

Robert W. Meyer

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Answer: uh, but, uh, I almost did it. I almost...I look back and that would have been a bigger shock for mother.

Question: Well, that's the. You saw the video, Norm Orford called home and I can't remember if his wife, I think it was his wife or his girlfriend answered the phone and they thought he was dead. And she said, Who is this? 'Cause he got off the but waiting for everyone to come meet him, and nobody was here, so he called home. And she said, Who is this? And he said, Norman who? Norman Orford, God damn it! And she passed out, 'cause you know, she thought he was dead. It was his fiancée, so.

Answer: Well, my folks thought I was dead, 'cause I remember my Dad always said that when they got that telegram saying I was missing in action, why, of course at that time, the newspapers had been full about all this Ardennes Offensive about the beginning and how terrible everything was, and when mother saw that telegram and missing in action, she just assumed, blown to bits, they can't find him. That was her thought, you know, that hit her. And it was so hard on her that she was sick in bed for a week. It really hit her hard. He always said, too, he said he thought her health had never fully recovered from that, that she'd gone downhill from then on.

Question: Did you have a different relationship with your parents when you got home?

Answer: No. It was still. I always had a very good relationship with my parents. The thing I remember got to me is I remember I got home and I finally walked up to my old room, and my folks had left it exactly the way I had left it, and it felt so good to see all this again, but there was something wrong, and you couldn't put your finger on it. And that, the thing that had changed was me. I, you could never go back and be that kid again. You were there and everything looked the same, but you knew the world had changed and so had I.

Question: That's the, boy, and that's a real good way to put a physical-ness to it, because I hear so many stories about these young boys that went away, and they went away for a year, 2, 3, 4 years, and in that period. Yeah, things at home stayed the same, but they had changed.

Answer: Yeah. And the other strange thing was that, when uh, you spent your life growing up there, a lot of your memories were when you were a little guy, and your sense of how big things were, and when you came home and you finally saw it in a grownup light, it felt like everything had shrunk. It was a weird sensation, because your memory was as a child, and a lot of the things you remembered was when you were smaller and everything was bigger. And it was a funny feeling.

Question: That's one of the hardest things, um, I think it was Don Newbold, I asked him.. and he had friends that were with him. He wasn't like you were where everybody got shifted around. He lost a lot of friends. I said, When you close your eyes and think about them, what do you see today, and he says, You know, I see 17-year-old boys, they never grew up, the never got to come back and see that difference.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: What was the worst part of the service for you?

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Answer: The worst part of the service? Well, it has to be the day I was captured. That was the most traumatic event of my life. It overshadowed everything.

Question: What about the best?

Answer: Best part had to be that comin' home. Like I say, when I stood there and saw the old family car coming down Capitol Way, there and seeing my folks in it, that was probably the greatest moment.

Question: What were they driving? What car, do you remember?

Answer: It was an old '37 Ford.

Question: What do you think...is there a message from this for generations to come that the history books haven't...

Answer: I don't know. The only. I always keep...you hear so much today when they talk about like going to war with Iraq and so forth, that there has to be a better way. Yes, there has to be a better way, but you'd have to have better people. And we can't, we still have families that can't get along together. How do you expect nations to ever get along together? Yes, you can negotiate with a gentleman, but you can't negotiate with a hoodlum. And so, I see no, everybody takes off that there has to be an alternative to war, but I don't see that there ever will be.

Question: A necessary evil?

Answer: Necessary evil. It just...all one has to do is look at the entire history of the world, and it's nothing but one war after another because there's always some human failure, where somebody doesn't learn from history.

Question: When you went to war, when you went to Europe, do you remember in your mind who you saw the enemy as? Who you were fighting?

Answer: I saw no problem. We knew what Germany was, what Hitler was doing, and as soon as you got into, onto Europe into like France, on the Continent, and you saw what the war had done to these people and you saw how happy the people were that Americans were there, then you realized that what you were doing was necessary. And even today, we have made 5 or 6 trips back to Luxembourg. These people are so grateful yet for what we did for them, and they're making sure that their children remember what was done for them. And one time when we went there and we had a ceremony of Bastogne and when we got through we were leaving the place and going back to our rented car in the parking lot, and this was on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge and our 28th division had come over there to take part in the celebrations, and somebody had given, as we walked into the uh, parking lot, there was a Belgium girl and her little boy and her husband standing there and she was pinning on a red keystone which was a symbol of our 28th division on this boy. And she was pinning it on upside down. And my wife looked and said, Oh, it's upside down. And she says, Oh, I'm sorry, she says, and immediately fixed it, and then she turned to me and she says, Were you here during the war? I says, Yes, 50 years ago, and she thanked me with tears in her eyes. That just said it all. It made you feel it was worth something. Those people over there in Luxembourg

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and Belgium appreciate it. Some people in France do, but a lot of them don't. And even some Germans appreciate it, 'cause I, in our travels back over there we have met two German veterans who were at the place where I was captured, and both of them have expressed gratitude more or less to me that we saved them. The one fella, we had gone to, it was on the 40th anniversary, and we had gone to the opening of the museum in Diekirch and we were standing there listening to the speeches and the Luxembourgers were praising their American liberators, and this German veteran's name was Fritz, Fritz Maschky. Fritz turned to me and he says, They forget, you liberated us too. And that said worlds of things to me. So...

Question: It's nice to hear, 'cause I've heard a lot of different opinions, but to hear you realize it was worthwhile. I know that some veterans question it right now because of the state of the world, the state of the country, some of the disrespect, you know...

Answer: It is kind of, unfortunately, like I say, that's one of the problems, is like now, like France, has not been a very strong supporter of us, let's face it. She's supposed to be an ally, but she's not a very good ally, in my opinion. Uh, and yet they owe us so much. They wouldn't have had a thing. And yet some places in France they resent Americans because we tore them all up, liberating them. Well, you know, even in like, when the Americans first got into the war and invaded North Africa, the first people we were fighting were the French. They tried to keep us out. I mean, they were going to go along with.. it's kind of unbelievable, but that's the way it was.

Question: Will Rogers said, They call it Neese in France because there is no nice.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to share this. I think it's invaluable for future generations, for your relatives, for people you and I will never meet to understand the reality and, from a personal perspective, because again history tell us the names and dates and places, but from the especially infantrymen that were there and I ask, What was war? And they said, My war was 50 yards, 50 yards, 50 yards, which is different than anybody else's 50 yards, anybody else's experience.

Answer: That's a very good description of it, because each individual only saw what was around him. You never got a big picture. And that's the thing that, uh, disturbs me the most, like when people talk about the Battle of the Bulge, the only thing they can think of is Bastion, but it was a thousand little places like where I was, and all the guys I know who were captured back during that time, we all have a completely different story. Different situation. It was all little actions here and there and everywhere. It was just a whole mass of them. We all...you don't find two people with the same story. Everybody. Even the guys who were right, side-by-side saw it differently than the other guy. One thing affects you, one thing didn't. Like when we were on that farm, I remember one night, one fellow kind of went berserk in the middle of the night, and 'cause at night we could hear the British bombing and you could hear this rolling thunder all night long, everywhere, and this disturbed him. And he was screaming, Stop the bombing! Stop the bombing! To me, it was music to my ears. Thank heavens it's out there. They're still...they're going to liberate us someday. But for him, it was a whole nother picture, obviously.

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Question: It's a hard thing for people to understand. I mean, even during this interview process, we...I do some of the interviews, Adolph does some, and we talk back and forth about things and perceptions of hearing people's stories, and we talked a lot about how everybody dealt with it differently, saw it differently. Some people it was an emotional war. Some people it was a logical war. It was a mathematical war.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: We had one gentleman who, he had been somewhere and Ernie Pyle was there. And he saw Ernie Pyle writing an article and he wrote his mother home. Now I never heard the end of this story, but he wrote his mother and said, Find the article that he wrote about this incident because I want to see if Ernie Pyle and I saw the same thing.

Answer: Yeah. And they didn't, I'm sure.

Question: Probably not. And that's the thing, too. People think history books are science books and they're not.

Answer: No.

Question: Because, you know, some General might consider what they commanded to have been the right choice. Like you said, they may never have had their foot where that was going on. You, that were staying in the middle of Hurtgen Forest might have a different opinion on what it was.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I just...I this is for a project. I mean I've always been fairly patriotic and proud of where I live, and I think respectful of where I live, but to have talked to over 200 people who lived through this and faced it, and to hear constantly when I say, you know, talk about hero or what they did, I constantly hear, I just did my job, and we wanted to get home.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: It wasn't zealots or anything like that. Proud, strong, hardworking people.

Answer: Yep, it's just...everybody's an individual and despite.. the Army tried to make us all one person that fit one nomenclature, but we all saw it differently and all reacted differently.

Question: You can dress them the same, you can put them in the same color, but the individual human spirit will still show through. Let me get you unmiced