

**Interviewee: Norton “Norty” Lund**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Date of interview: 23 September 2002**

**Location: dining room of Mr. Lund’s apartment in Richfield, MN**

**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, November 2002**

**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003**

Norton “Norty” Lund was born 24 October 1925 in Pine Lake Township, Clearwater County, Minnesota, the son of Norwegian immigrant parents. The Lunds moved to Richfield, Hennepin County, when Norty was a young boy, and he attended local schools, graduating in 1943 from Vocational High School in Minneapolis. In October of that same year Norty enlisted in the US Navy.

After Basic Training at Farragut, Idaho, Norty received advanced training as a hospital corpsman and in 1944 was shipped out to the Pacific. He was at the invasion of Peleliu Island in September 1944, remaining after the island was secured as a staff member at a large hospital facility; casualties arrived here from various locations for the remainder of the war. Norty remained on Peleliu after V-J Day, being rotated back to the US only in December 1945; he was discharged in April 1946 with the rank of hospital corpsman first class.

In civilian life, Norty returned to Richfield, got married (September 1946, wife Norine) and raised a family, and got into the upholstering and furniture refinishing trades. He worked many years for Erickson Interiors of Minneapolis, retiring in 1988. In retirement he remained in the Richfield area, which is where he was living when this interview was conducted (September 2002).

Norty passed away on 14 November 2005, aged 80.

In this interview, Norty offers insights on wartime medical care and treatment of casualties, the monotony of being stationed on a small Pacific island, and relations between blacks and whites in the US Navy.

**Interview Key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**N = Norton (Norty) Lund**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2002. First, Mr. Lund, on the record, thanks very much for taking some time today to talk with us.

N: You're welcome.

T: Let me start with a couple of basic questions. I know from talking with you before the interview began that while you were born in northern Minnesota you spent most of your life, your childhood, here in Richfield.

N: Correct.

T: What kind of place was Richfield to grow up as a kid?

N: It was an interesting place. We didn't have parks. We didn't have anything. You made your own things to do. We had nothing but gravel roads. Lot of stickers.

T: This was the days way before Richfield was a bedroom community.

N: Yes. Yes. I lived in a section called Nokomis Garden. Across Cedar Avenue was what we call Ford Town. I don't know how they got that except that some people worked for the Ford Company and that's where they lived. We had outhouses. There was no central plumbing. Everybody had their own wells. You were really in the country. It was all farmland around you. Truck farming mostly.

T: That's sure changed.

N: Oh, yes. Yes. There's not too many of them left any more. There's a few offspring. I know we have a thing coming up now this Sunday where, it's the old timers thing over here. We'll have it at the Knights of Columbus. That's people from Richfield and Bloomington. We've got a lot of the old timers. Some of the Oxboroughs which is an old section of Bloomington. That's some of their offspring. You've got Dozers or Bessers. There's a lot of old names in there that are still Christians.

T: Farming. Is that what brought your folks to Richfield?

N: No, I think it was just a cheap place to live. *(Chuckles)* You could buy a house for a couple thousand dollars. A brand new house.

T: This was in the 1920s.

N: This would be 1926 approximately. Pretty close. 1925 or 1926. You're in there.

T: In fact, you mentioned before we started to talk on tape, that actually Richfield had no schools and you went to school in Minneapolis.

N: No. We had elementary schools. We went to eighth grade. Then we went to Junior High at Nokomis Junior High which is now a senior citizen retirement type living. Then you would go to Roosevelt or you could go to where I went. I went to Vocational. They would bus you. Richfield paid for that. They would bus you to school.

T: So you took a bus every morning to school and then back in the afternoon?

N: Yes.

T: That made for a long school day, didn't it?

N: Yes, but the buses were right on. They picked up. It wasn't that bad.

T: You entered service in 1943. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

**(1, A, 66)**

N: Enlisted.

T: Why did you enlist?

N: I just did not want to go in the Army. I wanted to go in the Navy. I don't know. I just liked the Navy.

T: Do you remember going down to the recruiting office and making the big decision to join the service?

N: No. I think I made the decision before. I just went down and signed up. It's kind of hazy. I don't really recall that too much. I recall leaving here after and going to Fort Snelling where you went through the physical and all that good stuff.

T: What did they do at Fort Snelling? Was it a matter of just stick out your tongue and check your throat?

N: No. That was quite an experience. You stripped naked and you start down this here thing and you go through. They check everything of course. You go through this and finally you get to the psychiatrist and he says, "Do you like women?" and I say, "Yes." "Okay. You're in."

T: By this time you'd already had a number of shots or injections or blood tests or...?

N: They didn't go through any blood tests and stuff back then. They just checked you for hernias and your blood pressure.

T: Any inoculations?

N: Not there. No. No. Not there. That was just to see if you were going to go in. After you get signed up. You didn't get all that stuff until you got up to your... like when I got up to Farragut [Naval Training Center, Idaho].

T: That's when you got all the shots and whatever?

N: Yes. When you got all the other things taken care of.

T: How did your folks respond to you going into the service?

N: Not too well. And especially my mother. She did not. My dad, of course, we're Norwegian, so my dad he had been on the ocean. He was from Norway. He never made any mention of it. It bothered my mother quite a bit because she had to sign for me to do this.

T: Your dad wouldn't sign or...?

N: Oh, yes. They'd sign. There was no problem there. But it took a little convincing because... I just did not want to go in the Army. I didn't want to be drafted. There's a chance I could have gone into the Navy even if I was drafted but I didn't want to take the chance.

T: Did you have older brothers?

N: No. I was the oldest.

T: So you were the first. Were you the only member of your family to go into the service?

N: No. My brother went in later. He was quite a bit younger than me. He was medically discharged quite early.

T: So you were the only brother who was actually sent out to, left the States?

N: Yes.

T: You went to Farragut, Idaho for Basic Training.

N: Correct.

T: What can you say about Faragut, Idaho? That area up there?

N: At that time it was desolate. I guess now it's a lot different. I'd like to go through there again sometime because when we were there it was really nothing. They gave Eleanor Roosevelt a lot of heat. She was the one they claim picked all these training places. It was a story I suppose. You were out in no man's land and it was just a bunch of dirt. I don't know. You were young and you just went along with it.

T: For you, how would you describe the Basic Training experience? What was that all about?

N: It was mostly physical. A lot of physical training. Plus discipline. You had to stand watches. It was just getting yourself into the military type mode. Then you had a lot of other training too, like visual identification things and then you went through gas mask drills. You had to do certain swimming things. A lot of cross-country training. We did a lot of running and a lot of marching. It was mostly that type stuff. Mostly physical. To get you in good physical condition.

T: How easy was the transition for you to the military way of life?

**(1, A, 140)**

N: I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. I thought it was a whole different way of life for me. It was the first time away from home. That didn't seem to bother me too much either. Of course, I had worked on the farm in the summer time up in northern Minnesota. I had been away from home.

T: So it wasn't the first time really.

N: A lot of people had problems with this. A lot of people had problems with groups. In a bathroom, you know, you're stuck in there and you have a bunch of guys standing at a trough. A lot of guys can't handle that sort of thing at that point in their life.

T: They were about your age, right?

N: Yes.

T: Eighteen, nineteen.

N: Yes. A lot of them came in from the farm. The guys in the cities, of course, had been showering, like when you're in sports. But it got to some guys.

T: When you say it got to them, how could you tell they were bothered or disturbed by this?

N: I really don't know. What I'm basing this on, when I was back here, now we're jumping way ahead. When I was back here I had to go down to Great Lakes for double hernias and I checked back in after my leave. So what do they do? They give me a young kid. He was psycho. This was his problem. He was from the farm and he just went berserk. He just couldn't handle all this mixed stuff.

T: Even in Basic Training he couldn't handle it?

N: No. Of course transporting these patients is not an easy thing to do because... I didn't want to do it... I don't know why they always picked on me, but I always had to do this. Because if you lose one of these guys or something you can go to Leavenworth. You've got to be careful. This medical stuff is a little touchy.

T: Where were you transporting this kid?

N: Taking him with me down to Great Lakes. I got him down there all right. Then they wanted to know which was which. Who had the hernia and who was this goof-ball. *(laughs)* This was the kid's problem. Then I talked to another one of the guys that I worked with. He had a problem with this. This was after he was out and everything. But he said that really bothered him.

T: No kidding. The whole being in a group shower or group bathroom kind of thing?

N: Yes. Yes. It seemed to bother some guys.

T: It was obviously one of those things that people had to adjust to.

N: You have to. I mean it got worse after you got... When you were aboard ship you were really put together. That's for some people hard to do I guess.

T: I suppose it would be. Do you have one positive memory of Basic Training? Something you can recall.

N: I don't know. I think just doing the cross-country. I was pretty good at that. Doing these obstacle courses and similar things. I kind of enjoyed the whole thing. I kind of enjoyed the marching part and the whole bit.

T: Did you?

N: Yes. I kind of enjoyed it. I really had no problem.

T: By this time was it clear to you that you were going to the Pacific or to the European theater?

N: No. You had no idea where you were going. You had no idea what you were going to be. The last thing I wanted to do was to be a hospital corpsman.

T: Really?

N: Yes! You joined the Navy, you were going out to fight Japs. Man, give me a gun. I'm going out and whip the whole thing. As it turned out, it was the best thing that ever happened to me that I became a hospital corpsman.

T: How did that selection take place?

N: I have no idea. You were screened. They'd give you tests.

T: Written tests?

N: Yes. Written tests. They'd screen you. It depended upon what they needed also. At that point they needed a lot of corpsmen. They were losing corpsmen. You lose corpsmen real quick, especially if you're attached to the Marines.

T: Sure. Because you go with them.

N: Yes. What the factor was I'm not sure but as I became a corpsman and I had many doctors say that I should stay in the medical field because I had the talent for it but of course I didn't have the education for it. That was my problem. Otherwise I think I would have stayed.

T: Did you do the training for corpsmen also at Farragut or were you sent somewhere else?

N: No. That was at Great Lakes.

T: So you were down at Great Lakes for that training?

N: Yes.

**(1, A, 209)**

T: How did they train you to be a corpsman?

N: You had a lot of medical books. It was a crash course really because it was only a, I'm not really sure the length of time, but I think it was six, eight weeks or something.

T: That is fast.

N: But you were in school steady, steady, steady. Corpsmen are trained for fieldwork. Out in the field. You're just temporary. You just get this guy patched up the best you can. There's certain procedures. You have morphine. Then you still have to give shots and you had to learn a lot about some of that stuff. Then you'd be assigned probably to a hospital and there you would still continue your training. It was a real mix of subjects. It was a tough, tough course. It was a tough course. It really was.

T: Could you wash out of this course too if you weren't up to standards?

N: I suppose. I don't know of anybody that did. I know the guy we had to practice giving shots and the guy that gave me the shot passed out. He stuck the needle in and boom! He didn't wash out either. I think he got over it.

T: I guess you have to for what you're going to see in the field that's probably pretty minor league, isn't it?

N: Yes.

T: How did you do with the giving shots and all that medical stuff?

N: I didn't have a problem with it. Never had a problem with any of that sort of thing. I seemed to adapt to it very well. I used to do IVs and a lot of related things.

T: Without any kind of queasy feeling or difficulty?

N: No, no, no, no, no, no. I had no problems and of course we gave... I don't know how many thousands of penicillin I shot, because in the Navy you gave penicillin every three hours. It was different. You come out here in the civilian and people are allergic to penicillin. I never had a person have a reaction but you only gave them thirty thousand units at a time. Where now they're giving you millions.

T: At a time?

N: Yes. And your system can't. But we... your system could handle that. And that penicillin was probably one of the best things that ever came out because that saved a lot of people. Infections overseas especially in the Pacific were very susceptible. It took longer for wounds to heal. That's why we tried to get them out of there as soon as you could. We would not do tonsillectomies. There was too much danger of bleeding. It was different.

T: It sounds like it.



N: It was really different.

T: Speaking of the Pacific when was it clear to you that you were headed to the Pacific?

N: Not until we were in California. At Treasure Island. Going aboard the ship. There we were. We didn't know where we were going.

T: Really?

N: Oh, no. They don't tell you things like that. You just go. You get on this... took a ferry out. I tell you, it was scary because you were in there shoulder to shoulder. If anything would have happened to that stupid ferry nobody would have gotten out of there. They take you around and then they finally dock. Then you go aboard this ship. We had no idea where we were going.

T: Really? It was just get on the ship and go?

N: I had no idea when we were coming home. I had no idea where we were going to land. Speculation. We're going to Frisco, we're going here. Who knows where you're going? We went to San Diego.

T: Did that being in the dark so to speak, did that bother you?

N: No. No. By that time you're pretty accustomed to the Navy. It's hurry up and wait. Get in line and get there and stand. Where you're going or what you're going to do you're in the Navy. You just go.

T: I don't imagine all people adjusted as easily as you did to that?

N: I don't know. I don't really remember anybody getting all shook up about it.

T: Really?

N: No. You were at that age where... it would be different now. Oh, cripe! I could never do any of that stuff anymore.

T: You were headed to the Pacific. Was it 1944 by this time?

N: Yes. I would think so. Yes. Yes. Because I was home for Christmas. It would be '44.

T: You had leave in December of 1943?

N: Yes.

T: And then went overseas in early '44.

N: Yes.

T: As you headed out to the Pacific it was clear you were going to be part of the war against Japan. How did the Navy prepare you? What kind of picture did they paint of the Japanese? What did you know of the Japanese?

N: I know we were gung ho. We did not like them. Propaganda was propaganda. That was one of the main reasons you went in to the service. You'd see the movies and you'd see the newsreels. This is why you wanted to go. Your attitudes sure changed after you'd been in it for a while. There you were.

T: Did you perceive the Japanese as different in any way from the Germans?

N: Absolutely.

T: How so?

N: They were more like, shall we say, savages. They were brutal. They were brutal people. [These Japs were, they'd sneak around. They were cunning people—from p. 14]

That's another strange thing. You talk about tough times. It was a tough time accepting Japanese when you came out of the service. A buddy of mine was over in Korea. He had a wonderful time with the Japanese. He'd go to Japan. Wonderful, wonderful people.

T: He wasn't a World War II veteran, right?

N: He had been in there too a little bit. But not, I think he was in the States all the time here. But when the war broke out in Korea then he was over there. I had a tough time accepting Japanese because just the way they were. When you talk to them now, they were just doing, they were under propaganda too. Half of these guys wouldn't be taken prisoner because they figured they were going to be killed or tortured. They had their way of looking at things and we had ours.

T: Things have changed for you at least now how you view the Japanese.

N: Absolutely.

T: How did that change over the years then from when you first got out of the service?

**(1, A, 299)**

N: When I first got out of the service I couldn't go watch a Japanese, some of these movies. That bothered you. Of course we didn't have many Japanese around here so I wasn't really associated that much with them. I didn't like them at all. It probably took me maybe a year or so. Maybe more. I don't know. Like I say, I was not mixed up with them too much back here.

T: Not in the Twin Cities.

N: Not in the Twin Cities. On the West Coast it would be a different story.

T: Did your war experience change, help to modify your view of the Japanese, or kind of confirm what you had been taught?

N: When we were in it, no. I figured they were brutal people. No. They were dangerous. I believed what I was taught was the truth.

T: You sailed from Treasure Island right by San Francisco. And you were at the invasion of Peleliu Island in September of 1944. Where did you make stops between when you left the States and when you participated in the invasion?

N: First went to New Caledonia which was an interesting trip. We did not go over in a flotilla or a group. We were a single ship. The *Mormic Ren*. It was a liberty ship. I don't know. You're getting a lot of scuttlebutt and you don't know who's telling you all this, but we were supposed to have been tracked pretty heavy by a sub when we were going over. We did go to New Caledonia and made it. It's a beautiful port. The *Mormic Ren* was sunk was sunk right after we got off it.

T: Noumea, a main port in New Caledonia?

N: Yes. I had never seen such a... it was just like something out of the movies. It was just beautiful when we pulled in. I really loved it. That was just OGU, what they call, just a place where you kind of got sorted out and decided where you were going. After that we were there a couple days and then I went up to Guadalcanal. We were there a couple days and then we went up to the Russell. We stayed there and that's where I changed from Cub 12 and then we became Grow Pack 9.

T: Did you stay in the Russell Islands for a while then for training?

N: Yes. There's where we were issued our green uniforms. You were finally starting... You didn't know where you were going yet, but they were getting you ready. That's where the hospital supplies were being put together. I suppose that's where they were setting us all up.

T: Were you to be attached to a Marine Corps unit or not?

N: No. Not specifically. We eventually became Base Hospital 20. That was on Peleliu.

T: When did you find out that you were to be part of this invasion of Peleliu Island?

N: When we got there. We didn't know where we were. You just knew you were there.

T: What kind of training or preparation did you have before this invasion to get you ready?

N: Not much. It just seemed like we just started putting things together at that time. I was driving trucks and loading ships. You were hauling supplies. Quonset huts and medical supplies. We were loading ships. That was really up to the last point. The only medical stuff I'd been doing was in California when I was stationed at San Diego. From there on it was OGU. You were going first to Stockton and then you went aboard ship and then we went overseas and then we were back here on Benicka in the Russell Islands.

T: Doing anything but real medical work.

N: Right.

T: And this was going to change obviously pretty soon?

N: Yes.

**(1, A, 352)**

T: Were you part of a convoy that moved to the operation?

N: Yes, they were big. It was a big... I'll never forget it. This whole big flotilla. It was monstrous.

T: Talk about that convoy of ships and the trip, the voyage to the island.

N: I don't know. It was a long, long trip. We were on there about thirty days on that ship. It's kind of hazy. It was just a big mass. I know we stopped at one island and we had kind of a... they let you go ashore and everybody got a couple cans of beer and got half-happy. It was a mess. I don't know where that was. I can't remember where it was. But I remember it was terrible. All the guys got stoned. Then we had to go up these Jacob's ladders. They're these big nets, you know.

T: Up the side.

N: Yes. And the guys, crying out loud, they were falling off there. It was dangerous because you had these small boats down there. You get between them. Stepping on your fingers. But anyway, we survived.

T: It sounds like a mess.

N: Yes, it was. Everybody really unloaded. We had been stuffed in that ship for quite a while. When you're on those ships you have six bunks here and you're like in sardine cans. That gets pretty old. The ventilation on them was just horrible. There was no air conditioning or anything. It was just terrible.

T: It sounds like a pretty uncomfortable trip.

N: It was. Then you run out of shorts pretty soon and there's no place to wash them. You got... aaach!!! No, no. That part probably was one of the worst.

T: Just that trip over there and the waiting.

N: Yes.

T: How long was the wait before the actual invasion?

N: I really don't know. The battleships or cruisers went around that island for I don't know how many days just blowing the daylights out of it. Then they brought in the carriers, brought in the airplanes and they dropped napalm. You would think, that thing was burned black. The island was burned black when we got there, especially the one side. I didn't go in on the initial invasion. The Marines went in on the initial invasion. I can't remember how many days later we went in, but it was still going on real heavy. The side we went in on, our hospital was going to be on the opposite side of the island. So we had to take this road and it was a scary trip around the ridge. Especially at night. As soon as you'd get into this one nice, beautiful open area they'd shoot flares off and of course we were lit up like Christmas trees down there and then you'd get all kinds of bang, bang, bang, bang going on.

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.**

T: I wanted to ask. Waiting on the ship once the bombardment of the island had begun at that point it was clear that something was going to happen fairly soon.

N: Oh, yes.

T: Did you know at that point that you were not going to be part of the actual first wave invasion?

N: Oh, sure, because we were not attached to the Marines. The Marines have their own corpsmen. Their corpsmen are Navy corpsmen.

T: Right. And you were in a sense lucky enough not to be part of that particular group.

N: Absolutely. I wasn't trained with the Marines. The Marine corpsmen were trained with their units. We were not trained that way. We did get in on some of the stuff, because it took so long to take the island. They lost... because we had taken patients and we had a sling outfit that we used to sling the guys down from the ridge. Of course the Japanese loved that. They'd take potshots at this thing as they'd be going down. It was a different thing. In fact, you were sitting on that ship so long you wanted to get off. You didn't give a damn what was going on until you got off.

T: The way you described the conditions as being pretty close.

N: When you got off all of a sudden you've got bullets going around you. You think, "Holy Smokers! You could get killed out here!" Up until that point you hadn't thought too much of it.

T: That's an interesting point you bring up. Mortality in a way was abstract before then?

N: Yes. Until you really... there's bullets going around you and there's stuff blowing up around you. Then you realize, "Ah hah! This is what it is." You start changing your attitude a little bit.

T: How did that affect you personally the first time that you were under fire?

N: You're a little bit scared. What defense do you have against it? You can't see this. If you can see your adversary or something you can... but no, and you don't know where it's going to go. We had a guy, and this was after, a little later on, but he was standing in the chow line and all of a sudden bang! He got shot. From some sniper. These Japs were, they'd sneak around. They were cunning people.

T: So the island was certainly not secured when you landed.

N: No. No, no, no. They were supposed to secure that island in about seventy-two hours. It was supposed to be all over.

T: And it clearly was not.

N: No. One year after the war ended they finally got all the Japs off. They send a Marine detachment in there with interpreters, and they finally got them all out of the caves. But they were afraid too that if they were caught they were going to be

killed so they stayed in the caves. They stole stuff from us. They had enough supplies stashed in those caves. They could live for years.

T: No kidding?

N: Oh, sure. They'd be sneaking into our compound all the time. Stealing. In fact, I had a terrible experience. I had to guard the supplies. At one point there were about three or four of us. I never understood it at all, but we had this tent set up right in the middle of the supply dump. We'd have to stay there one night. We had a machine gun nest, two of them, right out in front of us there. And you slept with your rifles loaded and ready to go. Pull the trigger and they'd fire.

But I was sleeping in there one night and I rolled against, my back, I was facing the tent wall. And you could smell a Jap. You got to the point you could smell them. I was laying in there and there was somebody in the tent. It was a Jap. I was facing the wrong way. My gun was... I was really very vulnerable right there. I just laid there and I figured he maybe didn't know I was there. Maybe he wasn't coming this way. As luck would have it, he didn't. But if he would have started to move toward me I would have had to make some move and just hope I got him, because they would knife you. They were very, very good. [These Japs were, they'd sneak around. They were cunning people—from p. 14]

In fact, when we were bringing supplies from the beach to our hospital... you know what these ducks were?

T: Yes.

**(1, B, 477)**

N: That's what they hauling our supplies. You see, we had no docks or anything there. Everything had to come off and right up on the beaches. The Marines were getting a little bit scary because the Japs were jumping on these ducks. You'd have to go through this road pretty slow. And they were knifing them. We had problems. So they wanted somebody to ride shotgun so that was one of my duties. At night, that was another scary thing. You'd ride in with one and you'd ride back out and you'd do this all night long. Just riding shotgun.

T: Hoping something wouldn't happen.

N: Yes. We were fired on a couple times and you'd fire back. You didn't know what you hit. I don't know if I ever hit anything or not. That was the way it went. Then they would post signs up there if they knew Japs were right in that vicinity. That part of the island there was still some undergrowth in there and they could hide fairly well in that section. You really had to be on the lookout. I remember once, and this was a daytime thing, I had, it was kind of an officer's car like thing. I can't remember what they were called. I was bringing supplies or food or some dang thing down to the beach for somebody and this road was rough. I was going real slow and son of a gun, all of a sudden boom! Boom! When I got down there, I of

course floored the thing right then and got out of there. I got down to the beach and here I had two holes right behind me. Went through. You just never knew. You just never knew and this is why... this was after a little bit. This was maybe a week, two.

T: Did you ever see the Japanese?

N: Oh, yes. We had a banzai attack. A whole bunch of them came down one night and were going to attack some tanks we had down there. But we got them all. Yes, they were a mean looking bunch.

Then we had a couple of them in the hospital at one time. They were prisoners of war. This was around New Year's [1945]. Of course, everybody got, you know... A couple of the guys got pretty well stoned and they were going to take care of these Japanese in there. We had quite a time with that.

T: The guys came in and tried to get them?

N: Yes. They were going to finish them off. But anyway, that part got... nothing really happened there.

T: How did you handle that situation?

N: Really we just got them out of there. But nothing was reported. A lot of stuff went on there that, you know, but we didn't have reporters running around like you have nowadays. It's a whole different... I wouldn't even want to be near a combat zone today!

T: You're under a microscope almost.

N: Yes. It's terrible. It's terrible.

T: These Japanese POWs, what did you make of those guys?

N: We had one guy that dumped garbage for us. I had what we called the honey wagon and I had a crew and I would, which was a good deal, because we could get off the base. I could travel the whole darned island. I'd take the garbage out and we'd go traveling. *(laughs)* Come back when... You'd pull up to this thing and here was this Japanese, a big, oh he was a big guy! Tough. Grab these big fifty gallon drums. And of course you threw everything in the ocean back then. You'd throw it over the side. All your garbage went in there. Your ships dumped all your garbage. At night that's when you'd dump the garbage so that they couldn't trail you. Then spread it out. There was a lot of that going on.

T: So you had Japanese POWs who were working with you or for you?



N: Yes. Not too many of them. Every once in a while of course they'd get a couple prisoners coming off the hills. Catch up with them and shoot them or something and wound them.

T: How did you communicate with these guys who were working with you or working for you?

N: I don't know. I never really had that much to do with that part of it. We just backed the truck up and this guy would throw it over. I don't know. I never had too much. And these guys that were in the ward weren't on my ward either so I didn't have anything with them. Maybe the doctors did. I didn't have too much to do with them.

T: You were on the island for a long time. In fact, until after V-J Day.

N: Oh, yes.

T: You mentioned one of your duties here. What other duties did you have specifically?

N: I worked in the surgical ward for quite a few months. Then right toward the end the tailor there was being sent back. He had put his time in and it was up. They wanted someone who knew how to run a sewing machine. I had been in an upholstering class so I knew how to run a sewing machine. I became a tailor.  
*(chuckles)*

T: This is close to the end of the war here.

N: Oh, yes. So I had a good deal going there. Repairing. I made a few bucks. Then I'd have to do special watches if someone was in intensive care. We called it quiet room. Then at night if we had someone in there I'd have to go. So you had double duty on a lot of this stuff. I worked the surgical ward and that was interesting.

**(1, B, 571)**

T: So were you dealing with battle casualties or more people from different places?

N: We had some battle casualties at the beginning, but then it became more just a... people would come in with appendicitis, crushed legs, a few casualties once in a while off the hills. Not that many war casualties. Just at the beginning there a little bit. Then we had to be real careful. People don't realize this isn't all just battle stuff. But you've got dysentery and you've got sanitation things that are very... you know, when you've got that many men piled together you've got that many flies and you've got that many people laying around rotting. You got a bit problem. We did have one death from dysentery.

T: Was dysentery a problem on the island?

N: No. We kept it under control, but this was right when the fighting was going on heavy. Back up in the hills it was a mess. What we did, these dead bodies would be sprayed with oil. With fuel oil. That would keep the flies off. Then, it's real funny, but creosote, you can't use that anymore, but that was one of our big things in your toilets back in those days.

T: As a disinfectant?

N: Yes. You really had to be careful with that type... keeping the sanitation type thing. I know aboard ships the doctors would inspect the ships to make sure that the food was being handled right.

T: Was malaria a problem?

N: Malaria was a problem on Guadalcanal and it was a problem on Benicka. You slept in things. In fact, that's a strange thing because we didn't have any malaria. But we did take Atabrine [as a defense against malaria]. And we had to take a lot of salt pills when we were on Peleliu. That was a hot island. It was really something.

When I came back from overseas, it was at Christmas time again and you could not get trains or anything out of here. So they said, "We'll back your leaves up. You stay here in San Diego and we'll back your leaves up until after Christmas and we won't count that." So me and another guy from Lake Park, Minnesota, decide, "Let's go see if we can buy a car." So we bought a 1937 Chev for six hundred dollars. We got three other guys and we took off. Drove one guy to Kansas City, one guy to Chicago and one guy to Racine [Wisconsin]. Then me and Swede came home. The thing of it was, me and Swede were they only people that could drive.

T: So the two of you had to do all the driving from San Diego?

N: Yes, we did. One guy said, "I can drive," so we let him drive. Man, he got a hundred miles off the road and we had to go way back. So we're coming back and Swede was going to drive the first half and then I was going to drive the last half coming into Minneapolis. We were about an hour or two out of Racine and he's getting sick. I thought he had the flu. I said, "I'll have to drive." So I drove all night. Anyway, it turns out he had malaria. It's funny we didn't recognize it. I had a couple patients at one point. I don't think he got it on Peleliu. At one point I had a patient in there with it. That's miserable stuff, malaria. The guy's freezing, then he's hot. Put forty blankets on, take forty blankets off. It's terrible. The sad part is that they keep them over there. Finally it becomes permanent. They should really get them out of there right away.

**(1, B, 630)**

T: But they didn't?

N: No. They get them cured and then they'd put them back to duty. Then of course they'd have a recurrence later on. We didn't have that. He was the only case that I know of out of our outfit that ever came down with it.

T: The climate of Peleliu was not conducive to malaria. Was it too dry?

N: We were two degrees off the equator. This is something. I read these articles and these guys say that it was such a humid island. I don't remember it being that humid but I do remember being humid on Benicka. On Guadalcanal. Your clothes would mold. It was that kind of thing. I can't remember that being the case on Peleliu.

T: What was the climate like there?

N: It was hot. You were running over a hundred [degrees Fahrenheit] almost every day. Like I say, it was really something. At night you'd be in the movies and you'd see a cloud coming or all of a sudden it would rain for about twenty minutes and it would pass on by. Then in the daytime you could see the darn stuff coming. It would come over the island, rain for a little bit, and be gone.

T: The climate must have made fighting very difficult.

N: It was horrible for these guys that were up there fighting on the ridges. There was no shade. There was no nothing.

T: The island was relatively secure within some weeks. What transpired after that? Because it was a long time until V-J Day.

N: Yes it was. We ran this evacuation hospital and I can't remember how many months that went on, but it went all through the invasion and re-capture of the Philippines, late 44 to mid-45. They'd bring the patients in on C-46 [transport aircraft]. This was Army [Air Corps]. They would have two corpsmen or medics. In the Army it's medics. On these transport aircraft, they would have one nurse. In the Navy nurses could not be in the front lines. It was real funny. Situations like we were in, in the Army, the nurses were there. We took over an Army tent hospital. Then they had a compound that was kind of cordoned off, so the nurses had a place to stay at night. Because you had a bunch of crazy nuts that hadn't seen a white woman for two years. I always marveled at these gals. They would fly in these danged old planes and they had all these patients. They'd bring them in and we'd unload them and bring them up to our tent hospital. Then in the morning we'd haul them all back and they'd load them into the airplanes. I was trying to remember how many planes would come in a day, but I can't. We had quite a bunch.

There on Peleliu we had the first American POWs from the Philippines, they were the ones captured on Bataan and Corregidor, back in early 1942. It was a sad sight to see when they brought them in. Skin and bone, many of them, with legs amputated. They seemed in shock. To them it was unbelievable, the equipment we

had. When they were taken prisoner, they had nothing. They were abandoned, just left. They were told not to talk to us too much until after they were debriefed. Although some of the nurses that were prisoners did talk, and they had been through a lot. Women in their thirties looked like they were sixty years old.

I remember one guy, with both legs gone, I wanted to help him off my truck. I had ambulatory patients. Anyway, he would not let me help him, he waited for his buddy who would carry him on his back. They did not want too much to do with us. They seemed not to trust us, and after what they had been through, I could see why. They felt like we had abandoned them back in 1942.

T: So you had some interaction then with Army nurses there on Peleliu?

N: They were Army nurses. It was real funny. The Navy, when we were overseas, we had to do all the intravenous work. The corpsmen, we had to do it. I got back to the States, and you couldn't do it.

T: Why is that?

N: Because there were nurses. Nurses had to do it then. We couldn't, but we had been doing it all through the war. It was a funny, funny way the Navy operated. You couldn't date a nurse when you were out of the hospital. I was a hospital corpsman. If I would date a nurse, I'd get court-martialed. They're officers. You couldn't fraternize with them. Strange world.

T: You mentioned that you worked in a surgical ward for a while. Did you work in that for a longer period of time or did you have other jobs after that too?

N: I worked in that for quite a while. Seems to me I was in there for quite a while. Then that's when I went into that tailoring end of it. Way toward the end of the war.

T: Was there a daily kind of patient care that you also did? Taking care of people in recovery wards and things like that?

N: Sure. After operations. There was one story. This guy was a pharmacist's mate first class and he was on a small ship, maybe he was on a destroyer. He had an appendicitis attack and they put him over on a LST or LCI, one of them. Two young doctors came in right out of medical school and they're going to do appendectomy. Operate on the guy. They could have kept him, just keeping cold packs on him. They could have. But they decided they were going to do it. They get a couple corpsmen that had never been in an operation to be in with them. I can remember this guy Livaronie saying, he looked up at that ceiling and thought, "Oh, God! Who's going to operate on me here?"

T: On the ship?

N: Yes. On the boat. They did—and complications. We finally got him. I felt so sorry for that guy. I'd work with him. Have him in on the floor in a can and giving him enemas. I just could not get things working for him. I came in one morning, I don't know what that night corpsman was doing. I can't remember the guy's name, but Livaronie's stomach was, I swear, ready to bust. I said, "Something's got to be done." So I ran over to the officer's quarters and told him he had to come over and take a look. He did and there was only one thing they could do—they had to operate. They had been fighting it. They didn't want to do it because he had just been operated on, but they had to go in.

That was another thing. We had some real specialists as far as doctors went. They were big name doctors. So he came and decided it had to be done. This guy was Catholic of course, so they brought in a priest. They gave him last rites. It wasn't clear if he was going to make it. He'd been sick like this for so long. Given him IVs and stuff but there was nothing really left of him. They operated and nothing was ever said. No report or anything, but I knew the corpsman that worked it. They always count sponges when they start the operation. You always count sponges when you finish the operation. They had more sponges when they finished than what they started with. But that's as far as that went.

**(1, B, 714)**

T: Some of them came out of him, out of the guy they operated on. Somebody had left a sponge in this guy?

N: Yes. According to the story I got, the one corpsman fainted when they were operating on him on board ship. Anyway, they had to cut out a bunch of intestine, but they put him back together and boy, that was nip and tuck. We just didn't know. Trying to get the guy to eat. Old Doc Butzer, who didn't drink, he brought us a bottle of who knows what, bourbon or something, and put it in the medicine cabinet and said, "Have him sip on this a little bit." Of course we could sip on it a little bit too, but we didn't abuse it. It was a funny thing. Livaronie says, "I used to like a good drink. I can't even hardly stand this stuff right now."

This went on for quite a while. It seemed like he was coming along but it was still really nip and tuck. He got enough strength one day and he said, "I'd like to go up and see him." We had a patient up on the psych ward, and he wanted to see the guy. I said, "Okay, we'll take a walk." And we did. Son of a gun we're coming back and he says, "I think I got to go the bathroom." Boom! And he did. And from then on he was on his way. It was just exhilarating to have this guy pull out of this one. I remember then they were going to get him out of there and he didn't have any clothes. He didn't have anything. I gave him some stuff that I had and we gave him some dungarees and a shirt and a cap.

T: He went back to his ship?

N: He went back to the States. They discharged him. You often wonder what happened to some of these guys.

T: You mentioned a psych ward on the island. Were there people who were in the psych ward?

N: Oh, absolutely. We had one guy, he'd run out there and he'd climb trees and he was in love with Shirley Temple and oh, geez, we had a terrible time with him. We had another guy that was a big Jap hunter. He would sneak out at night and the Marines were so mad at him because he was crawling around out there trying to get Japs. So we had to lock him up for a while. You have this type of stuff. Then there were a lot of guys that wanted to get the hell out of there. So you hear, "I got headaches and I got this." We had one old psychiatrist. He was nuts himself I think. Most of them were. God, he'd come in and he'd jump around in the beds and he'd say, "What do you guys think? You're crazy? No!"

T: So do you think you had guys who were faking symptoms so they could get out?

N: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. There were a lot of them that tried to pull that one.

T: Can you talk about that?

N: They'd come in and they'd report. You'd have sick call every morning. So the guys would come in, and it was, "I got headaches. I got this." They'd put them in there and evaluate them. You'd get a lot of that stuff. Then getting back to the psychiatry stuff, when we were running the evacuation out of the Philippines there you had a lot of it. We had a lot of it coming when they were out in the hills there [on Peleliu]. You'd see guys coming down from the hills that had been up there for a week, and they've got a different look in their eyes. They're in never-never land. *(pauses three seconds)* A strange look they give you. We would get these guys coming out of the Philippines and most of them were line officers. Probably second lieutenants that had watched a whole bunch of their guys get shot to hell. They just finally threw up their hands, and "I'm going out of this world" is what it kind of amounts to. They just kind of snake right out of everything.

Ninety percent of them—and the percentage is probably even more than that—as soon as they're out of there and they have a little treatment, they're back to normal. You just can't imagine some of the stuff you have to go through over there. If you're a second lieutenant you're a little older, too. It's different. It's like the stuff I saw when I was nineteen, when I was in there, that young. I couldn't handle that today. You're different.

T: Do you think youth makes a difference as far as being able to handle some of this stuff?

N: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.**

T: Norty, you were on Peleliu Island for a long time. Did you have any leave time or free time when you were on the island?

N: You'd have the weekends. But really there was nothing to do except play basketball or we had a rec hall, library. You had that.

T: What was the number of enlisted men that were on the island?

N: I have no idea.

T: The Navy contingent here at this hospital, how many people?

N: I can't tell you that either. It was a five hundred bed hospital.

T: It was a big facility.

N: Yes. It was set up for a big hospital but you see it took us too long... we were supposed to be for the Philippines but it didn't work because we were still fighting [on Peleliu] when they invaded the Philippines [in October 1944].

T: So they figured the fighting on Peleliu would be over, and the hospital would be set up and ready to accept casualties.

N: Oh, yes. Everything would be all set. This was going to be it. But it didn't work. That's why we had, we'd go into this annex where we handled the patients. Then we didn't do it right from the big hospital because that was quite a ways away. This Army tent hospital was close to the airport. It worked a lot easier. Didn't have to transport so far.

T: So you had a lot of empty beds in your facility.

N: Yes.

T: So when you had free time you couldn't really go anywhere.

N: No. Where are you going to go?

T: On leave or around the base, was drinking a problem?

N: It was a problem. We had guys drinking alcohol. Torpedo juice they call it. We got a couple guys that got the wrong stuff. You can go blind from it and you can die from it. We had that problem. We did have some alcoholics. We had some drug problems also because the corpsmen, especially like the hospital corpsmen that were on tugboats and small landing craft where you had just a corpsman, they had access to drugs. We had a couple of them that had to be pulled off these boats. We kind of had a rehabilitation thing.

T: What kind of drug problem? What kind of drugs were being used or abused?

N: Most of it was codeine.

T: Is that addictive?

N: Yes. There were quite a few. I can't even go back to what we had back in there. We had different things.

T: Was this mostly people who were abusing the drugs themselves, or were things being bought and sold as well?

N: Oh, no. They were mostly hospital corpsmen.

T: Guys that had ready access.

N: Yes.

T: How did you handle people with either overdose of drugs or drug dependency problems?

**(2, A, 63)**

N: I never really got into that too much. I just knew it was going on. I don't know who was really even handling it there, but I imagine the psychiatrists would be involved in most of it. I do know it went on. We had some guys that were real alcoholics. They'd drink after-shave lotion and anything. We had a lot of alcohol.

T: Was alcohol available?

N: Oh, absolutely. We had alcohol. Then we would also, there was a buddy of mine who worked in kind of a garbage of the chow halls. All this fruit and stuff would come in, in big boxes, and the cooks, they'd just dump and throw the box away. There was a lot of fruit left in it. So we had a lot of applejack being made too, with fermenting fruit. Put it in a bucket, and it was hot over there. Put in a little yeast and throw it under the hut for a while, and if it wasn't enough you'd throw a little alcohol in it. You were going to find that. That stuff's going to go on.

T: On a new subject, Norty, while you were in the Navy was the Navy still officially segregated, as far as race?

N: Oh, yes. This is another thing that really surprised me. It was segregated. In the Navy the blacks usually were stewards for officers. They had a separate compound.

T: Did you have blacks on Peleliu?



N: Oh, yes. Sure. Our officers had their own. Every once in a while these guys, they all had to have knives, and you had a few of them cut up. And we'd shake them down. It was just an ongoing thing. But then when I came back from Peleliu and I went down to Great Lakes to have my hernia operation, I walk in. I checked this guy in, my psycho patient [a guy I had to deliver to this facility].

T: The guy you took down there with you.

N: Yes. Then they told me where to go. So I went to the ward and who was sitting there but a black corpsman. I almost fell over. I had never seen that before.

T: Was that new to the Navy now?

N: It was absolutely new. I had never heard of it. But the guy was a corpsman. What a nice guy he was. He was just a fabulous guy. I think he came from a pretty well-to-do family. I always felt kind of bad. He wanted me to go out with him on liberty once, but I had a buddy that was discharged and lived in Racine and I went with him. This guy checked me and he said, "Well, you're a corpsman. Let's go have some lunch." He was just going off duty. It was quite amazing. We walked into that chow hall and everybody kind of looked at you funny, because here you're associating with a black guy. But I never had that problem. When I went to Vocational [High School in Minneapolis] I wrestled on a team and we had two blacks on the team. Nicest guys in the world. I never had a problem there.

T: Was that different for you because you were from Minnesota, do you think? You were from a place where we didn't have a large black population.

**(2, A, 120)**

N: I don't know. I tell you where we really had the problem in the service was some of your blacks. The northern blacks would get the southern blacks. They'd tell them, "You don't have to take no crap." In fact, when we were in Stockton, California, waiting for assignment, we had a big contingent of blacks in there, Navy. They outnumbered the whites. They controlled the whole... I mean if they wanted to eat before you, they just went ahead. Anyway, they decided this wasn't going to work. They were going to ship a bunch of them out. So that morning the blacks sitting at the chow hall started throwing trays and started throwing this and they were just raising hell in there. They brought in the old fire hoses and just...

T: In the chow hall there?

N: Yes. Wiped the whole thing out. They just threw the guys in the trucks and shipped them out of there.

T: How did that make you feel? That whole incident?

N: It was scary, and at that point there's one time when I wasn't too happy with the blacks. They were just being... you've always got a couple bad apples. We had them in the whites. They did the same damn thing. That was not a good feeling because if you're outnumbered. Then of course, that's how they feel too. They're outnumbered. There's more whites than blacks, so when they got the upper hand they're going to show their hand. That's the way I took it. I was not happy with it. No.

T: On Peleliu did blacks have jobs other than stewards for officers?

N: Yes. There were a lot of them, especially the Army. They were stevedores. Drove trucks, and did a lot of loading. But as far as in the Navy, no. We didn't have... All the blacks that we had in the hospital were stewards.

T: Did blacks have their own separate compound?

N: Yes, they did. They had their chief. I don't know, I suppose the chief steward. I don't know what that rank was; I can't remember. I know I ran into him when we first came on the island because he was in charge of the guard detail that night. He gave us some kind of a talk. He was a neat guy. On the island you had to have passwords every night. They changed the password because the Japs were coming through. I remember I forgot it one night and I could have gotten shot, but the guy happened to recognize me.

T: Lucky for you.

N: Yes.

T: From what you observed, did blacks and whites tend to mix off duty?

**(2, A, 173)**

N: They had their ball teams and stuff, and that was another thing. You take discrimination, boy, I'll tell you, Texans were something else. I remember these Texans. If a black came towards them they better move. They were just... I know playing baseball, holy smokers! We had to do it every time.

T: Did the blacks have their own team as well?

N: Yes. It's kind of vague but I remember some of the Texans, these southern guys, which I never really, boy I thought that was horrible, you know. These guys in the service, especially traveling down south, they're servicemen and they could not go into these restaurants and be served. You have to sit in a certain place or use certain bathrooms. I never... that really rubbed me the wrong way.

T: Did you have separate facilities on Peleliu, where you were staying?

N: Sure. They had their own compound. Very seldom saw them.

T: How about the local population? Were there native inhabitants of these islands?

N: There were on Benicka. On Peleliu they were all off. They all went to Angaur. Peleliu was an interesting island in another way. You would be surprised the different nationalities that were on that little island. We had a graveyard right in our compound and there were Germans and French and English all buried in this cemetery.

T: Where did these people come from?

N: That's what I don't know, if they were gangsters from or criminals from other countries.

T: These were older graves?

N: Yes. In fact, they were always all lined with sake bottles. We didn't protect it but everybody left gravesites alone. We didn't bother any of them. You often wonder. They mined coral I guess, but that's about all that was on that dumb island.

T: It was really kind of a forgotten corner, wasn't it?

N: Yes. But there was a big fishery down there on Peleliu, and my brother-in-law knew a guy that ran that darned thing. He went back there once, way after the war. That was a fishing industry down there. That was a pretty good size town. That was a big town.

T: So the native inhabitants, at least on Peleliu, were gone.

N: There was nothing there.

T: What about on Benicka? That was in the Russell Islands. You weren't there very long but you did see some native inhabitants there.

N: Yes. They would do, the Navy used them. They did work on the roads and you'd see them out there. Chewing their beetle juice, that old purple stuff. They actually did a lot of bartering. They made grass skirts and they had quite a little thing going, a lot of them.

T: So they figured out how to make a little money off of it.

N: Oh, yes. It didn't take these natives long. You first went in on the island you could buy stuff for nothing. But give them a week and they were right up.

T: Good businessmen.

N: Yes. They were quick.

T: Coming from the States, from Minnesota, you were in New Caledonia, Guam and Guadalcanal too. That's a different planet in many ways from here. What kind of impression did the local inhabitants make on you?

N: I don't know. I thought in Noumea there, that was just a fabulous place, because you had that mixture of French and I thought it was really something. You had the leper colonies.

T: Leper colonies too?

N: Yes. In that section. Then on Benicka it was more or less comical. Kind of enjoyable. These crazy guys. These women. They'd just give them shoes or something and it was real funny. They'd cut the soles off and wear the tops. The women, you'd give them t-shirts. They'd cut holes out here so their breasts could hang out and wear the rest of it. It was almost comical there.

T: A mixing of cultures in a real interesting way. You were overseas for quite a while. How did you stay in touch with family and loved ones back home?

N: You wrote letters.

T: Were you a regular letter writer?

N: Not according to my mother. I wasn't good. *(laughs)* But you see also what you have to remember is, we traveled quite a bit. We were on ships for maybe thirty days at a crack. Then my son was in the Vietnam war, and I could see what my mother was going through. He was wounded about three or four times. It's a different feeling. You're over there.

T: As a parent, you mean?

N: Yes.

T: How important was getting mail to you?

N: Very important. You always looked forward to mail. Reading anything. We would get *Readers' Digest* and man, you'd read that thing from cover to cover. Then you'd get old magazines, like *Look* and *Life*. Those types you really enjoyed getting.

T: Did you get news as well? Updates of news from home?

N: Sure. We had radio stations there. Not necessarily just from Minnesota, but stateside news.

T: Did you feel pretty up-to-date or informed about the progress of the war? Because Peleliu was obviously off the beaten path.

N: I don't really think we paid that much attention to it.

T: Why is that?

N: I don't know. Geez, it seemed like you were there forever and you were never going to see the States again. I mean, this was life. You see, it's real funny. I just figured I'd been here all my life. This is going to be it.

**(2, A, 265)**

T: About the people there. Did you make lasting contacts during your time in the military? People you stayed in touch with after service?

N: One guy. We still see one another. In Omaha. I tried to find a couple of these guys and I've never been able to. One thing that was real interesting we had this Peleliu reunion. Whitskie and I were the only corpsmen there. But the other guys were from other units, all over the island. With the camaraderie when we got together it was just like we were all from the same unit. It was a strange feeling.

T: The units or service branches were almost irrelevant?

N: Yes. These guys were different groups. Didn't know any of them.

T: You didn't know them personally but it was a shared experience thing?

N: Yes. It was real interesting.

T: When did you have the first reunion?

N: It's been maybe fourteen years ago. Something like that. We've had about four or five. We had one here. I hosted one. We had two in Omaha I think. We had one in Idaho. They had one in Houston. One in Washington or Oregon. I didn't go to that one.

T: A half dozen anyway.

N: Yes.

T: Let me ask you, Norty, why do you attend those reunions?

N: I don't know. It's really fun to get together with the guys. But in a way it's kind of sad too, because every time there's a couple guys missing.

T: Right. What do guys talk about?

N: It's amazing. Never so much the violence of it, it's just the different, like these guys tease me all the time. There were bananas on that island and I never found them. I didn't believe there were bananas on there but they say there were bananas on that island. I had been all over that island. I don't know if they're pulling my leg or not.

T: So it's those kind of things that come up in discussion, more than the battle casualties part of it?

N: Yes. Another instance. There was this one guy, and I had to stand special watch. A black, a colored guy. Just a small, little guy. They were on the port command down there and they had a tower, and these guys would have to stand duty up there. I don't know what they really did. Anyway, this black came down off that tower and someone slammed a door or something on him, and he landed on a three-ton truck and he got all busted up. You wouldn't believe. I worked on him. I even worked in the surgery on that one, because I was running the pump on him. He was busted up something fierce. Then he landed on a truck. Anyway, I always thought some gold-durned southern clown figured he was going to get this guy and just slammed the damn door. It turns out that this whole command was turned over to a black outfit. So it was one of his own people. But you see, you learn things like that, that you had a whole different picture. Until it was corrected. But it's that type stuff.

T: Those are the kind of injuries that you were talking about earlier too.

N: Yes. We'd get all kinds of guys with their legs crushed and you know, they'd get stuck between a boulder. Arms break. A lot of appendicitis, a lot of appendix. I was diagnosing them before the doctors got there. I don't know if it was diet. Diet was a big factor. There was no fresh stuff over there, hardly ever.

T: You had a lot of dehydrated...

N: Everything. Everything. We had dehydrated butter, milk, it was all pretty much...

T: That food must have gotten old after a while, eating that dehydrated stuff.

N: Yes. It was amazing though, what we had. Here was a Mexican and of course he wasn't rated too high, so he always got the lousy duty of course. He had to cook on Sundays. He could take Spam and make it taste like steak. He was good. I just loved it because when he had charge of the kitchen you'd always get something special.

T: It sounds like he was pretty creative then.

N: He was. He was quite a character. Terrific dancer too. He'd get the USO girls that would come through.

T: So you had them come through some times?

N: Oh, yes. He'd dance with these gals and oh, man, I'll tell you. It was something to watch. Really jitterbug. He was really good. Nice guy. I can't remember his name, but he was a great guy.

T: Moving forward a bit, you were on Peleliu when President Roosevelt died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1945. How did you react when you heard that news?

N: Terrible. I had to stand out in the rain and listen to some general spout off, and I was a Republican anyway.

T: So there was a special ceremony?

N: Oh, yes. You had go and stand out there. I was not happy that day.

T: More from the news or from the weather?

N: I guess it was probably more so the weather. I was not a big fan of Roosevelt anyway. And I really hadn't made that much... In that point in my life, I wasn't really a strong Republican or anything. That guy just never... he always seemed sneaky to me. He always seemed sneaky to me.

T: Less than a month later, the war in Europe ended on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 1945. How was that news received where you were?

N: Really I don't know. It really meant nothing to us. You've been sitting on this island for... And you know, that was happening in the world that was outside your realm. You were in your little cocoon out there.

T: A lot of blue water around that cocoon too, wasn't there?

N: Yes.

T: So it didn't make much of an impact, did it?

N: No.

T: Before the war against Japan ended the US Navy cruiser *Indianapolis* was torpedoed [in the Pacific on 30 July 1945]. And you mentioned earlier that this impacted you people on Peleliu. What can you say about that, Norty?

N: That was a very traumatic... I can't remember exactly how many days those guys were in the water, but it was a traumatic experience to see these poor guys come in.

T: How many of them came to Peleliu?

N: I really can't give you a number, but we had a bunch of them in there. I know the captain was there. I ran the ambulance that night we were down there picking them up. Some of these poor guys had been soaked with oil. It's hard to believe that they stayed in the water that long. One guy was practically blind. He had a guy that kind of kept, took care of him practically. You wonder how many of them... a lot of them with pneumonia. Geez! If you've seen burns and the way you used to have to treat burns. Oooh! It was terrible. You wrapped it. Everything was wrapped and then you had to unwrap it. Aaach! It's horrible.

T: Did you have some burns among these *Indianapolis* survivors?

N: Sure you had burns. Of course half of them, they were practically psycho, just from the experience. You can imagine. Seeing water that long. It's hot out there. Then at night it's cold. And you got sharks and you got... aach!

T: What does salt water do to someone's skin?

N: You get ulcers. You get what they call salt-water ulcers. They had a lot of that. You'd been soaking for four days in that salt.

T: How do you treat something like that?

N: Ointments. Probably zinc. That's about all you can do. We had them there for a while. They also brought a hospital ship in and they picked up some of them, or they got them to the hospital ship. Then it seems to me the hospital ship came into Peleliu also and we loaded them onto the hospital ship.

T: So you had them at your facility for a number of days?

**(2, A, 368)**

N: A couple days. We had to keep that one guy. He had bad pneumonia. I don't remember if he lived or died. It was a horrible feeling to see these guys. It was terrible.

T: Were you able to talk to these guys about what they had been through?

N: Not really those guys that much. At that time, July, I must have been... I had to have the tailor shop at that time. I probably had the tailor shop then. Maybe I stood special watch on a couple of them. I can't really remember.



T: That was the first influx of a number of guys at one time for a while.

N: Yes. And they brought them in on everything. They had destroyers bringing them in. Just getting them on the island was a problem, although at that time we had a floating dock out there so the small boats could tie up, so that helped.

T: Because you said before, everything had to come on the beach directly.

N: We did have a big pontoon dock out there.

T: A number of days after these *Indianapolis* survivors came to your island the war against Japan ended. How did you react to the news of V-J Day?

N: That's another thing. I don't think anybody got too excited. The main thing was, when am I going home? This was your big... you were glad it was over. It was a good thing because there was talk that we were going to --

**End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 385.**

N: That we were probably going to have to go into Japan. But you see, the Navy hospital corps is under the direction of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. And they had stipulated certain times that you were overseas. You were only to be overseas eighteen months, then you went home. Of course that was the thing when the war ended. Then we were just about overdue. Also they needed corpsmen back in the States. You were just hoping in some way...

As it turned out we had guys, the Navy came out with this stuff, and this is probably why I never stayed in the Navy. If you would re-enlist, you would get sixty days leave. But you had to re-enlist right now. We had guys re-enlisting for six years. What they didn't tell them was, they were now low men on the priority list. So we're sitting there one day and all of a sudden orders come. I thought I'd be there for another year. Me, a nineteen year old guy, with points. I didn't have [any points accumulated] back here [in the US]. All I had was my time over there [on Peleliu] and we had guys that were supporting families.

T: And they would be higher than you.

N: Oh, yes. They had all kinds of points. So anyway, we're sitting there one day and all of a sudden somebody comes running out of the office. "We're going home! We're going home!" We were under orders, so we went home before these guys that had signed up for six years. (*pauses three seconds*) They were standing there when we left. They got taken in.

**(2, B, 422)**

N: I didn't get tattooed either.

T: Before the end of the war were you concerned that you were headed for Japan?

N: In some ways. You didn't know what, I didn't know what this eighteen month [overseas limit] thing was. So who knows? Yes, there was a good chance of it. We were a unit right there. Wouldn't be too far to get us up there [to Japan].

T: How did that make you feel when you thought about going to Japan?

N: No, no, no, no. I did not want to do that. No, I'd had enough of that stuff.

T: In concluding here I want to talk about coming back to the States. You mentioned at the beginning that you were in Great Lakes for a double hernia operation.

N: When I came back.

T: How did you get a double hernia to begin with?

N: A lot of times it's kind of a childhood, you're kind of born with a tendency to have it. Plus after carrying stretchers and off-balance lifting and bouncing around in these dang jeeps and trucks, that's probably what triggered the whole works.

T: Did you know you had the hernias?

N: I had had some feelings on the one side. Kind of funny twinging. I didn't know what it was. But it turned out that's what it was.

T: When did you leave Peleliu to come back to the States?

N: We left Peleliu the 1<sup>st</sup> of December [1945].

T: Oh, my goodness. You were there quite a while after V-J Day. A number of months.

N: Yes.

T: What were you guys doing September, October, November, with the war being over?

N: Actually we still had patients there, so you still had things going on. There was really no talk of closing down the hospital that I can remember. In fact it was real interesting. This guy that lives here in St. Paul, Dvorak, came just before we left. He and I had been through corps school together. He had stayed in the States all this time, but then he was brought in to our hospital. He was a corpsman. To be there when they closed the place up. But I was sitting in the movie and I don't know how, he had seen a roster or what it was, but he came into the movie and asked somebody

where Lund was. I hadn't seen him. We went out to lunch once a couple years ago. Just never got back together again.

T: One of the reasons the war against Japan ended so quickly was the use of atomic weapons. At the time, Norty, did you feel our government was correct to use atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

N: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Any way to end the war. I don't care what kind of... what's the difference? You lose thousands of men going in, and if you would have gone that way you were going to have to kill a lot of civilians. I don't care what you did. That's a different war when you're fighting on their homeland.

T: How have your feelings changed on this question since 1945?

N: It hasn't ever changed. I think that was the right thing to do. I don't like the atomic bomb, but it was there and we developed it. So did a lot of other countries. Germany was right with it too.

T: You came back to San Diego. Were you there very long?

N: No. You just went through there and got all your papers in order.

T: That's when you got the car.

N: Yes.

T: Then did you come to the Twin Cities briefly?

N: Came right here. I was on leave, I think it was thirty days. Then you reported back in to Wold-Chamberlain [Air Field in Minneapolis] where they did the physical. They always had to do the old physicals. Whenever you went, you always had to do the short arm and the whole bit. Wherever you went, or when you changed bases. So I was coming back, and I had the hernias. So I went down there [to Great Lakes] and then from Great Lakes, when that was all over with, then I was shipped back here and stationed at Wold-Chamberlain.

**(2, B, 507)**

T: How long were you at Great Lakes for the hernia operation?

N: I suppose I was there... well, they did them different then, too. You do one and then you wait a week and then you do the other one. So all in all I'm sure I was down there for a month.

T: Anything you can say about the time down there?

N: No. It was just go through the operations.

T: And you knew you were headed back for a couple months of duty back up here?

N: I didn't know anything. You don't know. You're in the Navy. *(laughs)*

T: That never changed, did it?

N: No. You just don't know. I didn't know where I was going to go. I didn't have any idea.

T: You were discharged in April of 1946. Were you discharged here in...?

N: At Wold-Chamberlain.

T: Wold-Chamberlain Field. What was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

N: I really don't know. Find a job, I guess.

T: Do you remember the very first thing you did?

N: I was kind of living at home at the same time. I was out at Wold-Chamberlain and when I got discharged I was supposed to have a billet out there, and then I had to get everything signed off. I didn't know where this was or that was because I was living at home. I really didn't have anything specific, I guess. I just went around looking for a job.

T: Was it difficult for you finding a job?

N: No. I was in the upholstering part for a while. That didn't... where I was working was kind of a factory thing, and I sure as heck didn't like that, so I wanted to get into more of the retail type stuff. I did find a job then with Erickson's [Interiors in Minneapolis], but they didn't have an opening for an upholsterer. But he said, "Have you ever thought about doing any refinishing?" So that's how I got started in that.

T: Were you drawing 52-20 unemployment benefits?

N: No, I never drew a penny out of that thing.

T: You made pretty much a seamless transition from service to work, and you were living at home, which I imagine helped in the transition.

N: Yes. Yes.

T: How was it to see your family and your loved ones again?

N: That was something else. I had lost a girlfriend at that time.

T: Can you say something about that?

N: Sure. She wrote me the “Dear John” when I was over there. Here was the thing—we were both very young. But we were both very serious when I went over. But you know, when you’re a young girl like that and a good looking young girl and you’ve got some clown sitting out there in the middle of nowhere, you know, that’s... So anyway, this guy came along and he had been... I guess they had drafted him and he had something wrong with his feet and they wanted to operate on them and he wouldn’t let them do it, so they discharged him. So anyway, he went after her. I don’t know why he didn’t go after somebody else. That ended there.

T: You got that letter when you were over there on Peleliu?

N: Oh, yes.

T: Can you remember how you reacted to the “Dear John” letter?

N: Terrible. I read it I’ll bet you fifty times, a hundred times. But it was so much to the point. “Don’t write me anymore. If you do write, I will put your letter in an envelope and mail it right back to you.” That’s pretty... There was nothing I could do. I was just sitting there. I kind of thought something was going on and I had written her and I said, “Why don’t you just give me a chance when I get home? Let’s see if we can get this thing sorted out.” But she didn’t even read that letter. She threw that one away.

So I came back. It was a very traumatic thing because she completely rejected me. That was the first place I stopped when we came back. I drove the car and I stopped at her place, and she wouldn’t even hardly see me. That was the end of that. Then I decided I was going to stay in the Navy, because there was nothing back here that I really was interested in.

T: So you thought of re-enlisting?

N: Yes. But that’s when I went down and had my hernia operations and met this other girl, the one I married. And that was a strange thing too, because she was going with a boyfriend and I would see her and maybe we’d go skating in the afternoon or bowling or something. She’d go out with him at night. I thought, you know, but we were having fun, so it didn’t make any difference to me. I went down to Great Lakes and had my operation, and sure enough she comes down, because she had an uncle that had a restaurant in Milwaukee and her folks came down to visit him. So she came out to visit me and then she stayed with him for a week or two, maybe three weeks, and worked at the restaurant. Then she’d come out and see me. She came back, and I got discharged, and we just kind of started going together. Then we got married and we had our family.

The church I go to she used to go to also. Mount Zion. Her mother still goes to Mount Zion. She's ninety-three years old. I bring her tapes. I been doing this for a couple years. I knew who she was. Joyce's mother. But I never saw Joyce. I figured she didn't want anything to do with me anyway. One day, I'm over there and somehow it comes out that Joyce has lost her husband three years ago. Of course, my wife was still living at that point. Then my wife passes away and at the mortuary the first person at the mortuary was Joyce's mother. Now my wife and Joyce's mother those two got along like two people I don't understand it all. They never knew one another that much in church. But Nick went and got her tapes through. She's blind so she got these tapes. But these two people, it was real strange to me, but those two hit it right off and they'd talk on the telephone. Nick was pretty sick at that time. She didn't go out much. You'd never know it to listen to her.

The first two people at the mortuary were Marie Wood and Joyce had to take her. Joyce was not happy taking her. She said, "I'll get you over there but you've got to go in." Then Marie wouldn't go in. Joyce finally came in. She was very uncomfortable. I hadn't seen her since... But my oldest son and his wife took her aside and they kibitzed and Joyce said, "I don't want to take my mother down there. I didn't know her or anything." I said, "I'll take her down." So I took Marie down. I thought that was really something that Joyce would do this. Then I happened to be over at Marie's one day and talking about my apartment and Joyce she owns a place, a house, out in Bloomington. She mentioned she'd was kind of looking at apartments. I said, just off the top of my head, have her call me and come on up and see my place. She was never thinking anything was going to happen but son-of-a-gun if she didn't call. She loved the apartment. She hated all the fooling around getting up here. That was the big problem. I had no idea that this woman was interested in me.

T: Strange path of life.

N: So here we are. We're going together.

T: Good for you. Norty, when you were in service during the war, in a larger sense, what did the war mean for you personally? Why were you doing it?

**(2 ,B, 631)**

N: At the first you thought you were really going to do something for humanity. The Japanese had to be stopped, for what reason I don't know. To go on with this these wars to be are absolutely... you're going no place with them. You're losing good people. They're dying because they think they're doing a good cause. I know they did on the islands out there. In some ways I think that. But then in other ways, you're just doing it for survival. It finally got to that point with me. Just survival.

T: You ultimately focus on yourself as opposed to this larger thing.

N: Yes. Forget saving the world and all that stuff.

T: And that happened while you were in service?

N: Oh, yes. You finally wake up, I think. I know I did. I don't know.

T: What's your favorite personal memory from your time in the service?

N: I don't know really. Probably Whitskie and me, we had boats. That probably. Just the camaraderie of a couple good people.

T: Kind of made the experience it sounds like.

N: Yes. There was nothing. Absolutely.

T: Anything else you want to add, Norty, before we conclude?

N: No, I think that's ... we've covered a lot.

T: Sure have. Let me, on the record, thank you very much for your time today.

N: That's fine.

**END OF INTERVIEW**