

Sergeant Karoki spoke at the Commonwealth Club luncheon meeting at the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, on February 4, 1944. There were perhaps 400 people seated at the tables and probably another 50 or 75 standing at the rear of the room.

Karoki is slight of build and very quiet in manner-almost shy; gives the impression of physical weakness, in contradiction to his record. He wears on his overseas ribbons insignia representing two Distinguished Flying Crosses and five Air Medals.

He began by saying that he supposed most people began speeches by saying they did not know how to make a speech, but in this case it was really true; that his Army experience had taught him many things but they did not include making speeches.

He then described his early life in very few words; He was born and reared in Hershey, Nebraska, a town of about 500 people. His father is a farmer, and Karoki and his younger brother were brought up together on the farm. Two days after December 7, 1941, he and his brother drove 150 miles to volunteer for service in the Army. He found it very difficult to get into the Army. He and his brother tried for six weeks, found it necessary to make several trips and several long distance phone calls, but finally succeeded in being accepted.

At training camp he found that he was going to have to fight two battles, one against the Axis and one against intolerance. "My brother and I were," he said, "the two loneliest soldiers in the barracks." Not only did the others have nothing to do with them but, in addition, Karoki was on K. P. a very large part of the time. It wasn't a matter of "keep'em flying", he explained, it was a question of "keep'em peeling". However, he finally finished that first training period, and then had a very difficult time trying to get into gunnery school. When he finished gunnery school, where he trained with the men who were to form the rest of the crew, he was called in by an officer and told that he was going to be transferred to another training school instead of being sent out with them. When he asked why, the officer answered only that he, the officer, had nothing to do with it and that it was not on the basis of Karoki's being a Japanese-American. Karoki then explained to the officer what he had been through in trying to enlist and at the training camp, and that all he was asking was a chance to get into active combat duty. He

begged to be allowed to stay with the crew, to be sent overseas and to get into the active fighting. Two days later he was told he was staying with the crew.

After a further period of working with the rest of the crew and together fighting Axis planes in Italy and in Africa, he felt that he had won the second of the two battles; he found that neither ancestry nor rank makes any difference when you are facing an enemy bomber or fighter. He added that the crew included two Italians, a German, a Jew, a Pole, an Irishman, and a Japanese-American. When they took off for bombing flights over Italy and Sicily, Karoki would say to the Italian boys, "We'll certainly be raising Cain with your honorable ancestors today. We'll make that spaghetti fly." And the Italian boys would say, "Wait till we fly over Tokio. We'll make the rice fly--out of your dishonorable ancestors!"

Karoki was the tail gunner in the bomber for a considerable number of flights, and then was made top turret gunner. And the other boys painted over the glass above the turret, "Honorable son Karoki is turret gunner here". He explained that they had two nicknames for him, one being "Honorable son", and other being "Hara kiri Karoki".

He told at length of some of his experiences in the thickest fighting. On one occasion the plane directly in front of his was hit, caught fire, and dropped in the sea. On another occasion the plane on their right was hit and caught fire immediately from the bomb bay doors to the tail. The pilot instantly headed the plane up, climbing as high as he could so that his crew could parachute out. After they had bailed out, the pilot headed the plane straight into a building which was part of their target. He told, also, of the injuries suffered by men in his own plane and his own narrow escape in the top turret--but without any injury.

On one occasion they were lost in a thick fog but finally, when almost out of gas, were able to make their way through it and find a landing place. They were at once made prisoners by Arabs and finally discovered they were in Spanish Morocco. Thereafter they were taken as interned prisoners to Spain, but were able to gain their release and succeeded in getting to England. From there they went back to Africa and resumed their bombing missions.

Karoki told the exciting story of the bombing of the Ploesti oil fields in Roumania. After a long period of training for this flight, including flying at heights where the temperature was from 10 to 20 degrees below zero (including one occasion when the oxygen tanks froze and he had to suck on the tubes in order to get air) and then landing in African heat of 110 degrees, they left from Bengazi to bomb the chief source of oil supply for Germany and Italy. They returned after 13 hours of flying and fighting. Knowing in advance how long the trip would take and what it would involve, they flew almost the entire trip at a height of not to exceed 50 feet above the ground, following the contour of hills and valleys, in order to save gas. In fact, some of the time they were flying as low as 10 feet above the ground; a number of the planes on their return had branches of trees and even cornstalks in the bomb bay doors.

After 25 bombing missions a bomber crew is disbanded and returned to the United States by plane. When Karoki was called in the given his ticket for his return, he asked to be sent on five more missions. He explained that his younger brother had never succeeded in getting overseas and he therefore wanted to do five bombing trips for him. It was on the thirtieth trip that flak tore through the top turret, knocking Karoki down, tearing his oxygen mask from his face and rendering him unconscious. But the radioman put an emergency oxygen tube in his mouth and he was revived and returned safely.

He then came back to the United States--by banana boat. He told of his happiness and thankfulness on arriving in this country. But he felt that there were still two battles to be won. "In fact," he said, "I'm not sure I am safe in the streets of my own country."

He ended his speech by saying that he was going to take a little time in the United States and then he was asking to be sent to the South Pacific. "Because," he explained, "I will not be satisfied until I have been in that fight. I want to go to Tokio--but I want to go in a bomber."

When he finished, the entire audience stood and gave Karoki an ovation such as I am sure the Commonwealth Club has seldom given.

I have been able only partially to transmit by this

medium either the content of the speech or its effect. I wish I could convey half the drama of the occasion.

The Chronicle ran a story five columns wide about it this morning. The Hearst papers ran it--without an unfavorable word.