

Fred G. (Ted) Nott

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Fred G. Nott

Also known as Ted G. Nott

Today is February the 10th, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer with Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, which is cooperating with the statewide effort to collect oral histories from the citizens of Illinois that participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the office of Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, interviewing Mr. Ted Nott who lives at 5271 Crestdale Drive, Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Nott served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in this war.

NELSON: Ted, would you please start by introducing yourself to us?

NOTT: My name is Fred G. (Ted) Nott. I go by the name of Ted because that has been a nickname all my life and that's the way most people know me.

NELSON: We would like to have the names of each of your parents.

NOTT: Alfred Nott and Rachel Nott.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

NOTT: Yes, I had three.

NELSON: Are there any details about your parents or your family that you would like to give?

NOTT: Well, my father and mother were divorced when I was 8 years old. We were living in North Dakota at the time and that was quite an unusual happening then. That was about 1928.

NELSON: What was your life like before the war, specifically during 1941?

NOTT: Well, before the war, as I say, I grew up in North Dakota during the drought and the depression. Things were pretty tough then, of course. Eventually, I moved down to Evanston, Illinois, and where I got married. I married an old girlfriend from North Dakota—from my hometown and started a ...

NELSON: What was her name?

NOTT: Hazel. My wife's name was Hazel. Hazel Kraft. I started a potato chip route there before the war. Then when Pearl Harbor came along, I eventually went down and took the exam for the air corps and passed.

NELSON: What thoughts did you have about the war before the United States became directly involved in the conflict?

NOTT: Well, of course, it was going on and I had always wanted to fly ever since I was a small boy. I wanted to get in to it. Then I got married and thought "Well, that's the end of that." So then the war came along and gave me another opportunity to get in. Prior to the war you needed two years of college. But I had one year and I went down and took the exam, as I stated earlier, and passed it. That was it.

NELSON: How did you hear of the December 7th, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? If so, where were you and what were you doing at the time? What was your reaction to the response of those around you?

NOTT: I was in Evanston at the time. I was married. We were listening to the Chicago Bears football game when it was suddenly announced. Of course, it took us all by surprise. We were stunned and that was about it. We didn't think much more about it, or say much about it, I guess, until the next day.

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

NOTT: Not specifically except that it looked like we'd eventually be in the war one way or another.

NELSON: Do you recall reading newspaper accounts of German aggression in Europe?

NOTT: Yes.

NELSON: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches, ideas or actions?

NOTT: Vaguely, I remember some of them, heard some of them and so forth. Some of the things he said. It wasn't stated by him.

NELSON: What events led to your entry into military service? Were you already in service, drafted or did you volunteer?

NOTT: No, I volunteered as I stated earlier. I went down to the loop and took the exam which took roughly half a day.

NELSON: Was your response to enter military service influenced by family and friends attitudes towards the war, the threat of national security or any other consideration?

NOTT: No, It was strictly my own decision and I didn't even mention it to my wife that I was going to go down and take the exam for the Air Force. I didn't make any points on that.

NELSON: When and where were you inducted?

NOTT: In Chicago, Illinois

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of that event?

NOTT: Yes, it was kind of rough in a way because they loaded us on a train in Chicago and probably one of the oldest trains I'd ever seen and we were shipped all the way down to Miami Beach for basic training. There were no bunks or beds or anything so we just ripped the seats off of the seats and laid them on the aisles and slept on those the best we could.

NELSON: Do you remember the date?

NOTT: (No answer)

NELSON: When and where were you inducted?

NOTT: January 17th, 1943

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of this event?

NOTT: Yes, the train-ride from Chicago down to Miami Beach. It was an awful rough ride. There was no bunks or anything like that. It was about a three-day trip as I recall. We just took the backs off the seats and laid them in the aisle and tried to sleep on those.

NELSON: How old were you?

NOTT: I was twenty-three.

NELSON: What happened after you were inducted?

NOTT: Well, we went down to Miami Beach and that's where we had our basic training. Learned how to march, etc.

NELSON: What were you trained to do?

NOTT: I wasn't trained for anything specific. We were hoping to go into the cadets.

NELSON: What did you think of the training?

NOTT: It didn't bother me that much. I had been to the University of Illinois and I had been in ROTC down there. I was somewhat familiar with military training—a little bit.

NELSON: Tell us about some of the other training camps you attended?

NOTT: We went to Maxwell Field where we were tested and Nashville, Tennessee, also where we took all the tests to determine whether we were going to be recommended for fighter pilots, light bombardment, or heavy bombardment.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

NOTT: No, not at that time.

NELSON: What was your military unit?

NOTT: Eventually it ended up as the—well, the Air Force, of course. But it was—eventually, I ended up as the 414 Fighter Group.

NELSON: Based where?

NOTT: Well, when—when we were organized, we ended up on Iwo Jima.

NELSON: What were your assigned duties?

NOTT: I was a fighter pilot. I flew P47s. I instructed here in the States in P40s before I went overseas. When I got over to Iwo Jima, I flew P47Ns and P51Ds.

NELSON: When you were sent overseas, how did you get there?

NOTT: By Liberty Ship.

NELSON: What were you assigned to do after arriving?

NOTT: Kind of redundant. Flying fighter planes.

NELSON: What did you think of the nation's war efforts up to this point?

NOTT: I was impressed.

NELSON: If you did not immediately enter a combat zone, where did you go before entering combat?

NOTT: Well, here in the States after I graduated at Marianna, Florida, and got my wings we were sent down to fighter school at Punta Gorda, Florida, and after we finished our fighter school training there, I was made an instructor at Punta Gorda, Florida.

NELSON: Tell us about your experience about entering your first combat zone.

NOTT: It was quite a joke and pretty stupid because we hadn't flown for about four months. I had been in the hospital, incidentally, off flight

status for about three months. So it had been about four months since I'd flown and when our planes got over to Iwo Jima, another fellow and I wanted to get up in the air right away and so he said, "Why don't we go up and take a look at Chichijima." It's about 100 miles north of Iwo. I said, "That sounds like a good idea to me." The two of us took off. We didn't even have our guns loaded. No guns at all. There were guns but not loaded so we went up to Chichijima and we circled around about 8000 feet and nothing happened. There was just a bunch of shot up planes down there in the air field, and so forth so he said, "Should we go down and take a closer look." I said, "Let's go." We went right down on the deck and we were sailing along just at tree top level and all of a sudden these white streaks started going over the wings and I said, "Let's get the hell out of here" and we did and fortunately neither one of us got hit because if we had been we'd have been court martialed because we'd been told to stay away from there. It was as heavily fortified as Iwo Jima was.

NELSON: Can you list for us in order of occurrence all subsequent combat actions in which you were involved?

NOTT: Primarily, we got over late in the war. A good share of the fighting was done. We had combat patrols was the biggest part of our flying and an occasional mission up to Japan which ran about 7 ½ or 8 hours

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued?

NOTT: Not particularly, no.

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

NOTT: We wanted to win it, of course. We hated the Japanese. We wanted to beat them, of course.

NELSON: Did you write any letters home?

NOTT: Oh, absolutely. Almost daily.

NELSON: Did you receive any letters or packages. If so, how often, what types of things did you like to get in these packets?

NOTT: Well, we got letters quite often. I forget what they call them. Those little abbreviated ...

NELSON: Care packages?

NOTT: No, not that. Anyway, occasionally I'd get a package but it was difficult to get way over there. But I heard from my wife quite often.

NELSON: Did most of the other men write or receive letters?

NOTT: Oh, yes.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendship with any of your combat companions?

NOTT: Oh, yes. Many of them.

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

NOTT: Yes. In some cases, yes.

NELSON: Did you ever have to help retrieve a wounded buddy from a field of combat?

NOTT: No.

NELSON: What was your highlight occurrence of your combat experience?

NOTT: Well actually, the one that stands out the most was I was on the last mission of the war and both of the bombs had been dropped—the atom bombs—and we had a code word that would be flashed to us if Japan surrendered. If we got that then, of course, we weren't to go in and fire. But we never got it. We got up to the Empire—up to the islands and there was cloud cover and the group commander said, "Well, there's a front here. We're going to turn around and go back." My flight leader who was an old hand from Sicily and Italy, he just shook his head at me and just motioned that we go straight ahead. We went on

in and it was kind of a mistake. We went in and shot up some shipping and so forth. Then flying around and looking around for more to do, we went over an air field that was nothing down there but burned out planes and hangars and so forth. The flight leader—element leader—called the flight leader and said, "I think I see something down there". He says, "Can I take my wing men and go down?" The flight leader said, "Yes. Nott and I will stay up here and fly cover for you." So we circled up there while they went in and strafed the airfield. Unfortunately, the element leader's wing man made a mistake when they pulled out of their 180° turn and ended up directly in back of the element leader. Of course, when they're being fired on they usually under lead the lead plane and so everything that misses him catches the plane in back of him if he's right in back of him. They're supposed to be side by side. He got hit and he was able to get back to within about 100 miles of Iwo where he had to bail out and then as he dropped out the tail plane caught him and he got compound fractures of both legs. He got his chute open and landed in the water. He couldn't get into his dinghy because he was so mangled up. Eventually, they got to him and fished him out of the water but he had lost so much blood, they got him back to Iwo and he died about two or three days after the war ended. When we got back to—we were the last group to get back to Iwo and as we called in for landing instructions, the tower said, "I'm sorry, you're going to have to circle. There's a live bomb on the runway that had dropped off a Navy plane that had been hung up and when it hit the runway, why the bomb jarred loose and was laying out there in the runway. You're going to have to circle." The flight leader said, "Like hell we will. We've got fifteen minutes of gas left, and we're coming in." He and I went in and straddled the bomb, one on each side of it. Then as I rolled up and parked my plane, the mechanic—my mechanic jumped on the wing and he said, "Sir, do you know the war is over?" And I said, "Right now I could care less." I'd been in that cockpit for eight hours and hadn't gone to the bathroom in all that time and I had to go so bad that my teeth were floating and that was all I was interested in at the moment.

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

NOTT: We had whatever they could give us for the best food they could come up with at the time. There is quite a fallacy, as far as we were concerned, about the Air force getting some of the best food. When we wanted to get good food, we'd take a bottle of booze and go over to the Navy officers' club or the CBs and for that bottle of booze, we could get almost enough steaks to feed our squadron.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the United States after the war?

NOTT: After things had settled down, we were still on Iwo. Then they decided—Incidentally, in the meantime, I had found that there was a friend of mine flying P51s in the Twenty-first Fighter Group adjacent to us in another airfield on the island. I always wanted to fly a P51. I got myself transferred over there so I could fly with him. I did get to fly the 51s and I enjoyed it very much. It was a great plane to fly. Then the powers to be decided that my old 414 Fighter Group which flew P47s was to transfer down to Clark Field in the Philippines. They didn't have enough pilots—some of the other P51 pilots were going to be transferred down there, too, but they had no P47 experience so they pulled me back into the 414 to fly down to Clark Field. So then we flew down there eventually.

NELSON: What happened when you arrived in the United States?

NOTT: Well, nothing much really. We got back to San Francisco eventually. Incidentally, I came back on a hospital ship and it took us 21 days from Manila to Seattle. When we got there everything had quieted down and nobody paid any attention to us. There was no parade or anything like that at all.

NELSON: Please tell us about your military rank and your decorations, especially your campaign decorations.

NOTT: Well, I ended up as a 1st Lieutenant. I don't remember—we got a couple of battle stars and air medal. That's basically what it was.

NELSON: How many campaigns were you in?

NOTT: Just the one from Iwo Jima.

NELSON: How did you get along with men with whom you had the greatest contact?

NOTT: Fine. No problem.

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

NOTT: No. I would still try to get into the Air Force and fly. I dearly loved it. I still do.

NELSON: What is the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

NOTT: Getting through cadets, without a doubt. We had to go through primary basic and advanced and they were washing guys out right and left. It was a tough situation. Everything was spit and polish. It was just a rough go. I wouldn't want to do it again on a bet but I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

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

NOTT: Well, becoming a fighter pilot as far as I was concerned was exactly what I wanted to achieve. And I got that.

NELSON: How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

NOTT: We were on Iwo when the word came that the Japanese had surrendered. Oh, VE Day. That's Europe.

NELSON: Yes.

NOTT: It was jubilation. The war in Europe was over. That was it. I had always wanted to go to Europe rather than the Pacific but I had no control over that.

NELSON: What about VJ Day?

NOTT: VJ Day we were on Iwo Jima when the word was flashed that the war was over. That was the end of World War II.

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

NOTT: I have a definite opinion on that. It is this: I have always thought that we could have forewarned the Japanese and told them that on such and such a day at so many miles off of the coast at a certain point there would be a demonstration and be prepared for it. Then detonate an atomic bomb there and show them that this is what's going to happen to them if they don't capitulate. I would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives with the two bombs that we dropped on civilians but as I say, on the other hand, if we had had to invade Japan we would have lost an awful lot of our people, too. So it's debatable.

NELSON: When and where were you officially discharged from service?

NOTT: Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

NELSON: When?

NOTT: In 1946.

NELSON: Did you have a disability rating or pension?

NOTT: Yes, I did.

NELSON: Do you have any opinions or feelings about our nation's military status or its policies?

NOTT: No. I think it's important that we maintain a strong force to protect ourselves. I think that that was to our benefit when we forced Russia to more or less draw back and tear down the Berlin Wall and so forth.

NELSON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

NOTT: Yes, I do. I get medical attention from the Veterans' Administration because I have a disability.

NELSON: What is your opinion of the VA if you have had any contact with it?

NOTT: As far as the Veterans' Administration that I go to as far as medical service, I can't say enough about them that's good. They're tremendous. Tremendous people.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us about how your family supported you during your military life?

NOTT: Well, I was married when I went in the service and after I got through basic and got in cadets, my wife joined me and she was with me pretty much along the way until I went overseas.

NELSON: Over the subsequent years, what has this support meant to you?

NOTT: Well, it was great to know that she supported me. It was a tough time for her, too, because she had to travel, there wasn't much money and she developed something when she was down south. Something that was almost like colitis, so she was kind of miserable on the way but it was a great pleasure having her with me.

NELSON: Thank you, Ted. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

NOTT: No. I appreciate the chance to be interviewed. It was nice.