

John Cannon

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Question: When you went in the surface, ah surface, when you went in the service was it segregated?

Answer: Oh yes, oh yeah. Ah segregation didn't, I went in in '42, segregation didn't end really until the '60's. Now it was declared in the, after Korea, and ah, but you still had units and pockets and that sort of thing. A part of, a part, the main impotent for the beginning of integration was Korea, you see. When we went, we the United States, when we went into the Korean war, you know that's history, where when there were, we were segregated units when we went into Korea

Answer: And what happened is that when the Chinese entered into the war the American forces were en route so we had to, you know, push back, you know when the Chinese crossed the Yalu, we were pushed back. And then when we began to regroup the people who were sent from the States, the reinforcements, weren't sent to black units, white units. If you needed a medic, you could be polka-dot (laughs) you went to the (inaudible) medic force. Now that's how I went into that thing, you see. Because when I came, I left Fort Bragg and the black unit but when I went to Korea to a 187th Airborne Infantry regiment. You see, the medical company because I was a medic, you see. So now, when the Korean thing ended, and this is historic, I mean in the books you could look it up, General MacArthur wanted to begin to re-segregate and President Truman, who wanted integration, President Truman said no because, you know, this was going on. And my understanding, and I accept this, I don't know this to be a fact, was that the you know, people said that General MacArthur said as long as he was the commander this would be, and Truman said your no longer commander... But that's a story, but nevertheless, the principle is there.

Answer: Sure.

Question: So then after that, and it worked. And it worked. So if it worked from the standpoint that if you were a commander and you were racist, you know, in your heart of hearts you were racist, but your career depended upon your subordinates. So here you got a cracker jack African American you got a cracker jack ah, Hispanic, you know, and you got, forsaken of my comment, you got a non-cracker jack Caucasian. And your promotion (laughs) depended upon which one of these people you were going to take. Yeah, you tell them, I'm sorry partner but you know, my baby needs new shoes, I want that other promotion. And that dynamic just makes itself. Just makes itself.

Question: Now you said you were in LA before you went into the service, right?

Answer: Um hm.

Question: Was LA segregated?

Answer: Um hm. Well not segregated as compared to New Orleans.

Question: Oh.

Answer: Ok, but we lived almost like it is now, tell you the truth, not no, that's not so. But we lived central area, southeast, but the people with means, African-Americans, we had family and friends, of friends of family, who had means, who lived in wherever they chose to. I mean, housing and that sort of thing which meant that the kids went to school, I went to Jefferson High School which was more black than anything else because it was in a black neighborhood, you know. However, we had all kinds of folks. And when I migrated from New Orleans there, just that same way, there were a lot of whites who were migrating there, in the

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same economics as I was and who lived in the housing, you know, in the community that I did, because the housing was cheaper (laughs). So they went to the school, they went to Jeff, you know because that's where the school was. And they went out and their mothers, fathers, brother, sister, went to the war, work and plants 'til they got enough money, like my folks did, got enough money to move out to better housing, and they moved out to better housing. But it wasn't restricted like it was in New Orleans, you know.

Question: When did you, did you enjoy the service?

Answer: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I would've stayed. I got sick, I had well, I got sick, I had cancer of the colon in 1966. And as you see, I'm ok. And they caught it in time but I had to be retired. But I, oh yeah, I liked, I still did after that (laughs). Yeah, once you find your niche, you know.

Question: Did you think there's a message from World War II?

Answer: I don't know.

Question: That you could leave for future generations?

Answer: I don't know, that I could say that because so much has changed, and you know, and so much changes. I think the, ah, the military service ah, offers tremendous opportunities for ah, people who understand what their goals are and understand how to arrive at what it is and who work at it. And I think that's true, the civilian life. And ah, I'm happy to say there are fewer hurdles than there used to be, racially we're talking now. But I also know that there are a lot of deterrents out there. So my message would be get in your game and do it right, you know. Just everything, just plain old everything.

Question: What type of questions were the people over at the meeting asked you, that you were just was at? You were saying that afterwards people had a lot of questions.

Answer: I think a couple of questions had to do with something particular about their own history. They knew somebody who was, and that sort of thing, as opposed to, you know, my imparting information because of this.

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

Answer: Um hm, yes. I'll be darned, I'd had forgotten that I uh... It was Sunday afternoon and I was on Central Avenue in the Lincoln Theatre, you know. In the matinee, Sunday matinee with Ollie Jefferson (laughs), pretty little girl (laughs) aha ok. I'll be darned. Ollie May Jefferson, and all of a sudden the lights came on at the theatre, and they said for everybody to go home, the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor. Who in the world is Pearl Harbor (laughs), you know. Pearl, all the people, all we knew about Pearl was girl's name, Pearl (laughs). The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor, so of course, when we got out onto the street, on Central Avenue, this was pretty much a black, it is, at the time, a black section. And people just running and you know, cars horn blowing, and just stuff. So when I got home, my sister, Anna V, Vera, is her name, we all call her Anna V, and Anna V was sitting in the living room with her bible (laughs) and I got in there and we had to get on and pray, and I didn't know what I was praying about but, and so we did that. And by the time the radios and stuff and that sort of thing... But I had forgotten that, yeah.

Question: That's interesting, you remembered who the gal was.

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Answer: Yeah yeah (laughs). I better go back to LA and find out what's going on. Older, she's older than me, I think she was a year older than me at that time (laughs). She was an old lady (laughs), an old woman, I wouldn't be interested (laughs).

Question: So what were you, were you in high school?

Answer: Um hm, in high school. I was finishing high school.

Question: So, like so many people, Pearl Harbor, I mean in Hawaii, only so many people live in Hawaii.

Answer: Yeah, not only we didn't know, I mean most adults didn't know Pearl Harbor.

Question: That's what I mean, yeah.

Answer: Not just the children.

Question: I heard of people talking about getting enlisted and they were saying where they were sending them and they were going we never heard of these places before, we just knew we were going.

Answer: Yeah, right.

Question: So did you realize then, I mean was it scary or was it, that was...

Answer: Oh no. Not at that age. You know, I mean, hell we're going to go whip some ass (laughs). You know, I mean, hot damn, you know, you know, shucks, that thing. Naw, then you know, of course, as the casualty thing, as the draft started pulling, you know, that sort of thing. And it, it sobered down. So I graduated that June came and you know, came into the service.

Question: That was cute to see your response, remembering that it was ah, Ollie.

Answer: Ollie, yeah.