



Video Story Transcript

WORN OUT BLINDERS: A SOLDIER'S STORY AFTER D DAY IN NORMANDY

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www.storytelling.org/directory

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qyRZYDCzm4>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hello, my name is Carol Kaufman-Kerman. My dad didn't talk much about being in World War II growing up. I mean, when I was a child I actually thought it was because he was invincible. I just... I saw the scars but I wanted him to be my superhero, my superman. And I felt so protected behind his fortified walls. Now I think, he also enjoyed me adoring him, looking up to him, but at what price. He had this knobby, sunken scar on his left shoulder. He said that that's where they had removed a lot of the shrapnel. But he told me that they couldn't get it all until they would be still some left in his body forever and I thought well that's a heck of a souvenir.

My whole life I remember my dad saying, "Talk to me in my good ear, my good ear, Carol."

Well, sometime during the war, his first, second or third injury, he had lost the hearing in his ear. Now as far as his emotional scars, those were harder to see. He had gotten three purple medals for being injured three times and he kept these medals in a box, in a drawer, in a room that hardly anybody ever used. I asked him once, "Dad, did you ever encounter anti-Semitism during the war?"

"I don't know. Not rea... yeah, there was this one time at Fort Benning, Georgia. My commanding sergeant said, 'Jew boy, take off your helmet. I want to see your horns.' But, you know, he was from Arkansas and he had never met a Jewish person. It wasn't really his fault."

And I said Dad, "What about sensing your Jewish identity, feeling it over in Europe. I mean you were fighting Hitler. He exterminated six million Jews."

That's when he told me about his bold escape going AWOL, absence without leave."

"Wait, Dad. AWOL, isn't that illegal? Why did you do that?"

He said, "Well, to tell you the truth, Carol, I had been released from a hospital in Paris. They were scheduling me to go back out onto the frontlines. I didn't know if I'd ever live to see Paris. It was Rosh Hashana and the first place I went was Rothschild's Synagogue. It was closed but the Shammass was there. The Shammass is the person that takes care of the synagogue and he let me in and you know it felt good. I was missing family and he was there for me."

Well, many years later, after I'd been married, my father told my husband and I both, he said, "You know, I remember when I was in a bunker. There were shells and fire all around and my buddy was sitting next to me. We were just inches apart. And I looked back over at him and his head was blown off."

I looked at my father. I mean he said it so nonchalantly. But you know he would have had to have been holding back details and emotions.

He said, "Carol, this is the way I survived World War II. I just had to put on my blinders and keep 'em on. There was a time my captain and I, we were lying next to each other on our bellies and I had the radio strapped on my back. It was my job to radio back to our artillery the captain's orders of where to aim the fire. And I believed that as long as I had that radio strapped to my back that I would be okay. You had to think like that, Carol, or else you'd crack."

Well, about two and a half, three years ago, my dad and I were talking and he said, "Carol, I remember when I was in a hospital in France. We were four men and five legs."

And that image just seared into my mind and I realized how impenetrable his blinders had to have been. I mean it was easier for him to talk about the good times, like the time that he was on a hospital train. There was a Red Cross volunteer. She was a famous actress from England. She was Alfred Hitchcock's first icy blonde. Her name was Madeleine Carroll. And she was beautiful. Now she had made a radical change in his... in her career. She actually had stopped acting after her sister was killed in the London Blitz. And she just wanted to help the wounded soldiers.

My father said that he had seen all her movies and that he was madly in love with her. So, can you imagine, she's walking down the aisle. I mean my mom... my father must have thought it was an apparition. It was an angel from heaven or something. She had in one hand crosses and she had in the other hand mezuzahs. A mezuzah is a casing with a Jewish prayer inside. And she came walking down; she stopped where my father was. She took a mezuzah and gave it to him and then she kissed him on the forehead. Oh, my gosh! He must have thought he died and went to heaven. He told me, he said, "I needed family and she was there."

Well, now my dad fights a different kind of battle. He has prostate cancer. He's softer now, more gentle. His blinders don't work anymore and he can't protect his fortress. His fortress that had kept our family so safe with his belief that if we all stayed inside the fortress, nothing could penetrate and hurt us.

Well, those weren't on anymore, the blinders or the fortress. and last November my husband and I went to Normandy. We went and we saw all the things that he had lived through.

We would call him every single day and we'd compare the sights we had seen with what he saw. And we said, "Dad, today we went to see the beaches of, of D-Day. We saw the bunkers, the German bunkers. And my husband even called him from the American Cemetery. "Dad, tomorrow we're going to go to St. Lo, the place where you got injured the second time."

Now St. Lo was taken over by the Germans and totally destroyed. In fact, the writer Samuel Becker describes it as "The Capital of the Ruins." It was that decimated and devastated.

When we got to St. Lo, we went right to the information tourist office and we asked, "Are there any World War II memorials?"

She told us that they were all closed for the season. We told her all about my father and how he had been injured in St. Lo. And she said, "Come back at five o'clock. I'm going to take you there myself."

And so, we did. We came back at five and she introduced us to this small, little, French elderly man. His name was Mr. Letribot. And he introduced himself and said, "I am the curator of the World War II memorial. I would like to take you there myself."

It was beautiful. It was in a 12th century chapel, La Chapelle de la Madeleine. He told us that it was the first time in his life he had ever had a piece of gum, given to him by an American soldier. It was the first time he ever had an Americ... eh, had a cigarette too. Also given to him by a soldier. And we told him about my father. He told us about the 29th. We had learned a little bit about how the 29th American Military Division had come in and they had liberated St. Lo during that July of 1944. And we told them how my father was in the 28th and they came in afterwards to relieve them. He smiled. He said, "It was your father's division that had liberated my sister's village not far from here. What your father did for us."

And it made me think, "Did my... was my father ever thanked by anybody or soldiers ever thanked?"

And I looked over at my husband and there he was dialing my father in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. He said, "Stanley, we're here in a World War II memorial and there's someone that would like to talk to you."

Monsieur Letribot got on the phone and he said, "Thank you so much for what you did for me and for my people. You came all the way over from America and you didn't even know me. Thank you."

And my father, oh, my father said, "You're welcome. It was my pleasure. I did what I thought was right. Nobody has ever thanked me before."

68 years later this conversation took place, 68 years after my father left France. Inside of a chapel whose walls are adorned with the military... American military flags with American medals with the... with the pictures of photographs of American fallen soldiers. And here was a liberated Frenchman saying, "Thank you" to a Jewish American soldier. And my father, well, he wore no blinders to protect his feelings... and he cried.