ago and I'm still married to the same gal.

Question: Now when you were in the hospital and broken up, you never wrote your mom, right?

Answer: No, my mother was there.

Question: No, no, I mean when you were overseas.

Answer: Oh, no, no.

Question: Now why didn't you write your mom?

Answer: Well, because I couldn't move my arm, in the first place. And I had a lady from the Red Cross come in and write a note and of course in her handwriting was so different than mine, my mother knew I was blind. But it just said -- I always tell them that I'm well and in a safe place. And so my mother tried to send telegrams and called the War Department and everything else. He says lady we can't tell you where he's at; we can't tell you where he was. This is all secret. We're not going to tell the enemy, you know. So no, I never did contact her

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or like that. I tried but just like the letters, I sent home 13 or 14 different money orders to my wife, you know, and one of them got through. So I figured what the heck, you know, no sense of wasting my money, letting them torpedo it.

Question: So while you're hurt, your mom gets this telegram and the telegram says --

Answer: That's what -- that's what the telegram said. That was the telegram.

Question: What does it say. Pretend I don't see it. What did the telegram say to your mom?

Answer: It said your son has received multiple serious injuries in a plane crash in the South Pacific. Period. And that was it. I mean no -- lot of people receiving them, and very luckily it went down to San Jose where we used to live where I enlisted from and a friend of ours, very close family friend was living in the house when they brought the telegram out to her. And so she received it first. And my mother was in Oakland at the time which is about 40 miles difference, and so she called up, she says I've got some bad news for you. And but also good news so she read it and then she had to take it up to Oakland where my mother was. Well my wife was in the same room as my mother when they brought in the telegram. And she says I've never seen anything quite as moving in my life. She says you know your mother just broke up. I'm the only guy that never broke up, I think. But it was different, I mean I had very exciting. We've had a wonderful life since then. We had two kids. One is in Alaska now and one is here in town. And I got grand kids and everything is fine. Got a beautiful yard. One of the prettiest yards in town. I've got flowers - - I've got 300 rhododendrons, and I've got a thousand tulips. I just love flowers now. I mean I'm completely retired and just taking it real easy.

Question: Are you proud of what you fought for?

Answer: You bet your life I am. I'd go back and do it again in a minute. Yeah, I'd lay down my life for my country just as quick now as I did then. I was proud of my country. I loved it then. Now I look out on all this stuff and part of it's mine, I fought for it. I bled for it. And I was willing to lay down --(I think there's somebody looking in the window there) But I would lay down my life gladly for it and I would again. No, I am very proud of what I did, very proud. (pause, muffled voices off camera) No, I am real proud and I'm proud of what I did. I have no regrets. I have no, no feeling for the Japanese race. I mean they're there. And I'm here. And I hear people, you know, they're our friends and like that. I can't see that. I mean to me they're not. They

Answer: .. I don't know how anybody can say that they've had a way of living for years, 1200 years, and some outside nation comes in, smashes them and hits them with an atomic bomb and 60 years later they've slowly fallen in love with us. To me that's a pot of garbage and I know that there are people over there now that hate us like they did then. They had to dislike us. There's no way that you could have a war that there wasn't feelings like that. Well mine, I try not to show them. I have -- I have good Japanese friends. I have some real good Japanese friends. But for the whole race as such, I don't. And I don't have to. There's no reason for me having it because I'm not there. I'll never be there; I'll never go back. And

Answer: ..but you asked, I love this country, I mean every bit of it. And I never felt closer to any country than I did in New Zealand when we were there. We went back to New Zealand, oh, it's been about five, six years ago now. And I told the people there that they -- they enjoyed their country. They liked New Zealand. But I said but I fought for it. If it wasn't for guys like me, you wouldn't have a country. And you know, I have never been treated as

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royally in my life. They thought that -- when they found out that I was an ex-flyer from Guadalcanal, they couldn't do enough. Because, well, we saved them. We know that. If it wasn't for us, the Japanese would have taken them over in a week. But we went over there, we broke the supply line and then we moved right into Guadalcanal, right in between them, and then we -- we just laid down our lives there on that island. Because as the news came out, the Japanese said that Guadalcanal is the turning point. We either win or we lose the entire war in Guadalcanal. And for six months, it was rough. God it was rough. I mean I -- I don't know how guys that made it made it. But we did. We went through it. And we come out of it. We're not, you know, all shell shocked and punchy. I mean we're human beings. We've had jobs, raised families and like that. But inside I guess we all feel kind of proud of what we did. We don't have regrets.

Question: Do you think, and this is one of the hardest ones. Is -- do you think there's a message from war, from World War II, to future generations, that you'd like to leave for great grandchildren or great-great grandchildren.

Answer: Well, I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that. I would like to tell them to -- to -- to watch their back. But as far as they -- I think they're wasting a tremendous amount of money on -- on armaments now. Because we're -- we're living in a world of overkill. I mean they have the and we have the wherewithal to drop bombs to wipe out the entire world. And it's a matter of minutes. You know, they -- they -- any country that has all this stuff could wipe another one out in minutes or like get poisonous gas they've got it bombs and so we don't need it as much. We have to have the protection because you have to protect yourself, but I don't see where it's going to make any difference whether they get killed in 30 seconds or 28 seconds. I mean I think that now is the time for people to get together and to -- to get along. I would -- I would truly tell anyone to get along -- love thy neighbor, because you're going to get killed if you don't. And I don't think it's right. I don't think people should have to live under a fear like that. Because it -- really, right now, this country is beautiful. Other countries in the world aren't, and they are foolish. I can't understand why they keep fighting. But they do. And I guess -- and it says in the Bible as long as there are people there will be wars and rumors of wars. And I hate to see it. Because we -- we were, I figure we were the last ones to slug it out hand to hand and that's what we did. Boy, I tell you -- we fought with everything we had and we fought night and day, believe me, night and day, day in and day out. That battle was six months long. And that's a long time. And of course the Marines were in there, then the Army come in, the Navy was there. Everybody had their crack at it. And the Japanese threw everything they had at it, everything. There were 26,000 dead Japs when we left there. That's a lot of them. Twenty-six thousand is a heck of a lot. Of course we lost about the 7000 ourselves. And I think it's a waste. I think that war is a terrible waste. Of course over-population is dangerous, but I don't see -- I hate to use the term over-population because there's so much food wasted now. You know, I mean we have thousands of acres that could be put into wheat and to different foods and like that that aren't being used. Other countries have the same thing. There's enough here for everyone. I just wish they'd share it and not have any more problems. I'd like to see a world of peace.

Question: Do you think World War II moved us towards that?

Answer: Yes, I do. I think, I think that it... it taught us, when we dropped that atomic bomb, that taught the whole world what there is. That was rough. I'm glad they -- they had to do it. If they hadn't had dropped the bomb, we'd lost a million men going into it. Because the Japanese -- the women and the children would have had guns and knives. There would have been no way of going through and just taking it. We had to stop them. We had to do it. And so the atomic bomb had its place. But it sure told everybody what could happen. And I

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think, yes, the World War II, the end of it definitely. And of course us guys that lived through it, we know the rest of it. But the end of it was an absolute necessity, and I think that Harry Truman will go down in history as one of the greatest presidents we ever had because he -- he didn't even know about it when he took office, and yet he was man enough to -- to order it done. They had to drop that bomb. And it cleared up the war and I'm glad it stopped. Because too many guys -- we'd have lost a million men, as I say, going in there. And we don't have to do that. I hope we never have to go in again. I was sorry to see things like Korea and Viet Nam and the desert warfare and like that. I wish they'd stop all of that. There's got to be a way of stopping it. But who knows all the answers, I don't. But I think that they're going to stop it sooner or later because they're going to have to get along or they're going to have to kill one another. And killing is not the pleasantest way to do it. I know. (laughs) I know it.

Question: Well thank you very much.