

Transcript of Oral History Interview of Leo Noorda

Interviewed by Kathy Bradford in Brigham City, Utah on May 2, 2005

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Kathy Bradford: Today is Monday, May 2, 2005, and I'm speaking with Leo Noorda at his home in Brigham City. Leo I'd like to start by asking you where and when you were born and a little about your family and growing up years.

Leo Noorda: I was born March 11, 1920 in Salt Lake City, Utah. I went to school in Sugarhouse. That's part of Salt Lake, and then I went to high school in Rock Springs, Wyoming. My dad's name was Simon Noorda, and my mother's maiden name was Ida Skoglund. He was Dutch, and she was Swedish.

KB: What did your dad do for a living?

LN: He was a pressman in printing. He ran printing presses.

KB: Did he do that in the Salt Lake area and then in Rock Springs?

LN: Yes, we went to Rock Springs because of the Depression, and he worked up there. That's where I went to high school. Then we moved back to the same house again in Salt Lake City in 1937, and I went back to school in Salt Lake. I went to high school in Rock Springs for the first three years, but never finished the last year because I went into the Civilian Conservation Corps at Ferron, Utah in 1937. We worked mostly on road construction, and I became a dynamite man.

KB: Is that where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LN: No, I was working out at Kennicott Copper at the Magna mill west of Salt Lake. It was a Sunday, and we were just out goofing off when I heard about it. Then I joined the Army Air Corps on January 26, 1942. I joined up at Fort Douglas, and they sent me to McCord Field, Washington. I was there for two years.

KB: What did you do there?

LN: Multiple things. I started out in aircraft refueling, and then I went to the hospital to have my appendix out. Then they put me on light duty, forgot me, and left me there. While I was on light duty, I worked in what they called Special Services. I knew how to run a printing press, so I helped print the camp newspaper.

KB: You must have learned that from your dad.

LN: Yes, and I ran the base library. We still had W.P.A (Works Progress Administration) workers. I had two of them under me in the library. Then I had an out with the lieutenant, so he sent me to Automotive Training School to do janitor work. I

sat in on a lot of the classes. They wanted to get somebody to be an assistant instructor, so I became the assistant instructor.

KB: What did you teach?

LN: Truck driving and second-echelon mechanics. I made Buck Sergeant doing that. Then we made driving-training materials for this school, and I taught truck driving. I went on a furlough back to Utah, and I met a lady at Saratoga. My furlough got over with, and I had a new Studebaker car that I used while I was home. My uncle was a butcher, so I traded meat at the gas station to get gasoline for the car.

KB: That gas would have been rationed then, wouldn't it?

LN: Yes, and then I went to the Ration Board to get some gas stamps. While I was there, I was going through the newspaper and picked out an address up in Smithfield and told them that was my aunt and I needed some more gas to go to her funeral.

When I got back to camp in Washington, they were going to send this kid overseas. He was just getting out of the hospital, and I finagled and got on the shipping list to go overseas as a casual. Casual meant they could send you anyplace with a ten-day delay en route. I had just been home, so I went home for another ten days and sparked this same gal again. She lived in Lehi.

Then I went back to camp and got sent to Camp Stoneman, California as an overseas casual. They used to call us casual, but I can't remember why they called us that. I wound up in Milne Bay, New Guinea in the Signal Corps. The Army Air Corps was part of the Army. It wasn't the Air Force. I was over there in New Guinea and put in the Signal Corps in the radar outfit to take care of their trucks. I was there for quite a long time, and then I got sent to the Philippines. Between the two places, I was over there two years. I was in the Army 47 months altogether.

In the Philippines I was taking care of the trucks. Being in radar, we were always near an airfield, and we were subject to a lot of strafing and bombing, but no hand-to-hand combat. Once we set up a perimeter around an island because the Japanese were coming in, the airplanes from this field took care of them.

KB: So you didn't have to see any of your buddies killed.

LN: No. I saw guys killed on ships going over – blown right off the ship. It wasn't our ship, but others we saw in the ocean. One time we were down in the hold and sleeping on the trucks and stuff. We'd go up the ladder to see what was going on, and the Japanese would come in strafing and we'd go back down the ladder again. We were on what they call LSTs. They were kind of landing craft, but they didn't really make it to land. They had Army ducks, and they were trucks that could go on land and sea. That's why they were called ducks. They had propellers on them and also wheels.

KB: So you had them on your ship?

LN: Yes, that's right. This one time we were on a ship that could get pretty close to shore, and they let the ramp down so we could drive the trucks off onto the shore. I was one of the drivers. I had kind of a fun life in the Army, and it took up my time. I couldn't go home, of course. Things always fell in place for me. When I was sent overseas, they took my outfit and made us the MPs on the ship. It was a liberty ship we went over on. We had the MP armband on, and we could go wherever we wanted. For some reason I didn't get on either list, and I just wandered around the ship. One time the man in charge of the outfit said, "What do you do?"

I said, "I've never been assigned anything."

So he made me the runner between him and the bridge. That was a good job, too. I could get upstairs and mingle with the USO ladies and the nurses. They were on our ship going over. Then coming back, I was put on kitchen duty.

KB: Did you like that?

LN: For some reason, I never got on either list, and I was entitled to fresh showers. The other guys had to take salt-water showers, and I had a bunk with a mattress on it. The other guys had hammocks or whatever. I always lucked out.

KB: Being in the Air Corps, were you involved with planes at all?

LN: Oh yes. At first I was an aircraft refueler at McCord Field, and I remember fueling P-38s and cargo ships and DC-3s, which in the Army we called C-46s. But they were really DC-3 Army personnel carriers.

When I went overseas and was put in the signal corps, the radar outfit, I ran the camp vehicles and did the mechanics work on them with some workers under me.

KB: Were you in the Philippines when the war ended in Germany?

LN: Yes, and I stayed there just a month or so after that, and then I came back to the States in November and got discharged in December. They started out with the requirement that you had to have 100 points to get out, but finally it got down to 80 points, which I had accumulated. I was still in the same outfit when the war ended. They sent us through a casual area. Then they grouped us together, put us on board, and sent us home.

KB: Did you ever get seasick?

LN: No, I never did. Some did. I remember this one storm when the propellers would come right up out of the water, and the ship would really rumble. But it wasn't too bad.

It was a converted luxury liner that we went over in, but they built wooden steps over the nice steps to save them.

After we got back to the States, I was sent up to Fort Douglas and discharged.

KB: Tell me briefly what you did after the war.

LN: I had been working out at the copper company before the war, and I got my job back. I only went back one day and said, "This is not for me." And I didn't go back. I went on the GI Bill and took public accounting for two years and decided I didn't like that. I worked at International Harvester as an apprentice mechanic. Then I moved back to Ogden and worked at Second Street at the Navy Base. Later on I took automotive courses at Weber College back when it was on 25th Street in Ogden. That was in 1946-47.

KB: Were you married by then?

LN: I met my wife at Covey's Coconut Grove dancing. She was a beautiful gal, really pretty, and she had pretty hair. We got married in 1947. Brent was born in Ogden and so was Clyde. Those are my two sons.

I went to Corinne and bought Jesse Wolfe's garage and was there about four years, and then I moved to this house in Brigham City. I took a shop at the southwest corner of the intersection of 6th North and Main in Brigham City, and later moved across the street to a garage on the northeast corner. Sam Fujikawa owned it. I liked Sam quite a bit. I ran the business, and then Brent came in to help me, and pretty soon he was a partner. He later became the boss. I worked up there until about 7 or 8 years ago.

My wife died 6 years ago on January 18, 1999. I have 9 grandchildren. Brent had 5 boys. Two of them were twins. Clyde had 4 children, and two of his were twins. One of them was a girl and one was a boy, but Brent's twins were both boys. Brent's kids all got married, and I have quite a few great grandchildren. None of Clyde's kids are married yet. One of his boys, the oldest and one of the twins, is on an LDS mission in South Washington, D.C.

Clyde lives up in Avon now. I see him almost every weekend if the weather's right. He was running that place in Hyrum where they've converted a great big turkey shoot place into making these things for roller coasters and stuff. It burned down not long ago, and now they're going to make trucks for oil drilling rigs in the same place there. Right now he's in Texas selling these oil-drilling rigs.

Brent went to mechanics school and became a shop foreman at Cummins Diesel in Salt Lake, and then we went together in our business.

KB: Well, you've had a good life, and I've enjoyed talking to you.