

Dr. Orel Friedman
Veteran

Jordan White
Interviewer

Interviewed on December 18th, 10:00 AM

Q: What is your full name?

OF: Orel Friedman

Q: When and where were you born?

OF: I was born in Glens Falls on September 30th, 1913

Q: Before the war, what was your education background like?

OF: I graduated from the Glens Falls high school in 1931, in 1935 I graduated from Union college in Schenectady. In 1939, I graduated from the only medical college, and then I was an intern in Brooklyn at the vet now hospital for a year. Then I spent a year at the University of Pennsylvania as a trainee in ear, nose and throat which was a specialty that I trained for. And then from 1941 to 42, I was a resident at the Albany medical center hospital in the ear, nose and throat or otolaryngology as it's called in scientific language.

Q: So, you liked doing that before the war?

OF: Well, it was preparation for a career in medicine, yeah, I enjoyed going, I've been a perpetual scholar.

Q: What made you get into the war and what made you decide to go?

OF: Well, I hadn't completed the basic requirements to be a specialist in their nose and throat knowledge and they were drafting people of my age. I was single, and I knew that if I didn't volunteer, they could not protect me in the residency. In other words, the hospital couldn't say no and that he's essential and we can't let him go. So, I could have been drafted and if I had been drafted, I would have been drafted as a regular GI and I would have been paid maybe twenty dollars a month. While, if I volunteered for the Medical Corp, I could get a commission as a first lieutenant and start practicing my profession, probably right away. So, I volunteered in 1942.

Q: What were your dates of service?

OF: From July 1942 to May 1946

Q: Did you have to do any specific training for Medical Corp?

OF: No, they put me right to work in my field

Q: Can you tell me where you went and what you did

OF: My first assignment was to Camp Lee in Virginia. I entered the army in July 1942, and I went there, and I was assigned to the hospital and to the induction center and I worked in my field there until about March 1944.

Q: What about when you went overseas, where's the first place you had to go?

OF: I was going ultimately to England, but we landed in Scotland and then went to Wales because the hospital that we were supposed to occupy in England was not ready for us yet. We were part of a group of hospitals that they were preparing for the invasion of Normandy, so, we spend so time in Wales doing nothing, and I was fortunate to be a part of a small group that was sent to Northern Ireland to man a station hospital there. After Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war, we took over the defense of Northern Ireland. Not that there were any battles there, but they had to have troops as a possible defensive force which had been previously taken care of by the British army. But when the Americans came in, we took that over and the British army was relieved of duty there so they could go elsewhere where they were needed more. So, there were probably a hundred and twenty thousand American troops at one time.

Q: Wow, I didn't even know that.

OF: No, it's not a very well-known thing

Q: I know that you brought up Pearl Harbor and one of the questions that are like a big conversation starter that our teacher told us was on where you were and when you found out about Pearl Harbor, can you tell me about that experience?

OF: Yeah, I can remember it very well. I was a residence at the Albany medical center hospital, and it was a Sunday morning and I had been called into the emergency room to take care of a patient who was coming in. When the word spread that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, that was December 7th, 1941.

Q: How did you feel when you heard about it at first?

OF: I had a feeling that it was going to affect me personally and change my life

Q: Well, then it did

OF: It did

Q: When you were overseas, how did you keep in touch with your family at home?

OF: My letters

Q: Did you get to talk to them a lot through your letters or not so much?

OF: Yeah, we corresponded pretty regularly

Q: What family was still in the United States, like what family did you talk to?

OF: Well, I wrote to my parents mainly

Q: You mentioned to me on the phone that your brother also served as military police, do you have anything about him that you would like to share?

OF: Yeah, well when I was in England, he was sent to England with the military police. But you know with security and such, you just couldn't tell him where you were, but he was there, and he wanted to find me. So, he contacted the Red Cross and in no time flat they told him where I was, and he was able to contact me and actually visit.

Q: Wow, that's exciting. Is your brother still with us?

OF: No

Q: When you were in Europe, did you know about the concentration camps and things like that, or didn't you really know?

OF: Yeah, I had heard something about it

Q: Can you tell me one of your most memorable experiences in the war?

OF: Meeting my wife, I was in Camp Lee Virginia and that was December 1943. She had worked and then went back to college and was on a college vacation in December, she didn't want it. My wife to be lived in Pennsylvania but she came down during her Christmas vacation to Richmond Virginia, which was about twenty-twenty three miles from Camp Lee in Virginia. She was visiting her cousin there and her cousin had a boyfriend, who used to visit her just about every weekend and he was a dentist in our hospital, and I knew him not too well, but I knew he had a girlfriend there. I was taking care of some patients who were very interesting patients, but I really wanted to know more about their illnesses, and we didn't really have a very good library. So, I wanted to go into Richmond, to the medical school there and use their library. But, during the war we were all restricted with using gasoline, we had to have gasoline tickets just like people who weren't in the army, and I had run out of gasoline tickets, so there was no way I could go in my car.

So, I asked Dennis, who's in our group, if possibly I could get a ride into Richmond with him because I know he went there just about every weekend because of his girlfriend, and I wanted to go on a Saturday. So, he said yes, and he said he was delighted he said I have a date for you. Apparently, his girlfriend knew that her cousin was coming, and she'd told him to find a date for her and he hadn't done anything about it. I wasn't too excited about it, but I figured, no date no ride, so I said OK and that's how we met. It just turned out that it was something I guess it was our day for the two of us to meet.

Q: So, you wrote to her when you were in Europe?

OF: Well, that was December 1943, and I went overseas in March 1944. So, we had a few dates and I actually visited her at home in Pennsylvania one weekend and that was it. I wooed her by mail, but I am a pretty good writer and I used to write a little poetry and things, so, I probably made a better impression by writing than being there in person. But that's a much longer story and we did get married when I came back from overseas.

Q: Being that you grew up in the Great Depression era, can you tell me about growing up then?

OF: Well, I was fortunate in my family that we had moved from Glens Falls to Schroon Lake, and during the depression, my parents had a business there like ready to wear clothes and sportswear things. The Great Depression itself was a terrible terrible time for many American people, much worse than we have today and it's bad enough today. We learned lots of lessons from the Great Depression and my generation I think learned valuable lessons that have helped us in conducting our lives and how we handle our finances and everything else. But anyhow, I worked in my parents' store from the day school went out to the time I went back to school, and we were fortunate that they were able to send me through college to medical school during the depression years. But the depression itself was real, it was so real.

Q: How did other people's lives change who were less fortunate than you were? Did you see them?

OF: Yeah, there were people in bread lines, people who have been very comfortable lost everything, especially if they invested in the stock market because the stock market crash started the depression. My parents didn't invest in the stock market, so they did not suffer that way and then things just keep adding on as one thing fails and something else fails and people lose jobs, and it was a very severe time. Fortunately, President Roosevelt did try and make changes and do things to alleviate the sufferings as much as he could. It helped some but still, we never really came out of the depression until World War Two started and then after that we did come out of the depression, but it wasn't the best way to end the depression.

Q: But that helped us get the economy rolling

OF: Definitely, because when we went into the war in 1941, the country had not completely recovered.

Q: Back when you were overseas, did you ever see any combat or anything like that? I have read in a couple of cases that doctors had to fight but you have never experienced that?

OF: I was never in combat, the only thing I did see was our hospital was in a city called Great Malvern town and it was in the midlands, a far distance from London. But they used to send me to London every couple of months for a conference, so I went in there and I could see where there was housing and apartments and then the next time I came, they were gone, and I actually could see what was happening. Also, I did venture down into the subway, and I saw the people during the war in England and they slept in the subway since it was the safest place to prevent being hit by bombs. I went down there just to see what it was like and there were all the people laid out and sleeping in the subways, but I never was actually in combat.

Q: Even though you weren't in combat, it must have been very hard to see all the wounded and all of the casualties that were happening.

OF: The war is hell, there's no question about it. Our hospital received casualties from the invasion of Normandy starting probably within a week when the injury occurred. They'd gone through all the field hospitals, their first aid hospitals and everything, and then they came to us for definitive treatment, either we can make them well enough to go back to duty or we send them back to the United States. I saw many young men who have been in excellent physical condition, and they came back blind, deaf, all kinds of terrible injuries. Permanent injuries that they would never recover from.

Q: Did you see a lot of self-inflicted wounds while you were there? Because I know that the mental anguish for the people that were fighting those were difficult or didn't you see it as much?

OF: I really didn't see anything, that didn't seem to be a big thing. At least, we didn't recognize anything as such. What brings that up?

Q: I don't know, a lot of things I read before have said that psychologically, you would be drained so they would want to leave, and they felt like giving up.

OF: I didn't see much of that, or we didn't recognize the brain. I mean, there was post-traumatic stress syndrome which we didn't call at that time, but psychologically, war has a terrible effect. They called it shell shock in World War one but now they recognize it as post-traumatic stress, which is a very real thing, and which is soldiers suffering from battle and repeated tours of duty in places like Iraq and Afghanistan there, it's really something. But it's a factor that was not important and just didn't recognize it.

Q: Yeah, I was just curious to see whether you saw that or not. I know that during World War two, a lot of new medical technologies had come out, can you talk about that a little bit?

OF: Yes, they saved many lives that they would not have been able to save in previous wars, for one reason, they had treated the initial injuries in shock much better because they had much better facilities and blood and plasma things than previous wars. We also had the benefit of sulfa drugs and even though penicillin had been discovered in 1939, it was late in the war before we began to use penicillin, but these things worked like magic, so they made a big difference. Never much better techniques and each war they would learn new techniques, there much better than the way they treated casually societies and freedom in Iraq. Then we did World War two and there were a lot of instances, and they saved many soldiers who would have died in World War two, now they have quadruple amputations and they've been able to keep them alive, which they would not have been able to do in World War two, so each war they learned more.

Q: Did your supplies ever run out? Did you ever feel like you didn't have enough supplies to treat your patients? Or did you feel like you were well enough?

OF: I think we were pretty well supplied

Q: How was the food when you were there?

OF: In general, it was good, of course we had things like powdered eggs in general among other things, as I said I was never in the front line.

Q: How do you feel about your experience in the medical corps? Did you feel like it was a good experience for you, and you were happy that you did it?

OF: I would say that it was a good experience and I'll tell you why. First, my entry into the army came along at just about the optimum time in my life, I had not set up a practice, I was not married, I really had no obligations expect to my parents who had supported me through school and everything and they were still supporting me until time that I was in army. Although it changed my plans, it didn't cause a big disruption in my life, like it would have if I had been an established doctor and had to leave that with a family at home and all of that. So, from that standpoint, it came along at the best time. Secondly, I did practice my specialty most of the time in the army, of course the field was not the same as the type of practice you would have on children and things like that, but I did work in my field sometimes. Third, I was safe and also, I met my wife so I would say it was a pretty positive experience for me considering everything.

Q: When you tried to get into it, did you have any trouble with your hearing problem? You also said on the phone that your father had a hearing problem too, so, what did they do?

OF: They put me on what was called limited service, I functioned well enough at that time, but I didn't have perfect hearing. Other than that, I think when they put you on limited service, that meant you probably weren't meant to go into combat or overseas or things like that, but they did, they sent me overseas because I was in a non-combat field.

Q: What is your hearing-loss called?

OF: It is called sensorineural hearing loss

Q: Can you explain that a little bit?

OF: The nerve endings in the inner ear next to your external ear in which you can see here. Then there's a middle ear which is inside the ear drum and then there's the inner ear, you familiar with the anatomy dear?

Q: No

OF: Then there's the inner ear where the nerve has little hair cells which are the little nerve endings that pick-up sound and through these nerve cells, the sound is transmitted by wave of the auditory nerve to the brain. Well, I've lost a lot of the hair cells in my inner ear, which I still have some which function when the sound is not enough to reach them which my hearing aid does, it amplifies the sound and is able to stimulate.

Q: So, this is a hereditary?

OF: It's hereditary in my family, it can also occur in the war for instance in my work, I saw as I said many many soldiers coming back from the front who were deaf. I actually did a rather basic study which I wrote up in a scientific article which was published in the prestigious journal.

[He gives Jordan the study he wrote]

Q: So, this is all about the army?

OF: That is my experiences and my experience over in England and what I saw there, and I wrote it all.

Q: That's cool, it got published and everything?

OF: It was published in a very prestigious journal, and this worked towards an advanced degree at the University of Pennsylvania.

Q: So, during the war, did you mostly work on ears and throat or were you for everything?

OF: It was in the head and neck

Q: But you could do everything, or it was mostly head and neck?

OF: no, I didn't do everything

Q: Oh, so just head and neck?

OF: Well on a rare occasion, I was assigned as a like family physician or a general practitioner. Toward most of the time it was mostly in the head and neck.

Q: Where there ever hurt civilians and you helped them? Or it was only on site

OF: No, I really had no contact with civilians.

Q: Once you got home from the war, what's the first thing you did?

OF: I visited my parents, and then I arranged for my fiancée, she wasn't my fiancée then, to meet my family and we got together and so on.

Q: Did you have any kids with your wife?

OF: I had three children

Q: How old are they now?

OF: sixty-two, sixty and fifty-eight

Q: After the war throughout your life, you were still a doctor, correct?

OF: Yeah

Q: How did your military experience influence your life? Besides that, I kind of messed up earlier and you said that it was a positive experience.

OF: Well, I think I mentioned most of the things. I did travel and see different planes out of the United States and of course in Europe. Just in the United Kingdom, England, Wales, I visited Scotland, but I think traveling was beneficial anyway when travelers broadening so much.

Q: Have you ever gone back to some sites?

OF: Yeah

Q: Did you visit the specific sites you have been at? Or did you just went over there pretty much?

OF: Not really, I visited some of the same countries or areas, but I didn't really go back there for that because I had been there.

Q: Do you find it hard to watch documentaries on the war because you don't think that there accurate?

OF: No I saw Saving Private Ryan and I thought that was very accurate. I don't watch a lot of war stories and it doesn't bother me.

Q: You haven't seen anything that had been crazy or out of the ordinary that you didn't really think was a correct portrayal.

OF: I said I had no experience in combat, so I was really not a judge.

Q: Do you have any fond memories of the war? Maybe you've met some friends over there? Or some like funny experiences?

OF: I made friends, some of them I kept in contact with after the war. My wife's cousin who lived in Richmond and married, whenever we went to Florida, we always drive through and stay in Richmond with her every evening and every night. Then there were some people that I kept in touch with, and I haven't been active in veteran organizations and everything and I said I came out in good physical condition.

Q: Do you have any funny stories in the back of your mind that might be anything like in the back of your mind that you have? Like a funny recollection of during your time

OF: Well, there are always some good signs and bad signs to think of, I remember when I was in Northern Ireland and we were stationed in this area, stationed hospital in Kilrea the town was, and then the bird droppings were horrible. I remember I wrote a poem; it was called the order of the white spot because we were all getting hit with bird droppings and the way I handled it was to write a poem hopefully. The order of the white spot, that was when you got hit, you became a member of the order. There's always humor when people are together but right now, I can't recollect a lot.

Q: No, it's ok, I was just wondering if there's anything specific. You said that you used to write poetry, was that a way to express how you're feeling, or you just liked doing that?

OF: I think my expression went through, I continued to do it.

Q: Did you keep it until now or do you still have some of it?

OF: Yeah, I have some of my poetry.

Q: What else do you have in there? Do you have anything in there?

OF: I just made some notes about my experiences.

Q: Anything specific that you want to share?

OF: Not particularly, expect that I want to repeat that war is Hell and I would love to see a world where there was peace forever and so, that's my dream.

Q: That's a good dream, I feel like a lot of people feel the same way.

OF: That's what I think we should all work for but whether it will come about there, I don't think it will come about my lifetime, maybe in yours.

Q: I hope so. Well, thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

OF: My pleasure, any other questions you want to ask me?

Q: I can't think of any but is there anything you would like to share?

OF: I think Matt Rochelle has done wonderful, I think his project is wonderful and I found that all the things he's done, your most fortunate in being part of that brand because I don't think too many high school students....

[End of Tape]