

**Transcript of Oral History Interview of Norm Nelson**  
Interviewed by Kathy Bradford on August 12, 2010 in Perry  
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Acc # 10.10.1 / MS 398

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Kathy Bradford: Today is Thursday, August 12, 2010, and I'm speaking with Norm Nelson at the War Memorial Building in Brigham City. First, Norm, I would like to tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family, growing up, schooling, and how you came to be in the military.

Norm Nelson: I was born in Los Angeles, California October 1, 1940. It was just before the war broke out, and my dad worked for the Union Pacific Railroad at the time. After the war started, my dad was drafted into the Army. He had four kids, but he was still drafted into the Army. When he went off to boot camp, we got on the train out of Los Angeles, and it brought us to Brigham City where my grandma and grandpa lived. I went to school for a couple of years in Brigham City, and then my dad got out of the military. We moved to Penrose, and lived there for a couple of years, and then he got a job at the cement plant up by Morgan. In 1951 we went back to California, and I went to school there for three years and then came back and graduated from Box Elder High School. My mom and dad both got hurt in an accident.

What took me into the military was the fact that my dad had been in the Army. A lot of my cousins had been in the Army. Some of my cousins and uncles had been in the Navy. They always fought over the Army-Navy game, and so I said, "Forget that." I joined the Air Force. That's how I wound up in the United States Air Force.

I got out of high school in May and enlisted in August. I went to work on a dry farm in Snowville from May to August, and I figured that I didn't want to be a farmer after that episode. Tom Sneddon, who used to be on the Police Force here in Brigham City, and I were sitting in Burt's Turn-In eating a cheeseburger, and he said, "Let's go join the military."

I said, "All right." They accepted me and didn't accept him, and so I went on into the military, and he had to turn around and come home.

KB: He had a pretty good career in law enforcement though.

NN: He did. From there I went to basic training in Texas at Lackland Air Force Base for Basic, to Lowry AFB in Denver, Colorado for training, and from there I went to Korea. I was in Korea for a whole year. This was after the Korean War in 1959. I was 18 years old when I went to Korea and stayed there until March of 1960.

Then I was reassigned at Nellis Air Force Base at Las Vegas, Nevada. While I was stationed at Nellis, I met my wife. We had two children while we were still stationed there, and then we got shipped to Italy. She and the children went with me. When we got to Italy, we had \$20 in our pocket. We didn't know where we were going to stay. Didn't know where we were going to live.

KB: Did you speak the Italian language at all?

NN: No, but one of the other members of the military, a first sergeant from one of the other units, happened to be at the airport when we came in. He picked us up, took us back, helped us get an apartment to stay in. Then he took us over to his house and gave us a meal that night. The next morning I went out and checked into the base and got some money so we could get provisions for the kids. We were stationed there for three years. We had a lot of fun. We traveled all over Europe. My kids played on the Leaning Tower of Pisa like the kids here go down to the park and play. We were only six miles from the Tower, and we'd go every once in a while, get a piece of Italian pizza and sit on the lawn and watch the kids play. It only cost us 15 cents apiece to ride the bus over and back.

Then we came back to the United States, and I was stationed at Hill Air Force Base, and then I went to Japan for a year. While I was in Japan, I made three trips to Vietnam and one to Taiwan. I came back to Japan; then I came back to the States back to Hill Field. I was there for about seven months and was turned right around and shipped back to Vietnam again. That was during the Vietnam War. I was in Vietnam off and on for 36 months from '67 to '70.

KB: Well, I'm sure you didn't have your family there.

NN: No, I didn't have my family there. When I was stationed in Japan, I was isolated in a bomb dump, a big bomb ammunition storage area on the island of Kitikushu down on the southern end of Japan. We were just run back and forth to Vietnam to fill in for different bases while they augmented guys in and out from the States. So it would be 30, 60, 90 days at the different bases. When I was at Sudhip, Thailand, which was the big B-52 base (it was called Utpou), we had to make 350 bombs in an eight-hour period, or we got behind. The bombers were dropping so many bombs at that time. They were carpet bombing North Vietnam.

After that I went to Phan Rang Air Force Base in Vietnam. I was there with the 100s, B-57s and A1Es, and we did a lot of support. One time we had a support for an Army unit that had gotten pinned down by the North Vietnamese, and they sent in a bunch of the gun ships. From here to Park Valley, the gun ships were about 100 feet apart going and coming from that battle. We had made up 3,800 rockets before the gun ships got there, and we ran out before the battle finished. We worked for 16½ hours on that battle alone. By that time, we'd been up about 28 hours. When they said, "Okay guys, it's over. You can take a break." – we just laid down on the trailers right where we were and went to sleep. We didn't even go back to the barracks. When we woke up, we hopped on the truck and went and got something to eat and started our next day's work.

KB: What was your assignment exactly?

NN: When I was at Phan Rang, I was in charge of the Napalm area, and so I built tanks of Napalm, which is 110 gallons of gasoline and a gel mix that they use for destroying and burning and stuff like that on the enemy targets. They were dropped from the air. The F-100s were dropping on them and the A-1s were dropping – the Sky Raiders. Then we had a lot of the choppers come and go. The rescue choppers from the Reserve outfits that were in there helping would go and pick up the downed pilots.

Or when guys would get in battle, they'd go get the wounded and bring some of them back to our hospital at the base.

KB: Did you see a lot of wounded?

NN: Quite a few.

KB: How about you? Were you ever wounded?

NN: No. I lucked out. I was one of the few who didn't have any problems. I had some friends that didn't come home that were there, but it's just one of those things you live with.

From Phan Rang, I went back to Hill Field again. I was there for about a year and a half, and they shipped me back to Italy for another 3 ½ years.

KB: Those times when you came back were you able to reconnect with your family okay?

NN: I had some problems to start with. The first time when I came back, we were under fire quite a bit, and the fire alarm on the base was the same as the fire siren here in Brigham City. When that siren would go off in the middle of the night, I'd just roll over, hit the floor and head out for the bunker – not realizing where I was. My dad would grab me, or my wife would grab me and say, “Honey, you're home! Relax!”

KB: Did your kids get scared when you did that?

NN: No, the kids didn't even know. One time when we were going down Riverdale Road in the car, and thunder and lightning was over the top of us. A lightning bolt hit the road about a block up the street from us, and I opened the door and started out. My wife grabbed me by the shoulder, or I would have baled out and left her and the kids going down the road in the car at 40 miles an hour. Things like that would just happen.

My son came to me one time and walked up and shook me by the shoulder, and I knocked him clear across the room because I didn't realize what was going on.

He said, “I learned then, Dad, to reach down and grab you by the toe to wake you up.”

But it's just something you go through. I've been able to get through it, so now some of the things that are going on with me health-wise are treasures from Vietnam or somewhere.

KB: I interrupted you when you talked about being sent back to Italy.

NN: I went back there again for 3½ years. We had a large ammunition depot, and I worked Test Research and Development most of the time. I was always working on some kind of project with something special in most of the time I was in the military.

KB: I'm sure that was a career builder for when you got back to civilian life.

NN: When I got back, I went to work for Thiokol. When I got out, they hired me to work in the test area because of my research knowledge for the Minute Man missile and stuff like that which I had worked with. From there I went to Denver to help my brother with his trucking company. He needed some help. Then after I got him back on his feet. I came back and worked at Hill Field for 12 years and they put me right back in the missile field helping with missiles and trucks. With all my training background and knowledge of all that equipment, I became the trainer for the Missile Division down there. I would teach guys how to drive the trucks and run the equipment – the guys that hired on new and had no idea what those things were like.

KB: That was an educational benefit for you.

NN: Well, most of the things in the military, if a guy keeps his training certificates for the different things he goes through, will help him when he gets out into the civilian world. Just like – at the rate I was when I got out, I qualified for 138 different civilian jobs. But I had a lot of fun, went a lot of different places while I was in the military.

KB: Was your stint in Italy doing the Research and Development the last place you went?

NN: No, I came back to Hill Field again for another two years. All my military career – when I was in Italy, when I was in Japan, when I was in Korea -- I went other places, TDY (what we call Temporary Duty) to different bases. I visited 17 different countries. I speak a little bit of about four or five different languages so I can order food and get directions, stuff like that. It's fun, but I had to watch myself because I'd be talking, and all of a sudden I'd slip over to another language. People would look at me like I was some kind of nut and asked, "What did you say?"

I'd have to go back and say, "Sorry about that." It was a lot of fun. I was on the Philippines; I was on Guam; I was on Hawaii. A lot of places.

KB: How many of those places were your family able to go with you?

NN: On the two trips to Europe. They spent 6 ½ years with me in Europe.

KB: Did you have more kids after those two children?

NN: Yes, we had girl in Italy while we were there the first time. We came home from Italy with three kids. We had another one while we were stationed here at Hill Field just before we went back there. So when we went back in '72 for the second trip to Italy, we had four kids. My kids went through most of their elementary school years there. All my kids speak at least one extra language. My two boys both speak some Italian. My one daughter speaks Latvian, Italian and German, and the other daughter speaks Italian. They all speak English. They all learned to jump the trains, get their backpack on, put their stuff in it. Everybody shares what they carry. We would go visit different places as a family – just have fun on our time off. On Friday night we'd sit down and see how many gas coupons we had. If

not, gas was \$3.50 a gallon. You'd get the coupons, and your gas was like 28 cents a gallon, so we would get the gas coupons, see how many we had. If any other families wanted to go with us, we'd go out until we were halfway out of coupons and then turn around and come home. We'd go a different direction every time just to see the countryside and visit different places. My kids played at the straw market in Florence and all over the different places. They visited all over Rome. They've been up to the top of the Vatican and down, and they've had quite an education. In fact, my son is a high school aeronautics engineering teacher in the Ogden School District. He teaches the gifted and talented kids. He came home one day and said, "Dad, I'm really bothered."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Because I can't give my kids the education you gave us."

I said, "Well, that's the profession you chose. I wanted to travel, and so I got to travel, and you guys got to go with me. That's the beauty of it. He's think now that when he retires from the school teaching, he's going to apply in the military to get into the school system there to teach and see where he can find a place to teach that's overseas. He's already looked at two or three, but when he came and talked to me, and I told him what was there, he didn't think Okinawa was a place he wanted to teach for three years. It's on a rock that's not bigger than Brigham City."

KB: That's pretty isolated.

NN: Yeah, almost all the island places are that way, except for the Philippines. You can go to 30 different islands in the Philippines and have fun.

KB: Is it really beautiful there?

NN: Oh, it is, but you get out in the areas where the people live out of the city. Some parts of the city are just filthy; other parts are fairly nice.

Go back to Thailand for a minute. In Thailand they dump all their raw garbage in the streets. Every three or four days, the city comes through and sweeps that stuff up. So the rats on the street over there were a foot and a half to two foot tall, and just running up and down the street. Little kids were just playing all over the street, and the kids over there don't have any diapers on. It's open so they just go whenever they want to until they get big enough to potty train themselves, and they start wearing full clothes.

KB: Wow!

NN: Yeah. It's quite a shock to the system.

KB: Have any of your children been in the military?

NN: I have one son that just got out of the Army, and he joined the National Guard. He's in the National Guard now down in Utah Valley, and he's part of our Veterans of Foreign War group. He

comes up here in his uniform and helps us do funerals. In fact, he was up here for Cliff Green's funeral just last week. Cliff was a great guy.

KB: I guess your girls are not involved in the military.

NN: Well, my one daughter was in Latvia with the Peace Corps, and they wanted her to come join the language group for the National Guard. They sent them all over the world as interpreters, but the type of stuff that they wanted her for was behind the Iron Curtain because she speaks a little bit of Russian, some Czech and Latvian fluently. They wanted her to spy on the same people that she had been teaching in the school system over there with the Peach Corps, and she didn't want to do that. So she went to work for Nu Skin International in Provo, and she was a rep for them to go around to different countries and teach different things to help them with their business. Now she works for Salt Lake County as the Director for Aging Services. She's filling a slot for a lady who just retired.

KB: Do you have grandchildren?

NN: We have five grandchildren and adopted 11 grandchildren. You know, they're kids that have adopted us. My other daughter works for Ogden Regional Women's Center in the Pediatrics Division with Dr. Lowe in Pediatrics. So my kids are all really busy.

KB: It sounds like their activities stem in some way from the childhood you were able to give with your military service.

NN: Quite a bit, yes, and they all know from being around their dad and mother that service is where it's at. If you're serving other people, you're making things work, and you're helping things work. This is what our kids have all learned from day one – how to be of service to somebody else.

KB: Well, they've certainly had a great example of that because that's all you do in the military. This is kind of going back – but when you were a child, did you have a lot of patriotic feelings? Or did that come later after you got into the service?

NN: I've always had a lot of patriotism. My dad was a World War II veteran, and seeing him in his uniform and my cousins in their uniforms, I always knew that someday I would wear a uniform for this country and serve this country. Jim Hansen made a comment one time when he came to speak at one of our patriotic programs over here at the Tabernacle. Jim said, "Everybody should serve in one facet or another – whether it be in the Peach Corps, whether it be a two-year stint in the military. They all should take a service tour to respect this country more. That's one of the problems I feel – that more people don't do that.

My love is the flag and what it stands for. We present these flags to young Eagle Scouts and give them the responsibility to take care of that flag and what it stands for. We give it to veterans that are retiring out of the military. We go down to Hill Field and fold a flag and give it to a veteran. We've done a lot of that kind of stuff. Somebody called me one time and asked me a question about the flag. I couldn't answer it. I can now. There's not too much I don't know about the flag and the customs and courtesies that go with it.

KB: I've heard that about you from a lot of people I've interviewed, Lonnie Cutler for one. He just loves participating in that with you.

NN: He's great. He's my sidekick. He and Curtis Roche.

KB: When did you start doing all this service with the VFW?

NN: I got out of the military in 1978, and I got two or three cards inviting me to join the American Legion and the VFW. I'm a member the DAV (Disabled Veterans) because of a disability from the service. One afternoon a guy by the name of Zeke Worthington came down and said, "I've got a form here that you need to fill out."

Well, he's married to my aunt, and I said, "What is it, Zeke?"

He said, "I want you to join the VFW."

I thought that I really should. I felt it was an obligation. I sat down and talked to Zeke, filled it out, joined and came up to my first meeting. They made me the Senior Commander of the Post at my first meeting, and I remained the Commander for ten years because nobody wanted to take it. Everybody said, "Well, you're running it so good. We'll help you. We take the other slots if you'll just stay in as Commander."

I said, "Well, whatever, if that's what you want."

Since then we've gone from 33 members to 236. That is from '94 to now.

KB: I think you were destined to that position, and I say that because of what some of the men have told me. Most of them didn't particularly want to come until they got here and saw what it was about, but it's made a tremendous difference to them.

NN: That's right. You've got to know military people to begin with because military people put on that uniform, and they put it on with pride. They don't disgrace it. They don't look sloppy. At least, my guys don't because if somebody comes and they don't look up to par, somebody else is going to say something. They've never had to, though, because when a guy puts on his uniform, he stands a little taller, a little straighter, a little more proud. When we do the parades and stuff like that, they do it with dignity. When we go to different place to present the colors for different organizations – we've been to Salt Lake three times to present the colors, and there's been over 5,000 people at each one of those events.

KB: When you talk about parades and presenting the colors, are they like Peach Days parade or a military parade?

NN: Yes, it's like Peach Days or the 24<sup>th</sup>. We go down and have a Veteran's Day parade in Ogden, which is a military thing. We take a group down for that. We carry the five service flags – Army,

Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard flags – and we have somebody from that branch of the service carrying their own flag.

We go to 15 or 20 schools every year to take veterans into the classrooms to teach the kids how to take care of the flag, what the flag stands for, how to maintain it, how to put it on a pole properly and how to take it down properly and fold it up.

We spend probably 150 to 200 hours a year just doing that alone. We go all the way to Grouse Creek, Park Valley, Stone Idaho, Snowville. We go to all of them. We don't leave any of those outlying schools out. When we go to Grouse Creek, we leave here around 6 o'clock in the morning, and we don't get back until after 6 at night.

KB: I know you participate in funerals, and I've heard many people say that the military part was the most touching part of the services.

NN: For our Post members and special members we do what we call a casket watch. We post two guys – one at the head and one at the foot of the casket all during the viewing so that the the body is protected and the family is protected. That's what that's for. We've gone down to the volunteer people in Davis County. It was at Layton Park, and we posted the colors for that just last Monday. They were going to have Hill Field do it, but they were busy and couldn't do it. They called them Friday afternoon and said they couldn't do it. Friday night the guy called me all in a fluster and said, “Can you help me?”

I said, “Sure. We'll be there. What time?”

So at 11 o'clock the next day we were there and posted the colors for that. There were probably 250 to 300 people there. We did the Pledge of Allegiance with them, and then Lonnie and I sang the *Star Spangled Banner*.

KB: So you're a singer, too?

NN: Yes, we do that quite often. Lonnie and I both sing with the Symphonic Choir here in Brigham City. We're the ones that put the patriotic program together.

We've gone to both the Republican and Democratic conventions in Salt Lake. We posted the colors for that. I took seven or eight guys down for that. We've been down to help posts as far as Orem and Provo to do the Eagle Scout presentations with the flag. I think a lot of people don't know there are a lot of things that go with folding the flag, and it's something we put together. Every time we do it, somebody will come up and say, “I've never heard that before.”

I say, “Well, stick around. You'll hear it again.” We fold the flag, and then we present it to the grandfather. What brought this about was the Nagano Olympics. My wife and I were watching the opening ceremonies. A young Air Force Captain from the Sau Air Base in Northern Japan was in the crowd with a flag on a pole running through the crowd in his military uniform. He was just proud to be there as an American. The news media caught him and asked, “Did the Government send you here to

do that?"

He said, "No, my grandfather gave me this flag when I became an Eagle Scout."

And we said, "Why not our Eagle Scouts?"

Since the Nagano Olympics, we've done over 3,000 Eagle Scouts.

KB: Who pays for the flags?

NN: We ask the family to donate the price of the flag, not quite \$20, and then Rob Bishop's office flies them over the National Capitol for us and sends them to us. We keep 50 flags on hand all the time. In fact, we can't always keep the 50 flags on hand. I just sent Willie Hunsaker three more this morning to do, and I have one in my car that has to be done Sunday night.

They have to be Eagle Scouts. We don't do it for anybody but Eagle Scouts. We keep some 5 x 8s that have flown over the nation's capitol on hand for the different people. Some people have bigger flagpoles and would like special flags, so we keep them on hand.

KB: But when you do a military funeral, you give the flag to the mother or wife.

NN: Or the daughter or the family representative who's going to receive it. This flag comes from the Post Office through the mortuary. The mortuary has to take the discharge paper to the Post Office, and they give them a flag. And we do between 150 and 195 funerals a year.

KB: What things do you do at a funeral? I know you mentioned the casket watch.

NN: We do the casket watch, but that is separate from the military honors at the graveside. Once they get ready for the family prayer, we do a final salute to our fellow fallen comrade who's lying in the casket.

Then at the cemetery, we do a gun salute. It's a volley of three rounds. We've done it in snowstorms that are going horizontally; we've done it in 40- or 50-mile an hour winds with it snowing and hailing. You know these guys just stand tall and do their job. What they do at the cemetery is the hearse comes in, and the honor guard commander greets the hearse at the side of the road and salutes the hearse as it goes by. Then he drops the salute, goes over, opens the back door of the hearse and checks to make sure that the flag is on the casket right and that the body is loaded in the casket correctly. He discusses with the mortician what needs to go in place there. Then he goes back and stands with the honor guard who is lined up by the grave site. Then the casket carried by the pallbearers goes through, and as the casket goes out of the coach, we salute until he passes through us and they set him down. Then the pallbearers step to the foot of the casket and stand in a straight line. We step up to the casket and pick up the flag. They do the dedicatory prayer. Then we explain what will be going on – that they'll fire a volley of three rounds with the rifles; Taps is going to be played, and then the flag will be folded and presented to the family.

The thing we have to be careful of is that once in a while the morticians forget. I was going out the door to do one funeral, and Petersen's Mortuary called and said, "We forgot to call you, but we'll be burying a veteran at 11:30."

I said, "That's good. We'll be doing one at 11 o'clock right in the same cemetery, so we'll take care of you."

When we got there, both caskets showed up at the same time. We did one, then walked over and did the other one and left.

KB: I can't imagine how that makes you feel. It's such a touching thing.

NN: It's tough, especially when they call in the bagpipes to play *Amazing Grace*, and then Taps plays. Then you're sitting there with tears in your eyes, and I drop down on my knees to present that flag. It's tough. You can't look right into their eyes or you lose it. When I gave Cliff Green's wife a flag the other day, that was a tough call because my son had dated his daughters. He was holding the flag for Cliff's wife, and I came up with the three rounds to go with the flag and handed them to the family. We know them all personally. That's the hard part – when you know somebody real personal.

When I did Zeke's funeral, Alberta said, "Norm Nelson will present the flag." We were all standing there waiting for Zeke's body to come from the church house. A guy said, "How come you're so special on this one."

I said, "Other than the fact that he's my uncle, nothing."

"Zeke was your uncle?"

But that's the way we got into all this. The more you get involved you find ways to do it a little better. I studied the books on special ceremonies. When you have a dinner, there's a table set for those that can't be there – the missing men or the Prisoners of War. There's a table set for one, and there's also a hat ceremony that goes with it. You have five guys from the five branches of service come in and do a hat ceremony. This is at any special dinner so people can see how it's done, and it's all done before the meal. We've done that down at Hill Field about five or six times. We've done it around here two or three times.

KB: Do the churches call you in a lot?

NN: They call us in to visit with the Relief Society and the Scouts. We teach the Scouts how to handle the flag, and I'm the Cubmaster for the district, so every couple of months I do something different at Pack Meeting for the District so people know how to handle the flag, how to roll it on the pole, how to take care of it. All of these things are part of my training program that I do constantly.

I call Lonnie and say, "This is what we've got. Can you help me?"

"Yeah." or "Nope, I'm going golfing." So then I call somebody else, but usually he or Sarge (Darrell

Loveland) go with me. Willie Hunsaker goes with me, Fred Beach. Oh, I could name 30 or 40 guys that will go at a drop of a hat. I call them and say, "I've had a problem. Can you help me?"

"What time? Where?" Not "No" or "Maybe." It's just "What time? "Where?" What a great bunch of guys!

KB: Are you still the Commander after all that time?

NN: I'm back as Commander. See, I went through chairs of the State and was the State Commander in 2006-2007. Then I came back to the Post, and the guys said, "Are you going to run for Commander again?"

I said, "Doesn't somebody else want to."

They said, "No, we want you to take over. You know it; you know how to do all the stuff; and you're the trainer."

I've taken these guys to St. George to do training programs. Four or five of them hopped in the car with me and went all the way to St. George for these training programs.

KB: It's a great thing that you do, and I know that it makes a big difference to them.

NN: It does. What's bad is that they're all getting so well-versed and well-trained on the flag that when they see something wrong, they go say something. I say, "You know, guys, we fought for their right to do things. We can't tell them to do it. We ask them."

One funny thing happened. We were leading with the flag at the County Fair parade. I had one guy up there that speaks Spanish and one guy up there that speaks English side by side carrying the flag. They saw these people not standing up on the side of the road, so they wandered over to the side of the road and chewed these people out and came back. I said, "Guys, you can't do that!" It was just a hoot.

KB: You love this, I can tell.

NN: Oh, I do. You know Arland Duvall. He was presenting the flag at one of the funerals. He wanted to present the flag because he knew the family. He goes around to the front, and you know he has that one bad leg. He hooks one of those three-pronged stands with that bad leg so he can't lift it. The next thing you know he was going head-first right into the grave. The family reached down and grabbed him by his coat and pulled him back up out of the grave. Funny things like that happen.

Orville Waters had gone in for open-heart surgery. Two weeks out of open-heart surgery, he shows up at the cemetery to help with the funeral. I said, "Orville, what are you doing here?"

He said, "I want to be part of this one. I know this family."

I said, "All right." I put him up front just standing and holding the flag. It was in the stand, but he was

just holding onto the flagpole. He takes it out of the flagpole and sets right alongside. About halfway through the military honors he starts falling forward. The wind was blowing him so hard, and he didn't have enough strength to stand up. Brent Gillies walked around, put his arm around him, pulled him straight back and held him until the ceremony was over.

Orville Gray one time was standing up to the front holding the flag and locked his knees. Well, you don't do that because it cuts off circulation and you pass out. Right in the middle of the ceremony, he passed out and fell over. Somebody else walked over, picked up the flag, and stood it up. We left Orville lying there until it was all over with. He got up on his own.

We have so much fun, and these guys are so great! The Veterans of Foreign War in Brigham City, Utah have trained two-thirds of the State of Utah how to handle the flag properly, and there's no group in the state that is better than these guys and look as sharp. There are others out there, but they don't look as sharp as these guys here.

KB: I heard one of them talking about getting his uniform cleaned and then getting called from you while it was in the cleaners.

NN: John! I had to have him the next day, and his uniform was in the cleaners, and I had to get somebody else. He said, "I told you I was going to put it in."

"You said you were going to put it in Monday!" And he put it in Friday, and when I needed him, he didn't have his uniform.

Most all of these guys have a spare uniform because they know I'm subject to call them any time.

KB: Can they buy uniforms if they're not in the military?

NN: Let me show you something. (Note from KB: Norm showed me rooms full of uniforms hanging neatly and organized according to military service branches.)

KB: Do you ever think of your influence on people?

NN: You know, I spent six year going back and forth to Washington, D.C. as a representative for legislation for the Veterans of Foreign War and got to know almost everybody in D.C. on a personal basis. I go all over the state for different functions and teach people how to handle the flag, how to do military honors. One thing we haven't talked about is the South Pacific Medallion that came out in 2000. It's given out by a VFW post in the Mariana Islands which was Saipan and Tinian where the B-29s flew out of to bomb Japan. I sent for those, thinking it would be a little plastic thing on a ribbon, but they're really a nice bronze deal. So I started finding all the WWII guys I knew that were in the South Pacific because it's only for the South Pacific guys. We've given away probably 250 to 300 of those in the last three to five years. Singing with the Symphonic Choir, we do a patriotic program every year, and those people are great to let me use them for that. We do it in the Tabernacle. The smallest audience we've ever had was about 600, and the most we've ever had is people walking out because there was no place to sit. They sat out on the lawn on blankets and listened to the program. In

the middle of the program we bring these WWII guys up on the lower stage there. I have a one-star or two-star general come in and put those medals on those guys. I don't just let some sergeant walk up and hand the guy a medal. I have asked the generals, "Would you do that for me?"

I've had the Base Commander at Hill Field three times. I've had the National Guard Commander up here to do that. I've had two or three of the Reserve generals do that. In fact, when we do our program this year, General Cook is going to come and do the military honors for us. He just retired from the Army Reserve out of Salt Lake City in the 96<sup>th</sup> RS.

But anyway, being all over the place doing all this stuff, I run into people all the time. Now it's amazing how many people come up and speak to me. Another thing we do as a VFW -- I take Dave Kilfoyle from Tremonton and Darrell Loveland. Lonnie goes with me all the time. Fred Green has gone. Fred works down at the temple. You know, the best part about this job is scheduling around these guys' temple assignments. That's the hardest thing I have to do. Other than that, they're available 24/7 just about.

We go down to Hill Field, and the first-term airmen that are coming into Hill Field for the first time -- we have an hour with them to talk about our experiences overseas and how to conduct themselves in the military and what to do if they become a prisoner of war. We do that every other week or every week. Some months we do it three or four times; other months we only do it twice. We do that all the time. That's a gimme. And it's so much fun! What's funny is that we'll be walking around Hill Field for something else -- because I pick up stuff at the Thrift Shop and the Airmen's Attic that's excess and take to the veteran's shelter downtown, clothes and things like this. When I do this, I'm in four or five different places, and the honor guard there at Hill Field where I got my basic training invited us to come down. I'll give you a story on that.

One day I was on base, and the Honor Guard Commander runs me down and says, "What are you doing in February? I need some help with the Olympics because my military guys could be called out at any time to go on military duty. Can you give me six or eight of your veterans. So I had two ladies and four guys. That was myself, Fred Green, Ray Reese and Norm Child, and Vicky Leigh and Kay Partridge were the two ladies. We helped at the Olympics for six weeks. We did the regular Olympics, and we went back for the Para Olympics. We did the Para Olympics almost by ourselves because the guys got shipped out. They had to go to Iraq, and we lost over half of our crew. So our people were taking two or three jobs. Instead of just one, two or three a week they were taking six, seven or eight a week to do the different venues. It was so much fun! It was great! That's why I'm so proud of this post.

Hill Field was starting their training for their Honor Guard. I went down and went through eight days of training with the Honor Guard out of Boing Air Force Base which does Arlington National Cemetery for the Air Force. I went through that training, and then I came back and trained our guys to do the same thing. When we started that, the guy told us to give 50 pushups. When I finished my 50<sup>th</sup> pushup, I thought my shoulders were going to fall off. I turned around and said, "Do you want my 80-year-old guys to do that?"

He said, "Well, maybe you'll have to modify it to three." But we had a great time, and that's how I got

involved. Like I told you earlier, someone asked me a question that I couldn't answer. It all snowballed from there, and that's why I'm doing what I do now.

KB: What a great service you do, and what a difference it makes in these people's lives.

NN: Oh yes. I've had more than one guy come up and say, "Norm, if I hadn't got involve with you, I'd have sat on the couch and died watching television."

KB: And there's such a high level of suicide with veterans right now. I'm sure it curbs that as well.

NN: Oh yeah. If you can get a guy to talk. Right now I'm also the State Chaplain for the VFW, and once in a while somebody's struggling, and I get a call. I hook them up with whoever can help them in their area. If not, I go myself.

KB: How does your wife deal with this? Is she on board with it, too?

NN: Her nickname is Captain Kodak. You now what she does? She follows us around everyplace we go, and she's taking pictures. Do you know what she's doing right now?

KB: What?

NN: Putting together a collage of 56 veterans that she's taken individual pictures of to show at the dinner this coming Tuesday night.

KB: I guess we've covered this service quite well. Is there any more you want to say about your actual military service?

NN: One of the saddest things I saw was when I was in Vietnam. I saw a boat coming down the river. It had a family on it. I saw a older man reach over and take this little girl by the hair of her head and push her over the side and hold her under the water until the bubbles quit coming and then just let her go. Because they didn't have enough food to feed their family, they had to eliminate a mouth. Outside the United States women aren't respected

At the age of 18, I was moving a bomb load of 500-pound bombs, a train car full, from Osan down to Kunsan, and I pulled into a rail yard and was switching. I saw an old Korean fellow standing there in a high silk hat and coat and tails. He was walking down the street, and he fell down, had a heart attack and died right there on the street with people walking around him, stepping over him and didn't even touch him. Because in their custom, if you get injured and I help you, I have to take care of your family until you get back on your feet. That's why they don't help each other.

In Thailand, outside of the base there at Utpau, down in the town of Sudihip, a guy got killed in a truck accident and was hanging over the steering wheel. Nobody but his family could touch him for three days. Well, in 110 degree weather and 98 degrees humidity, what do you think that body smells like after three days? That drifted right out over the base. Talk about gag a maggot on a gut wagon.

That's three of the things I saw, and the one that changed me the most was the grandpa. I was a young kid straight out of high school, not having a clue what the world was like until that time. I went into a restaurant and ordered a meal. Not speaking the language very well, I ordered rice, which I thought was pork-fried rice. Well, when I went out the door of the restaurant, there was this dog hide, still bleeding, tacked to the side of the building. So I knew what the meat was in the rice I had just eaten.

We are spoiled here in this country. I remember when I came back from Vietnam the last time. I got out of the plane, and there were 187 people on that plane. I was the first one out the door, and I went straight down to the bottom of the ramp, got down on my hands and knees and kissed the ground. We had almost got killed before we came home. We took a mortar attack in the area where I was working. That's the napalm area, and the 500 pounders were right next to us, so it would have been one heck of a blast if they'd hit one or the other, but they didn't.

When I had gotten out of that plane and kissed the ground, I thought, *Man, that's stupid*. I turned around and looked, and everybody was doing the same thing I was doing. They'd gotten down on their hands and knees and were thanking God that they'd made it home safely. Everybody on that plane probably knew somebody that they went over with that didn't come back.

KB: Many of the Vietnam vets I've talked to have told me about the hostile reception they received at home after they came back. Did you experience any of that?

NN: Oh, you mean getting spit on and called a baby killer. Yeah. We're getting more respect now as Vietnam veterans than we ever did while we were in that era. When we came home, we knew the demonstrations would be there. We knew they would be a problem. I didn't expect that much. The whole thing was – What was I doing? Defending this country and its ideals. As a free American citizen, they might do that and think that's part of their freedom, but they're infringing on my rights, too. But you look at people who do that and say, “Thank you. I defended your right to do that because in another country, they'd have shot and killed you right here on the street.”

KB: How did they respond to that?

NN: They'd look at you kind of funny when you'd tell them thank you, and they didn't know what to do. That ends it. They walk off so bewildered they don't know what to do. They're looking for you to react to make them look good to get in the newspaper. You just look at them and say, “Thank you. Appreciate that.”

People ask me all the time, “Norm, you love the flag, don't you?”

I say, “Yes.”

“What would you do if somebody burned the flag in front of you.”

I say, “I hope I never find out. To destroy a flag properly, it's folded back in a triangular fold and laid in a fire after Taps is played and burned. But to just go out on the street and stomp on a flag and set it on fire, and act like a jackass – I hope I never find out.”

I can't see how a lawyer or a judge can say that burning a flag is freedom of speech. That flag has never spoken in its life, but it means more than anything in the world and has more customs and courtesies that go with it than anything in the world.

KB: Thank you, Norm, for your patriotism and all your service in the military and afterward. I appreciate talking to you.