

KAAARE NEVDAL

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me

KAARE NEVDAL

This is July, 27th 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer with Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, which is cooperating with a statewide effort to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens that participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the office of the Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, interviewing Mr. Kaare Nevdal. Mr Nevdal served with the Royal Norwegian Air Force attached to the British Royal Air Force in Iceland and England during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war.

NELSON: Kaare, would you please start this interview by introducing yourself and how you come to be involved in the Air Force during World War II?

NEVDAL: Okay, Chuck, as you know I was born in Norway. I was born October 9th, 1920. I lived in a small town in a suburb of Bergen on the west coast of Norway. On October the 9th, 1940, the Nazis invaded Norway and I was there when that happened. I lived under the occupation for almost a year. The Norwegian king and the government had fled earlier to England and established a government in England in exile. They also established an Air Force, Navy and Army. I was fortunate enough to get together with some other guys—twenty of us—and we escaped across the North Sea to Shetland Islands and from there we went down to London and got inducted into the various services. I wanted to be in the Air Force and I applied for that. They took me in. They sent me to Toronto, Canada, where the Norwegian government had established a training camp. So I went to Toronto, Canada, the same year—it was in March of 1941—and was training there and became a radio gunner. That means I was trained to be a radio officer or radio man on the airplane and also a gunner. From there I went somewhere in 1942, I went back overseas to England first and then they sent me to a coastal command squadron in Iceland. That's where I first started in operation and that was in 1942.

NELSON: Would you give us a little lowdown on your parents? Did you have any brothers or sisters or any details about your parents or your family that you would like to give?

NEVDAL: Well, my father was a retired sea captain. He had been retired for many years. As a matter of fact, he retired before—I can't remember him being at sea. One memory of the thing was, when he found

out I was going to escape across the North Sea, he offered me his old sextant which I couldn't take along because I couldn't try to escape carrying a sextant. It would have been obvious that I was up to something. I had my mother there and we were five—we have four boys and one girl.

NELSON: What was life like before the war, especially 1941?

NEVDAL: Life was fine. We had the depression there the same time you had it in the United States but we were coming out of it when the war started. Of course, we tried to be neutral but then the Germans came and things changed dramatically.

NELSON: Did you have any idea that Germany was attempting to take over Norway before they did it?

NEVDAL: No, we had no idea. As a matter of fact the night before they came, we knew there were some naval movement by German ships south of Norway but we thought they were going out to the North Sea and do battle with the British. Instead they came up the Oslo fjord and invaded us.

NELSON: Were there a lot of losses, Norwegian losses during this time?

NEVDAL: Yes, there were a lot of losses—a lot of losses.

NELSON: Okay, now I'm going to ask you something about December 7th, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese. What were you doing at the time and do you remember the response of those around you?

NEVDAL: Yes, I remember very well. Harbor Day — Pearl Harbor Day, I was in Toronto in the barracks where I was training. I remember my reaction was—I felt terrible that this had been done to the United States. At the same time I knew that in the long run it would help me regaining my country because I knew that now the United States would get involved and the only hope for Europe that I knew from the beginning was United States getting involved in the war.

NELSON: It must be very depressing to see a country come like that and take you country away from you.

NEVDAL: It was awful. The worst was to live there because we had absolutely no freedom of movements. We couldn't go like from here to Belvidere without a passport. So it was very difficult and frustrating.

NELSON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what was taking place in Europe and Asia?

NEVDAL: Yes, Europe in particular. I was well aware of that Hitler was trying to conquer at least all of Europe and maybe go on from there.

NELSON: You heard of Hitler's speeches and ideas.

NEVDAL: Oh, of course. Yes. And then, of course, the last year I was in Norway I saw the soldiers marching in the street and singing and carrying on.

NELSON: Now you volunteered in the service, right?

NEVDAL: Yes.

NELSON: Went up to England and volunteered. Do you have any special memories of this event?

NEVDAL: My escape?

NELSON: When you got inducted and you went to London, I suppose.

NEVDAL: Yah.

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of this—anything special happen.

NEVDAL: Well, the first thing that happened when I got to London, we were interned because we had to be cleared—they had to make sure we weren't spies. We weren't spying for Germany. So they put us in an institution there and I was thrown in there with people from all nations, all colors. Being from a little town, it was kind of scary at first but I was fortunate. I only three days and they cleared me and I was out.

NELSON: You were about 20 years old?

NEVDAL: Yes.

NELSON: Then what happened after you were inducted? You said you were sent to England and then to Canada.

NEVDAL: Yes, they put me on a cargo ship in convoy. It took us 21 days to go across the Atlantic because we had to crisscross to evade the submarines.

NELSON: So you were taking a chance there too just being on that ship...

NEVDAL: Yes, like everybody else was particularly the sailors who had to do it all the time.

NELSON: Yah. That's true. They lost a lot of sailors, too.

NEVDAL: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Where did you take your basic military training?

NEVDAL: In Toronto.

NELSON: And you were trained to do what?

NEVDAL: Radio and gunner.

NELSON: Okay. What did you think of that training?

NEVDAL: It was very good. Very good. Excellent.

NELSON: Tell us about other training camps you attended.

NEVDAL: I was at radar training camp in England to learn to operate the radar equipment.

NELSON: So you were in radar. You had radar equipment on your airplane.

NEVDAL: Yes. We got it later on—not in the beginning—but we got it.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

NEVDAL: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Now in this camp, were all you people Norwegians or was...

NEVDAL: Yes.

NELSON: Just Norwegians.

NEVDAL: Yes.

NELSON: What was your military unit? Was that the Air Force?

NEVDAL: Air force, yes.

NELSON: Where did you go after you completed your basic military training?

NEVDAL: First to England. I was in London just a short time and then I was assigned to the Coastal Command Squadron #330 in Iceland.

NELSON: What were you assigned to do after arriving?

NEVDAL: To fly as a wireless operator and gunner.

NELSON: What did you think of your nation's war efforts up to this point? The Norwegians.

NEVDAL: Well, we were limited but we were doing very well considering that we were in exile. What made it possible for the Norwegian government to do it was the Norwegian Merchant Marine. They were confiscated by the government and the merchant marine which was at that time the fourth largest in the world. They were operating all over the world and they were told to go to neutral ports or allied ports as soon as the occupation happened. The government took them over and the revenue that they received during the war was used to finance the three branches of the military.

NELSON: So they were working for a lot of different countries delivering supplies, I suppose.

NEVDAL: Yes.

NELSON: They had a lot of losses, too, then.

NEVDAL: Oh, they had a tremendous amount of losses and large amounts of the oil that was transferred from the United States and the war material was transferred on Norwegian ships.

NELSON: Tell us about your experience of entering your first combat area.

NEVDAL: Our job in combat was mainly to seek out submarines and destroy them. We were given certain territory in the Atlantic to cover. We'd be out for 12 hours sometimes. Sometimes less.

NELSON: Were there so many flights you had to make or was it based on the amount of time or how did you know when you were through doing this.

NEVDAL: There was no regular ... you just

NELSON: No time schedule.

NEVDAL: No.

NELSON: You just kept on going.

NEVDAL: Yah. There was some talk about after you had been in action for eighteen months, you could apply to get relieved.

NELSON: I see. The British were operating the same way.

NEVDAL: I don't know how they were ...

NELSON: They just were flying, flying and flying.

NEVDAL: Yah. Yah. There wasn't talk about numbers.

NELSON: No. Not like the Americans ... Now you did have casualties aboard your airplane.

NEVDAL: Oh, yah.

NELSON: Can you tell us a little bit about how they occurred and how they were treated?

NEVDAL: Well what happened—I was only in combat with a submarine one time. Even though we didn't see too many submarines, they could see us and they would submerge as soon as they saw us. They spotted us before we could spot them. It's easier to see an airplane than to see a little ship—a little boat in the ocean. So when they saw us they would submerge and just by the fact that we were there, we slowed them down because they couldn't travel under as fast as they could on the surface. They wanted to be on the surface—they could go faster. This particular submarine that we encountered was on May 16, 1944. That was in the North Sea. This was a large submarine. It was 1800 ton. It was a supply submarine for the other submarines that were out there. It was on the way out to the Atlantic to supply others. And I imagine since it was so large, they figured when they saw us that they could fight us, so they didn't submerge. They remained on the surface. As we went in, they started shooting at us. We were diving down because we had to get down low to sink them with our depth charges.

NELSON: What were they using to shoot you with?

NEVDAL: Guns. Big ones. Big guns.

NELSON: 40 mm cannons?

NEVDAL: I had no idea what cannons they had. They had cannons and they had machine guns. There was a terrific barrage of fire at us as we came in. As a matter of fact, as we approached and got closer we got a real bad hit in the front turret and the front gunner was killed instantly. They hit him in the chest. He was dead. We continued down and they kept shooting at us. Finally we get down and going to release the depth charges and they didn't release. So we had to make a turn and come back again but by this time we had killed most of the gunners. There was only one gun firing when we came back.

NELSON: You were shooting at them, too.

NEVDAL: Oh, yes. We had sixteen guns firing at them.

NELSON: The nose gunner now was out of action.

NEVDAL: Yah. He was out of action. We had another gunner with 50 mm under the front turret. He was shooting. We made a second turn and when we came back we were able to drop the depth charges and straddle them. As we left the scene we could see we sank them. We could see they went down with the stern first. And the angle and it was obvious we had sunk it.

NELSON: Do you think they had any survivors?

NEVDAL: No. There wasn't a chance for survivors.

NELSON: So you had that one casualty and you told us how it happened. There was no chance of trying to save him.

NEVDAL: No.

NELSON: No other casualties at the time?

NEVDAL: Yah. We had small wounds. I just got a little dust. I was at the radio when this happened. My first job was to send a position—send the word that we went in for attack and give a position so that's what I did.

NELSON: So in case you needed help—

NEVDAL: Yah. That was routine. As soon as you went into action, tell them that you were going into action and what is your position. Then when this was done, one engine was out of commission. Another one was halting so we couldn't get—we were right down on the surface almost and we couldn't gain any height because the other engine leaking oil and eve-

rything. Then I had to send SOS and leave our ditching position because they thought we would have to ditch.

NELSON: Were both of these engines on one side or was there one on either side?

NEVDAL : One on each side. Fortunately.

NELSON: So it was balanced out.

NEVDAL: Yah, a little bit. Yah. But there wasn't enough power to gain any height. Then we jettisoned a whole bunch of gasoline and threw the guns overboard—through everything overboard that was loose.

NELSON: How far were you from your home base?

NEVDAL: About two hours. And little by little we gained a little height.

NELSON: By cutting the weight down.

NEVDAL: Yah. And we can get out of this position and we managed to get back to base which was in Shetland Islands. When we landed, we were so full of holes from the bombardment that the hull. This was a flying boat, so we had to beach it. We had to beach the plane when we landed

NELSON: Otherwise it would have sunk right away.

NEVDAL: Yah. We made it home.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

NEVDAL: Not really. Not really.

NELSON: What did you think of the war so far?

NEVDAL: Well.

NELSON: Besides being brutal.

NEVDAL: It was brutal. I don't wish anybody to be in it but we were highly motivated to fight because of the fact we had lost our country. At the time there it looks like we never get it back.

NELSON: Could you get in contact with your family at all.?

NEVDAL: No.

NELSON: So you couldn't get any letters or anything like that from home.

NEVDAL: No. They didn't know if we were dead or alive. They did know that I had reached the United States because I was visiting Rockford when I was training in Toronto. I had an aunt and uncle living here. We took a picture of my aunt and me and mailed that by Red Cross—sent it to Norway. She put on it that was her son. My family knew, of course, that I was their son. I had escaped and I was supposed to be dead as far as the Germans were concerned.

NELSON: If they knew that you had escaped, they probably would have taken it out on your family.

NEVDAL: Exactly.

NELSON: You were taking a chance.

NEVDAL: Yah.

NELSON: Have you remained in contact with any of your World War II companions?

NEVDAL: Yes, I have. Two years ago I was at the Squadron Reunion in Norway and met quite a few of my old friends.

NELSON: Didn't they have a special celebrity at that meeting, too. You say that you met the king.

NEVDAL: I met him—I met the king in Toronto. He came to Toronto to commemorate or it was a plaque given to the city of Toronto from the king or a stone as a memorial. The king came and I talked to him then.

NELSON: That must have been quite an honor to see him.

NEVDAL: It was. I had met him once before. I was on the crew that flew him from Oslo to another city, Trondheim, just after the war.

NELSON: What was the highlight occurrence of your combat experience or any other experiences that you can remember? You've given me so many here—

NEVDAL: One of the highlights was when I was supposed to be on an easier assignment when I flew with a career plane between Scotland and Stockholm when I again could fly over my homeland.

NELSON: And you were free.

NEVDAL: Yes. The first night we flew into Stockholm—I'll never forget that because the whole Stockholm was lit up and I lived under the blackouts in England, like you did, for several years. I'll never forget the sight of the Stockholm airport in the middle of the night as we flew in there and the whole city was lit up.

NELSON: Yes, that's true. Tell us what you and the other men did to celebrate America's traditional family holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

NEVDAL: We celebrated Christmas wherever we was like in Shetland Islands. I celebrated in Iceland. I celebrated in London. We tried to do it in our own way. It was sad times because we were away from the family and we didn't even know if our family were still alive so it was a sad time.

NELSON: When was the first time that you actually turned back to Norway? Was that after the war was over.

NEVDAL: After the war was over. We flew in in May of 1945.

NELSON: That was just about when the end of the war was.

NEVDAL: Yah. Just after Norway had been liberated.

NELSON: Were there still German soldiers around at that time?

NEVDAL: Yah, but they were in prison. (Laughter). They were imprisoned by the Norwegians that had taken over.

NELSON: So the Norwegians did have some guns.

NEVDAL: Yah. The underground. They came out and then, of course, we got Allied Forces come in, too, to help.

NELSON: Had to turn in all their ammunition and guns ...

NEVDAL: Yes. Yes.

NELSON: Okay. Now when you first come to the United States, did you go to Canada and then to the United States?

NEVDAL: You mean after the war?

NELSON: Yes, after the war.

NEVDAL: Yes. Yes.

NELSON: When did you first come to the United States?

NEVDAL: After the war, first I got a job as a radio officer with the airlines—with the Norwegian Airlines which later became the Scandinavian Airlines. I had a good job there but the housing shortage was so bad because of the war and then my wife, she had come from—I met my wife in Toronto and we didn't get married there but she corresponded while I was in England. I asked her to come over to Norway after the war and we'd get married. She came and we were married in Norway in December of 1945. Then when she get pregnant and housing shortage she had to go back to Toronto to have the baby. She was going to come back but after six months, things were going so slow I decided to leave and so it was easier to get into Canada than the United States so I went to Canada and join her there. We lived there for a year and then in 1948 we came to Rockford.

NELSON: I'd like to go back before this when your parents were living and your family were living under the German government. How were they treated?

NEVDAL: My family, in particular, didn't suffer any. They came—the Gestapo came and inquired what happened to me because they knew I had disappeared.

NELSON: How did they know of your existence?

NEVDAL: They knew I had disappeared.

NELSON: Yah. But how did they know you existed?

NEVDAL: I don't know. They knew everybody. So they asked my dad what happened to me and he said, "I don't know. I hope he went over to England," he says. They said, "That's what we think, too. We're going to confiscate everything he owns." He said, "That's easy because everything he owned he had on him and I had provided it for him." Nothing come of that. But that's all they ...

NELSON: They never bothered them after that.

NEVDAL: No, they didn't. A lot of people suffered terrible under their—

NELSON: I suppose this was constantly on your mind, too, while you were away from there what was happening to your family.

NEVDAL: Yes, exactly.

NELSON: You had no way of knowing ...

NEVDAL: No, that was very difficult.

NELSON: Return to civilian life which we had been talking about. How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact—your crew members?

NEVDAL: No problem. Very well. Very well.

NELSON: Were there things you would do differently if you could do them once again?

NEVDAL: No, I can't think of anything.

NELSON: What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your military service or prior to your military service when you got involved with the Germans?

NEVDAL: Prior to my service? Living under the occupation. It was difficult thing was to put up with it and I get involved in sabotage.

NELSON: You got involved in that?

NEVDAL: Yah. That was difficult and risky and very rewarding.

NELSON: Unless you got caught.

NEVDAL: Yes, that's one reason I had to get out, too, because I would get caught sooner or later.

NELSON: Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in the military service?

NEVDAL: No, nothing special. I'm proud of the time I served thankful to God that I survived.

NELSON: I think you should be real proud that you served your country. Now this has to do with victory in Europe. How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

NEVDAL: VE Day was interesting because of a couple of days before when I was in St. Andrew's in Scotland, my captain, my pilot came and knocked on

my door in the middle of the night and said we had a special trip. You better get up right now and come. That special trip was to get down to London. We flew down to London. We get down there—we were parked there and some VIP 's came—Norwegian VIP's. I don't know who they were but they were VIP's. They come aboard and I was told to be aware on the radio for orders. At that time, we knew something special was going on and we suspected that we were going to fly these people to Norway because the surrender was about to take place. We were all excited. I was sitting glued to the radio hoping to get the message to head for Norway. As it turned out, we went up to St. Andrew's to Lucas Airport and landed there instead. The VIP's went to a flying boat that was just a few miles from there and flew to Norway. We had an inkling that this was going to happen before. Two days after, it was all over.

NELSON: How about VJ Day. What was your reaction to that?

NEVDAL: I was very happy, very happy about it. I was back in Norway at the time and followed it with great interest, the end of the war. I felt bad for—I knew some of the Americans who had been in Europe were shipped right to the Pacific afterwards and had to fight there.

NELSON: Now, you had been away from Norway for how long? Four years?

NEVDAL: Yah, at least.

NELSON: Had there been many changes in your town?

NEVDAL: Not many, no, no.

NELSON: They never had any air raids or anything in Norway.

NEVDAL: Oh, yes. They had like Bergen—in a suburb of Bergen was bombed. There was a German submarine base there and the Allies—they bombed it.

NELSON: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was used against the Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

NEVDAL: I was all for it because I knew that that's what it took to save a lot of lives, not only American lives but also Japanese lives.

NELSON: Has that opinion changed over the last fifty years?

NEVDAL: No. It had to be done.

NELSON: Where were you officially discharged from the service?

NEVDAL: I was officially discharged in Oslo, Norway in 1945. I think it was in June or July of '45.

NELSON: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that you haven't discussed—your feelings and so on?

NEVDAL: Only that I've been an American citizen since 1954. I've lived here since '48. Only how proud I am to be an American now and how much I've enjoyed talking to Veterans from the American Air Force and how well they have accepted me even though I am from a different country. That's about all.

NELSON: I think, basically, everybody in this country, somewhere along the line, were from a different country.

NEVDAL: Yah, but I'm the real thing.

NELSON: Yah. Right. Right.

NEVDAL: I have an accent.

NELSON: Well, Kaare, that was real good. I really enjoyed that and I thank you very much.

NEVDAL: You're welcome.

