

## Byron Stensen

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**Question:** Now you are Byron Stensen?

**Answer:** You have to make a Norwegian out of me, not a Swede.

**Question:** Where did you grow up? Did you grow up in Washington?

**Answer:** I graduated from high school in Everett.

**Question:** What year did you graduate?

**Answer:** 1938.

**Question:** What was Everett like back then?

**Answer:** Old fashioned. There was nothing modern there but it was a nice time, now of course with Boeing there they have expanded south and you don't recognize Everett anymore. I don't. I don't even go there to look at it.

**Question:** 'Cause at that time it was a nice small almost rural, was it rural?

**Answer:** No it wasn't rural but it was much smaller than it is now. The population at that time was about 25,000 or something like that. Now it is out there, way out there, they've expanded it so much. I don't have any roots there anymore. My dad was the last one and when he passed away he was the last one of the family that lived at Everett.

**Question:** What did he do?

**Answer:** My dad was he worked in ironworks as a machinist yeah and

**Question:** In Everett.

**Answer:** In Everett. He came over from the old country in Norway and got a job and stuck with it all those years. Both my mother and dad came from Norway.

**Question:** Were they already married?

**Answer:** No, my dad was nineteen when he came over and my mother was only ten but you know my dad came over when he was nineteen and he was ninety four when he died and he still had that Norwegian accent. He could never get rid of it and I'm glad he didn't I love it. My mother didn't have any accent at all of course she was only ten when she came over and she went to school and learned English.

**Question:** It's amazing just that little difference in age your dad kept all his life.

**Answer:** Yep, he sure did.

**Question:** Any brothers and sisters?

**Answer:** I had two sisters, one sister died in 1950 and I have one sister that lives in Edmonds.

**Question:** Where do you fit in the age?

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**Answer:** My oldest sister is the one that passed away was the oldest one and then three years later I came and then seven years later my other sister came.

**Question:** Were you into sports and stuff in high school or what sorts of stuff did you do?

**Answer:** Oh gosh yes. I was into all sports. Everything. I never made the football team, I was too small, but I was in the track team and baseball and I played a lot of softball. We had a lot of softball teams around there and we had a good gol darn team in fact we won the city championship once. We beat out Castello's Menswear. Yeah. We had a good team.

**Question:** Was that the big sport then, baseball, bigger than now?

**Answer:** Do you mean softball?

**Question:** Softball.

**Answer:** It's different now, they have different rules and stuff, I wouldn't recognize the game we played and I loved the game we played and I played basketball for the YMCA called the YMCA Comrades and I was on the track team in high school. I've loved sports, always have but I never made it in football I was too small.

**Question:** Were you a good student?

**Answer:** No, I was an average student I'd say. I didn't put any effort into it but things came to me so easy. I'd take tests and pass with flying colors where ever I took a test. When I went into the military I took tests and got a high grade on my IQ and heck I've never had trouble taking tests but I wasn't a good student I skipped school a lot when I was in high school. Those were the fun days though.

**Question:** When you skipped was there a hang out you'd go to?

**Answer:** We'd go down town and downtown wasn't too far away and we'd go down to the YMCA and hangout. We didn't do anything wrong when we skipped school, it was just fun.

**Question:** Go try to find some basketball to play

**Answer:** Well whatever. I can't remember all what we did.

**Question:** Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**Answer:** Yes, I was already in the Philippines.

**Question:** So you were already in the service?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** How did you end up in the service?

**Answer:** Well, I was in the National Guard in Everett, infantry, and they were rumors that Japan was going to invade and it was a ticklish situation and they said they were going to mobilize the national guard and I thought mobilize the national guard, which they did later but I don't want to be apart of this I don't want to be in the infantry, I want to be in something got a little more glamour to it so I went down to the recruiting station and joined the army air

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Corp and was sworn in at Fort Lawton in Seattle and from there we were shipped over to Fort McDonald on Angel Island and was there for two months and then shipped off to the Philippines.

**Question:** How old were you?

**Answer:** Twenty.

**Question:** So, compared to a lot of kids that got in later you were an old man?

**Answer:** Oh yeah well so anyway I joined the air Corp and ended up in the Philippines. In signal aviation is what it was.

**Question:** So what was your duty then what type of?

**Answer:** We were training then mostly but for awhile there I was a telephone operator. I enjoyed that but we were wiring things and radio communications whatever we could whatever we had so I really didn't have a job that was assigned to me we just did odd jobs and things until the war came along then we were scattered all over the place. Nobody knew where to go, nobody knew what to do. First we were in one outfit and then in another outfit. They put us in different outfits. We went up to Bataan of course when they declared Manila an open city we went up to Bataan and when I was up there they wanted four volunteers to go down to Manila it was an open city then and the Japs were allowed to come into the city and they wanted somebody to go down there and pick up a bunch of signal supplies and all the food we could get so we had a big truck and we headed down to Manila and we loaded that truck up with everything we could possibly load it up with and then we were headed back and Filipinos stopped us and said you can't go any further, why not, well the Americans blew up all the bridges between here and Bataan to keep the Japanese from advancing up there. So here we were stuck down in Manila with a truck full of stuff and we couldn't get back up to Bataan so what do we do. Well, the Japs are going to occupy this city so we'd better burn this truck, so we set it on fire and burned everything in it and we got rid of our uniforms. Oh we got a family, a Philippine doctor, and his wife took us in and got us civilian clothes so we got rid of our uniforms. We stayed at their place and they kept telling us what was going on. The Japs were in the city and they were rounding up whatever American's they could in the city if they were military they took them down to the jai alai Stadium put them up against the wall and shot them. This they told us was going on. We thought we got to get out of this someway. Well then we got word that all the civilians American civilians and British civilians were to report to Santo tomas University. It was a university there. All the civilians were to report there so the four of us made up stories about being a civilian. Another fellow and I said we owned a restaurant out near Nichols Field, and when they bombed Nichols Field they bombed our restaurant and all our papers and everything was gone so we had no papers to show we were American citizens or whatever. Anyway we got by on that story. The other two guys said they were merchant sailors on a ship and so we got into Santo tomas for a year and somebody squealed on us and said we were military. And so the camp commandant got on the radio.. loud speaker that evening and said there are military people in this camp and this camp is for civilians only, so all of the military were to report to my office at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning and if they don't we have a list of names of who they are. So if you don't show up you will be executed. Thirty-three of us showed up at that office in the morning, thirty-three of us and I later found out I wasn't on that list. I hung around with guys that worked for Pan American Airways and they thought I was with Pan American but I had turned myself in so now I was stuck. So they loaded us all up on trucks and took us down to Fort Santiago. Fort Satiago dungeons. These were dungeons, I mean dungeons, this is where they used to.. When the Spanish were in control there and they took prisoners they put them

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in dungeons here and at high tide the river along side it would flood the cells and drowned them. But of course this was all sealed off now. The river wasn't, well it still ran through there but here it was blocked. But they put us in these cells. There were sixteen cells and we were in number fifteen cell number fifteen. You get in there and there is nothing but blank walls and a hard floor and over in one corner was a latrine or slip trench was in one corner and over in the other corner was a faucet that was turned upside down and that was the way we got our water if we could get it. We'd suck the thing to try to get water and there were fourteen cells ahead of us to get the water so we were way down the line. But we got water eventually to drink but that's all, not to bathe or anything else. We had to lay on the floor, the hard floor.. twelve hours and then at the end of twelve hours we had to stand up and be counted. The Japanese would count us, to make sure we were there. There was no way we could get out of there but they had to be sure we were there. So anyway twelve hours and then we had to sit down for twelve hours, and then of course it was to lay down for another twelve hours. It was the place was filthy, it was lice, and you had a shirt on and go along on the shirt and kill lice as you went around, by the time you got back around you could start over again cause there was lice. It was terrible and of course the latrine the tray would be over.. too much in there, and smell like a sun of a gun. It was terrible conditions.

We were put in there as spies, and we were to be executed for being a spy. So we were in there for 76 days, and during these 76 days every once in awhile you'd hear them calling out names of people and they'd open the cell doors and pretty soon you'd hear the rifle shots. They were executing them. And so conditions were so bad.. in the cells every once in awhile one of the Japanese guards would come in there and practice his martial arts. And boy I mean we were hurt but we couldn't fight back, there was no way we could fight back.

Anyway, the conditions were so bad and food was so terrible. It was plain ordinary dried rice.. twice a day.. about a cup about a saucer full like a cup and saucer and a.. The conditions were so bad that I just prayed that I would die.. or that I wouldn't live, or that they'd hurry up and call my name so I could be executed. Well after 76 days our names were called. and we thought this is it we're going to die now. So they took us out of there, out of our cells and marched us down to a building. And in this building was a Japanese officer and another Japanese man was there, he was the interpreter. So this guy spied off a bunch of stuff in Japanese and then the interpreter would say according to the law you have been caught as spies and you are to be executed.. however the Imperial Japanese Army and the superiors have said we'll take you to a prisoner of war camp instead of executing you. So they took us out of there and they took us to this prison called Bilibid, Bilibid Prison. We were there for eight days I think and then they loaded us on box cars, railroad box cars. Crammed us in these box cars and took off for what was to be Cabanatuan. Conditions in the box cars, we had to stand up cause there wasn't room to sit down of course some guys had to pee and they peed.. it was terrible. They made one stop and had us get out and do our job if we had to do it, and stood there with bayonets and stuff to make sure we didn't run off. But anyway I had to pee so bad that when I got out I couldn't do it, I couldn't pee a drop..and I was just scared I guess, I don't know. So got back in and off to Cabanatuan we went.

At Cabanatuan you were assigned details right away. I was assigned to the burial detail. Gosh sakes... The hospital they had there wasn't really a hospital just a place where they put people that were too sick to work and they were dying at the rate of five or ten a day. And the burial detail we had to take them out and bury them. It wasn't much to bury them we just took them out and dumped them in the hole. And they at least when we were there were.. able to get individual graves for each one. But before that when they were dying at a rate of fifty a day or so they took them out there and they dug great big holes and dumped them in there. That was.. when the rains came it washed the bodies up, you'd see hands and legs and heads popping up from the rain. But I was on that detail for awhile, then they took me and put me on what they call the farm detail. We were going out to where they were raising vegetables and stuff for the camp. We'd go out barefoot. Walked out to where the garden was.. where the farm was. And I was assigned to carry water from the creek, there

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was a creek down there. I was to get water from that creek, walk up the bank and put it on the stuff that was growing. There was a whole bunch of us on that detail. If we got down there and didn't fill that bucket full enough, they'd beat the hell out of you and go back down and fill up the bucket so you'd have a full bucket. And we did this all day long barefoot.. and there was guys that did things that was wrong and they punished them by putting a rock in their hand and making them hold their arm up like this for hours, if their hand went down they got beaten. It was hell.. that farm detail, but it was a lot better than some of the other details.

Then they came out with an announcement that there was going to be five hundred from the camp were going to be transferred to Japan. And they were taking the healthiest ones, and I was one of the healthiest ones I guess because I was on the list. There was five hundred and one of us and we had one doctor on there. And we were put in the hold of the ship, just locked in the hold of the ship, crammed in there, five hundred and one people in that hold which wouldn't hold that many. You couldn't sit down.. had to stand up.. and people were defecating all over the place.. and it was one hell of a mess. They sent rice down to us once a day, and that was all that we had was that plain rice.

We had one guy who had an appendicitis attack and Dr. Hewlett, who was the doctor there he operated and took his appendix out while everybody was holding him down, because he couldn't give him anesthetic he had to do it without any anesthetic. He did it he got the guys appendix out and the guy lived. And we all five hundred and one of us made it to Japan. Now many of these ships that these guys went over on they were sunk, the ships were sunk, by American planes. The ships weren't marked in any way so they didn't know there was American POW's on the ships so they sunk them so lot of our men never made it to Japan that were scheduled to go there.

We got to Japan we were assigned to work in a coal mine. And we were fairly close to Nagasaki and we'd go down to the coal mines and work all kinds of different jobs from blasting, to shoveling, to whatever.. whatever. And we worked ten to twelve hours a day seven days a week no time off. They finally give us a day off and said well you can stay up on top you don't have to go down in the coal mines, you can stay up in camp but they gave us jobs to do while we was up there so we really didn't get any rest at all.

Anyway it was so bad down there in the coal mines.. guys were having other guys break their arms for them so they wouldn't have to go down in the coal mines.. some guys would have their legs broken, all this was done on purpose. Every day I went down in the coal mine I said I'm going to have a broken arm today I'm going to break my arm today or I'm going to do it on my foot, I'll get some big rock and pull it down on my foot. Every day I went down in the coal mine I said that's what I'm going to do but I'd get to the rock and I'd get to the thing and I'd pull the rock over and I'd pull my foot back and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it and my birthday was on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July and I said I'm not going to be working in this coal mine on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, something's is going to happen and something did happen. We was going down on the trains in the coal mine it was open on the side, and I had my foot stuck out a little bit and so when we was going down there was a pipe that had been pushed by a slide pushed closer to the rail. So when I went down my foot caught that flange on that pipe and broke my foot, bone was sticking out, anyway they took me topside. That was the end of my coal mining I didn't have to do it anymore because I had a broken foot. So on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July I didn't have to work down in the coal mines. But it wasn't long after that that the war was over.

But we suffered through.. what do they call that flame throwers.. the bombs they dropped, incendiary bombs that they dropped. I was in the hospital of course with my broken foot anyway I was in this room and this one night all of a sudden these bombs started falling. I think what happened was that they were dropping them on Nagasaki and the surrounding areas, but they.. and they probably knew our camp was there but the wind blew the things into our camp. About half the camp burned down, and one of the incendiaries came through the roof where I was and landed in there and flames all over the place so I had to get out. I

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couldn't get out the door cause the flames were there so I went out the window and landed on the ground. And while I was down on the ground one of the incendiaries came along.. and those things they are five pound bombs, one of them landed underneath my foot.. I was laying face down, the one that was broken, and BOOM, and I had a big gash in there and was bleeding like mad and had stuff all over my legs from burns. And so I was laying there on the ground and I'd been hit so I couldn't move, I couldn't go anyplace, couldn't move, so I called for medics and by golly they showed up and picked me up and took me to this building. And I was laying in this building bleeding and I was getting weaker and weaker and I thought I'm going to bleed to death here so I called for somebody to come and said I think I'm bleeding to death so they took me in and fixed me up, so I didn't bleed to death that's for sure. But anyway, that was close to the end of the war then.. but they burned down half of our camp. Our camp had 1700 men in it, our original 501 and then they brought English in there and Dutch so the English and Dutch were in the camp with it and it totaled 1700 and some. And we lost quite a few during the time we were there. Conditions were terrible.

**Question:** Were there barracks by this time?

**Answer:** They were barracks, grass mat floor, and uh.. paper walls, and there was four of us to a room and.. we had.. they gave us pillows, little blocks said these were pillows, we couldn't use them for pillows we'd never had pillows like that. But anyway there were four of us to each room and we were in what is called a section, and there were fifty of us in a section and we were the ones that went down in the coal mines, we had certain jobs to do down in the coal mines.

One of the jobs I had down there in the coal mine was standing where the coal came down.. and dumped it onto a belt that was in front of me and from this belt went down and into the coal cars.. railroad coal cars. Well they told me my job was to pick the rocks out of the coal and stick them over behind me. Pretty soon, I had no room to stick them behind me so I started putting them on and I.. I made the mistake of putting on a great big rock and it went on down and it landed in a brand new coal car that was empty.. and man the noise from that rock hitting that thing BOOM. The Jap came up to me and beat the hell out of me and anyway I continued on taking rocks off and putting them on, I couldn't take them all off there was no place to put them but I had a way of doing this I used the books of the Bible every time I put a rock on there I'd say like this was Mathew and the next time I had one a pretty big one I'd say like this is Mark and Luke and John and so forth and I went through the new testament and then I went through the old testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the whole thing each rock represented one of these chapters. I kept my mind clear and I never had another experience like Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. John was the one that landed in the coal car down there. I never had another experience like that. I kept my eye out to see where the coal carts were and if they were moving. So anyway that is the war.

**Question:** So that is how you would trick your mind?

**Answer:** Yeah I did that, yeah.

**Question:** So would you go through the whole Bible putting them on and then get to the end of the Bible and then take them off?

**Answer:** No, just putting them on that's all.

**Question:** Did you end up with any people that you knew were there people, like the four guys you started out with, two of you said you had a restaurant, did you follow each other along or did you lose people.

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**Answer:** Just lost them altogether, in fact none of those were in the 501 I went over with. They were still in Cabanatuan or had already gone over to Japan, I don't know, I've never been in contact with anybody I was in prison camp with, not a soul.

**Question:** By choice?

**Answer:** No, I belong to the POW group that meets in Shelton once a month but they are mostly European prisoners, German prisoners. There are some Japanese prisoners but I didn't know them, so I've never been in contact with anybody. I don't know, of course, most of them are probably gone now.

**Question:** You said the coal camp, you said there were four in your room, do you remember who they were or does your mind just?

**Answer:** I remember a couple of them, yeah, I remember them but.

**Question:** Where were they from all over the place?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. All over the place. We had one from the Bronx that was in there and one was from Colorado, Denver, and I don't remember where the other was from.

**Question:** What was your condition by then, I mean you've been fed a diet of rice and?

**Answer:** I was losing weight like mad, everybody did and you know when I went into the service I was 165 pounds and when the war was over I was 88 pounds so I lost a lot of weight, but we kept working even with that weight.

**Question:** You lost almost half of your weight?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Question:** It seems like there were so many things going on I mean mentally you must have something going on that kept you?

**Answer:** Well the guys kept talking about if I get home I'm going to do this or that and I never said that, I said when I get home. I was going to go home that's all there was to it. Guys in there that were smokers got five cigarettes a week and boy those cigarettes were like gold we could trade for food and the guys that traded for food are six foot under, they'd trade their food away for cigarettes and you know finally they died so it was I saved my life by trading cigarettes for food. I didn't smoke them anyway.

**Question:** That would cure you.

**Answer:** It sure would.

**Question:** It sounds like you have two extremes you had the work having to pass the time at work and like you said you found a way to pass the time at work, but the time in between when you weren't working cause you said you had to work twelve hours a day was it sleep or did you sit in your room and try to?

**Answer:** Just sleep is all we could think of. It was 12 to 14 hours down there in the coal mines and then an hour to get back from there so we didn't have much time to do anything.

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One thing for sure working in the coal mines you got a bath when you got through. We had to get into one of these big bath tubs they have in Japan everybody gets into them so we had to get into those things to clean the coal dust off of us. If we tried to get back to the camp and we still have coal dust on us they'd make us go back and get in that tub so we had to take a bath and we kept clean that way.

**Question:** How come they wanted you to keep you clean? Here you are in this God forsaken work camp but yet they still want you to be clean. Was there a reason for that or some?

**Answer:** Maybe to make the people, we had to walk through a town to get back to our camp and civilians were watching us go by and booing us and hissing us and probably they didn't want us to look like coal miners.

**Question:** So through the town?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Question:** And I assume you didn't know what they were saying but you knew it was anti you.

**Answer:** Yeah. That's funny. One day they threw a bunch of orange peelings on the street where we were walking. We picked them up and ate them. Orange peelings.. boy they was good for you. They grew these Japanese like Mandarin oranges so we got the peelings off of those, another time they threw a bunch of green onions on the street, we picked them up and ate them, boy they were great. I think they thought they were punishing us, or they enjoyed seeing them scramble for food, that might have been it too,. But we ate anything they'd give us. We had one day in camp, they brought in two dogs and they butchered them and cooked them up for a meal and unfortunately all I got was juice. Some people got a little bit of meat. Two dogs didn't go far with 1700 people you know so.

**Question:** It's amazing again the perspective. Were all the guards as vicious as you describe them or did you see much humanity?

**Answer:** Not much humanity at all. They enjoyed beating the hell out of you. If we were in our room and had to go to the latrine down at the end of the building we had to take a little marker outside our room to show we were out at the latrine. Well sometimes when you got beriberi.. and beriberi lets loose you go there is no waiting so many of the guys went down there without turning their tag over. And when that would happen the guard would get you and get you down on your knees so you were on a level with him and bam bam. They'd slap the heck out of you, and that hurt more than if they'd have kicked the heck out of you. Just the thought of that damned Nip standing there and slapping you, and you couldn't do anything about it. It didn't hurt when they slapped you but it hurt in here. Boy, that was terrible. And that is how it was every time you took a beating. It wasn't so much the hurt. Of course, they did a lot of damage too. Well when the war was over we got word of it but we had to stay in our camp. We were too close to Nagasaki and they didn't know what the affects of the atomic bomb would be on us in that camp so they made us stay there. And we didn't get out until a month after the war was over. September the 14<sup>th</sup> I think we got out and the war was over August 12 or 13<sup>th</sup> or something in there but we were there longer but they wouldn't come in they'd drop us supplies by plane which killed two men stuff dropped down tear loose from the parachutes and come down we lost two men that way, the war was over and we lost men, its not the fault of the people that dropped it, its not the fault of anybody, it is just an accident, but it was unfortunate.



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**Question:** How did you find out the war was over?

**Answer:** Well we worked in shifts going down the coal mine. Like I said we were in fifty and we went down and another fifty or so and some went down at a different time and came back at a different time and this one day I was in the hospital with my broken foot and one day here comes the shift that had gone down in the coal mines just a couple of hours earlier and here they were coming back. What's going on, we couldn't figure it out, everybody from the coal mine came back up and were top side.

And then they call everybody out on the parade ground we were all on the parade ground and then this Jap got up there and said hostilities had ceased, he didn't say Japan had surrendered or anything like that, hostilities had ceased but we were to remain there until we were brought out by the Americans. So we were stuck there. One guy who had made an American flag while in prison but kept it hid raised that flag out there on the parade ground and the Americans started singing the Star Spangled Banner and everybody sang. The war was over. That was something I'll never forget.

When we were finally released from the camp they took us to an airfield on the island that we were on, we were on Kyushu and they took us to the southern part of the island and flew us out of there to Okinawa. And then from Okinawa we were there one night and they flew us into Manila and were there for eight days I guess it was and put us on a ship and sent us home. Funny we were supposed to go to San Francisco so my parents notified them the ship is going to be in San Francisco so they drove down to San Francisco to meet me down there in the mean time they told us there were too many ships in San Francisco so they were going to have to send us to Seattle so anyway they got word to the people that were waiting in San Francisco, they got word to them, so my folks were able to go down to Seattle and first of all we went up to Victoria and let off a bunch of Canadian ex-prisoners of war and then we headed towards Seattle and went right past Everett my home town and gee I'd just like to just dive over and swim there. But anyway we got into Seattle and my folks were there on the dock waiting for us.. I saw them but they kept us overnight, they said we couldn't go we were to go to Madigan Hospital the next day. But we were quarantined they said so they took us to Madigan the next day and that's where my folks got to see me for the first time.

**Question:** You could see them?

**Answer:** Yeah, yeah, and we saw them at Madigan my two sisters and my folks were there. I was in Madigan for several months before I was released. I had all kinds of things wrong with me but eventually I got out. While I was at Madigan they gave us three day passes all the time on the weekend.. three day passes so I was at home and a guy that I knew and went to school with came by and he said hey why don't you come over to Spokane with me I want to show you the business I started. Oh no, and he said I've got a black book its got all kinds of girl's names in it. I'll fix you up with a date. I said ok well that's a good deal. I'll do that. So we got over there and he had a heck of a time trying to get a date for me. Finally he said well here's the last one and I'm going to let you call her. So I called her and when I told her I was with Wally she says no I don't think so, I don't think I want to go out with you, I said come on, so I talked her into it anyway and found out she'd dated Wally once before and Wally was all hands and wouldn't leave her alone and she didn't want anything to do with him. But anyway, Wally had his date and I had mine and we went all the way over to Coeur de laine because you could buy drinks there, you couldn't in Washington at the time. And so we went to a night club there where they had dancing and so on and we went there and enjoyed ourselves and this girl that I met a few days later, I asked her to marry me and she said yes. And she had a little two year old girl and her father was killed at the Battle of the Bulge so she didn't have a father so anyway after I married this girl on the

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6<sup>th</sup> of July, my birthday, I adopted the little girl and she's been a part of our family ever since so.

**Question:** So its good Wally had been all hands because if Wally hadn't been all hands you would never have gotten a date.

**Answer:** Wally, I don't know, you being in this type of a business you might have known Wally Nelscog, he owned Kixy radio station for years and years and years he owned Kixy radio station.

**Question:** Yeah. I've heard the name.

**Answer:** Wally. He had a radio show with kids, Wally's Kids or something anyway it was funny. I went over there with Wally and it was a good deal and then he showed me his business, music, all piped in music to the elevators and so forth, he had that but he needed some money and he knew I had almost four years of back pay coming so he said hey I'll sell you a third of the business. He had another guy to be the other third, three people owned the business, and I thought about it for a couple of days and finally said, Wally, no I don't want to buy into the business but I'll tell you what, I'll lend you the money, so I lent him the money. I got it back eventually but he turned that into, he became a multimillionaire, he has a beautiful home in Edmonds just up on the hill, he has a mansion up there, just great place and Wally is a good friend of mine.

**Question:** Do you hold animosity from the war or when the war was done do you put it behind you or what does the mind do?

**Answer:** I don't think I'll ever forgive. I might forget but I'll never forgive. Some of the things they did were absolutely uncalled for inhuman and just you know I just can't forgive them for doing these things. They could have been nice if they'd wanted to but I mean we were prisoners we couldn't do anything but be there and work for them so why did they have to be so mean. Why did they have to beat us? I think the reason I can't walk now is the beatings I took in my back. I can't use this leg and that's all a result of the beatings I took. I'm sure it is. I can't prove that it is but I'm sure it is.

**Question:** I would say there's a pretty good you know.

**Answer:** I have a 100 per cent disability, actually I've got 280 percent disability, got that many things they've given me disabilities on but they only pay for 100% they don't pay you 280 per cent. That's all right.

**Question:** Are you proud that you served? Are you glad you went in the service?

**Answer:** Oh yes yes and I'm very proud of my country. Very proud. I love my country. I'd serve again if I had to.

**Question:** Do you think, I'm 44 years old, my generation even begins to understand what you did for us?

**Answer:** I don't think so, I don't think so, the kids in school don't know anything. Like the kid when I talked about fighting the Japanese they didn't know we had a war against Japan. They don't know and they don't know what we went through and they'll never know unless we tell them. I have been reluctant to tell my family what went on. They keep asking me questions and getting things out of me eventually you know, but I don't know I haven't

## Byron Stensen

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wanted to talk about it. I don't mind talking about it now because the word has got to get out, its got to get out to these kids and that's the only way to tell them what went on.

**Question:** Do you think there is a message we have everything happening in the Middle East now and it sounds like we're back in the cold war again, do you think there is a message from World War II that should be left with the generations to come?

**Answer:** It's so entirely different I don't I'm worried about this war we're in now that it is going to get worse and we're going to get hurt going to get hurt bad. These terrorists are not going to sit by and watch us enjoy our lives they are going to make us pay. This is what I'm worried about. It's going to happen. It happened with the planes that went into the towers and the pentagon. That was bad enough, maybe not war but something is going to happen and I'm worried about it. I'm worried about my family, my kids and my grandkids and my one great grandson I'm worried about him and its not going to end its going to go on and on and on. Those terrorists are all over, all over the world and they are going to do something. Maybe not to us but to somebody. It's a sad situation.

**Question:** Is it a similar feeling what you felt going into World War II or is this totally different what is happening now.

**Answer:** Totally different, totally different. Some of our troops have had some battle but very little compared to the big war, the Korean War or World War II. It's completely different. I hate to think its going to come to that what we had in World War II because we lost so many people, so many men in Germany and Japan all over, I can't.. I can't , I know it's going to happen, I'm afraid when I watch the news that something has happened. Right now in the middle east between the Palestinians and the Israelites I don't know, I don't know why they can't sit down and make peace, to me it sounds easy to do, let's just say here's the border, lets not kill each other, let's live in harmony but I don't think its going to happen. It's too bad.

**Question:** Do you think the middle East has gone on forever, do you think the story hasn't been told, they don't know what war involves. I don't say war is the answer to anything you know but for some reason we either ending up protecting, defending, aggressing, like you said it seems so simple, you need to get along, draw a line.

**Answer:** Yeah, I know what the answer is but I hate to see another all out war of any kind.

**Question:** What was the best part of being in the service, was their a good part for you of being in the service?

**Answer:** Oh yeah. It's, I was on recruiting duty of my home town in Everett when I came back from after the war and I wasn't going to re-enlist in the service, I didn't want any more to do, but in fact I had a friend of mine was getting me a job in the bank up in Concrete and I thought, he said you learn the banking process here because it's a small bank and you'll learn everything about it so you can go into a bigger bank. Sounded good to me until we got to the salary which was terrible and I thought, I was adopting this little girl and having a wife, I said I can't make it on that, so the recruiter got hold of me in Everett and said why don't you re-enlist and I got to thinking about it and thought the pay wasn't too bad and the work wasn't too bad he says we'll get you a job right here in Everett your home town, gosh sakes, that sounds great, and I stayed in Everett for four years on recruiting duty by that time I had over ten years in the service and I was building up a retirement here and I can't give that up

## **Byron Stensen**

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now I'm going to keep on so I went from there to Saint Antonio ,Texas, to Kelly Air Force Base down there and from there went overseas.