

**Louis Hoenecker  
Veteran**

**Interviewed on March 20, 2005  
American Legion Post  
Saugerties, New York**

**Q:** Okay, Lou I want to find out, were you drafted or did you enlist?

**LH:** I enlisted.

**Q:** Where were you living at the time?

**LH:** I was living in Manhattan I went to work and was going to graduate in June of '49 and all the recruiters came aboard into the school and gave us their spiel. It sounds funny but I was in the old National Guard back in '46 and the first year in the National Guard we went to camp Smith in Peekskill New York and the Mosquitoes hated us a lot (chuckles). So the second time we went to Fort Edwards out in Cape Cod. Sand Fleas got us, I'm just giving you a little background of why I joined what I did. On the third time we went up to camp Drum up by Water town in October and the snow was up to our kneecaps and we went out in bivouac. So they get back to the recruiters coming to the High Schools there was the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corp, the Air Force, and the Coast Guard. Each one gave us there spiel telling us what was going on and everything. So what happens is after everyone got done and the Navy got up there and he says all you gotta' do fellas is listen to what I'm gonna' say he says think of this, you are gonna' have three hot meals a day and you are gonna' have a warm bed at night. I said you got me because all those Sand Fleas and all that crap came back so I joined the Navy and I graduated at the end of June '49 about a week and ten days later I was in the Great Lakes Illinois for boot camp we went to work and spent about seven days on a train it was the old coach cars. There was no dining room, no nothing, no showers so you have some idea of what we looked like when we finally got to the Great Lakes. We left New York went to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia into Ohio into Indiana picking up recruits along the way. The only time we got any food is when we stopped at some train stations and people would come out and give us sandwiches and sodas. As I told you before so you had some idea of what we looked like when we got to the Great Lakes. We hadn't showered, shaved, or changed clothes and we got out there at about five o'clock in the morning and this chief comes out there screaming his bloody lungs off. We figured he's gonna' take us over to the barracks so we could get a shower and shave. No such luck, he had us do double time to the barracks.

We dropped our clothes, we ran into Sickbay to get our examinations and I don't know why the smell didn't kill him but we got in there and they started to give us the medical and everything then they ran us over to supply got us some dungarees and clean shirts gave us the chance to grab and shower and shave. Everything was done double time. Then we finally got to the mess hall. When we got to the mess hall we got some chow, it didn't make any difference what it was it was warm and twelve weeks we were in boot camp we went to work and did everything. We learned about Sigmund ship, military discipline, the

other thing was in the barracks there was one-hundred and twenty-five of us in the barracks. We go to work and get in there and finally that first night we were just exhausted we fell down and went to sleep. About four o'clock the next morning it sounded like the world came to an end. This chief came in with a GI [Government Issue] can with a nightstick running around in the middle of it and he told us we had ten minutes to get shaved, showered, and outside. We get out there and we do double time to the mess hall and this procedure is continued for twelve weeks and eventually after about I say three or four weeks we learn what it is all about. It was discipline, timing, learning seamanship, all about the military and another thing was the first night there...I'm just thinking about it.... after the lights went out the last thing the chief said to us was, I don't want nobody crying for their mommy and it's dead silence because we are just tired. Then all of a sudden you hear a little snuffle down that went into the barracks and like a set of dominos three or four guys I want my mommy I wanna' go home. [Chuckling]. It was a funny story but I learned it was a great life I mean I really enjoyed it.

**Q:** You went in boot camp in '95?

**LH:** We went in in July. So we were there for July, August, and September. Graduated in boot camp in about the end or middle of September. My assignment...We got ten days leave and then after we got the leave we came back and we got our orders and I went to Norfolk, Norfolk Virginia. I don't know it once beyond the tape but they used to call it Shasta City. Never being out of New York before it was a whole new experience. I was the report of aboard a CBE which is a big flat two. One twenty was a polymer and we go to work at first cruise and we went and spent three months in the Arctic Circle, no liberty just floating around watching icebergs go by. [Laughter]. We go to work and we have what we call GQ [General Quarters], general quarters we practice like we were under attack. The planes would go work and make qualifying flights on the day hours then they would have to qualify at night the same thing. So we get back to Norfolk about three months later it was unbelievable, I think I was drunk for the weekend because we didn't have nothing for the three months. Then we found...[chuckle]...the old timers will tell you this. We go to work and we found signs on people's lawn and it says sailors and dogs keep off. So that was welcome to Norfolk.

**Q:** Did you go to a Class A school so you could become a cook did you strive for it?

**LH:** I went to work and when I was aboard ship when I was a yeoman. I was in the office and I had started working in the pastry shops when I was eight or nine years old. Cooking at eight or nine years old. So when I come back from Norfolk from the Arctic Circle I was going through brochures and stuff and it was an opening for the ship's cook. I went to work and put in for that and I got that and went up to Bayonne New Jersey. From that day forward I was the ship's cook.

**Q:** You served during a time after Korea?

**LH:** I served during Korea. During '49 that's right. I went to work then Korea come along in 1950 and that's when I swapped ships for a guy because the *Mindoro* (?) was supposed to go to Korea. This guy was going through a brutal divorce so he wanted to get away from Norfolk and come over to my ship. He says the *Mindi* is supposed to go to Korea I'm on the *Sicily* which is another flat top. He goes to work and he says would you spot for me. I

said that I don't care doesn't make a difference to me he just wanted to get out of Norfolk so we swap.

**Q:** Mutually?

**LH:** Yes, I went to your ship, got it approved by your CO [Commanding Officer] my CO approved it. So what happened is he gets on the *Mindoro*, which is due to go to Korea. *The Sicily is supposed to stay in Norfolk!* [Hitting his leg]. It didn't work that way. *The Mindoro stayed in Norfolk!* The Sicily went to Korea. I was over there from about fifty or... fifty-one in that era. At fifty two my time was up because I signed up for a three year hitch. In Korea they flew me off the Sicily back to Norfolk for discharge. I get all processed for discharge, all I had to do was go topside to get my pay goodbye. I go topside to get my pay man tells me he's going to give me another year, Mr. Truman our honorable president gave all the service men at that time another year. So I figured I would spend another year at Norfolk. It didn't work that way. They put me on a plane and flew me all the way to Korea for the Sicily. So the night we come back from Norfolk we went to where he came back I guess at the end of '52. So we get back there and I spent another year there till '53. Then I started moving around. Got off the CED's I did a cruiser and then I believe the Jersey was in the water at that time so I did a little bit on the Jersey. My time I re-enlisted and I went to work and got out in January '60. So prior to getting out I had taken a test for the post office because I figured I had got out in '60 there were no jobs out there. My father had always told me to get a civil service job you ain't gonna' make a lot of money [Laughter] he said but then in thirty years or so you'll have at least a pension coming. If you want to ask me any other questions after that?

**Q:** You had done ten years active duty?

**LH:** Actually about eleven.

**Q:** Eleven years active duty?

**LH:** Right.

**Q:** Did you get any medals for like the invasion in Chan or anything like that?

**LH:** No, all I got was the Korea medal, the United Nations medal, Navy Occupation, Good Conduct, and the National Defense medal. Then in late February or March I joined the reserve. I wanted to get back to the regulars but I enjoyed the job at the post office. So I joined the reserves and the thing was when I was on a carrier it shows you how everything comes full circle. When I was on a carrier we used to laugh at the guys who were on tin cans, destroyers. When we were in the North Atlantic we would watch these tin cans go straight up in the air come down and they would lay on their side and take water down the stag and come back up right and be ready to lay down on the other side. Then the fan tail would either go down or go up. We used to laugh at them now I'm in the reserves. Don't you know my first reserve two weeks cruise was on a tin can out of Brooklyn New York. I thought I had died, what I was laughing at before was happening now to me. The old reserve cans used to go to work and were built back in '38 or '39. We were only on there like a weekend we do a Friday, Saturday, Sunday or we do a two week cruise which was my first two week cruise.

There was very seldom hot water if you took a shower it was like you go in and wipe down with soap. You go and get where you can have a shower. I took the night shift and I stayed down overnight and I was a baker, I'll give you a funny story. I go to work, working nights and we were feeding about two twenty, about two hundred and twenty guys so I called up to oceaner deck and I sit down. This is about twelve o'clock at night.

**Q:** Mid rest?

**LH:** Yes, I said I'm going to bake some pies. I said now you go to work and you are going to work this thing on an even keel [Laughter], you are not gonna' fight games go left and right up and down. I said if I load up this oven with about twenty or thirty pies you ain't gonna' go to work and do nothing like this right? He said don't worry about it he says were gonna' be very calm then with a straight line no problem. I loaded up the oven, they switched watch. One comes off at midnight another guy comes on. The guy who comes on at midnight decides he is going to play a little GQ and go to work and do a load of zig-zags. Low and behold starts this stuff and here goes these ovens and they are shaking like hell. First thing you know the doors pop open and all these pies are flying out. I got blueberries on the overhead, I got apples all over the bulkhead. I just quit [Chuckle], I left it there and went down to my rack and went to bed but that was you know funny story about how things comes full circle. Twenty-five years late and I went in in 60' twenty-five years.... I got out in 84' so twenty-four years later I retired from the reserves.

**Q:** So you were in the reserves all that time, Twenty-four years?

**LH:** Yes active duty you know active reserve. The only reason I got out was Mr. Reagan decided in 1984 anybody that had thirty or more had to get out. Why? I don't know. But that's what happened I had to get out.

**Q:** You going for chief?

**LH:** I made chief six times and that where the navy started changing. I don't know about other branches of services. Even though I made chief because I didn't have any community service you can get the highest mark on a test but if you weren't involved, this is the reserved now. If you weren't a reserve with the Boy Scouts, United Way, the Red Cross. a blood drive, other words community service they didn't look at that test. Even though that you have we will say a 4.0 which will never happen. If you average a three five three seven it just got to the point where you didn't want to take the test anymore. You keep taking em' and they used to tell them when I went to the board I used to tell them, I am working full time at a post office at that time I was working overnight. I was work the five to one-thirty, the five am to you know. I said you think I'm going to go out there and play little league ball, or I'm gonna' go for the Red Cross running around for a blood drive I just can't do it. So they said well then you can't make Chief, so I retired as First Class.

**Q:** When you were in Korea did you keep in touch with your family?

**LH:** I didn't because my family and I didn't get along.

**Q:** There was no contribution or you didn't get any less social anything like that?

**LH:** No, our entertainment was mostly movies at night on board ship. We put movies on in the hangar deck. There was two movies one was at 18:00 and the other was around 20-

20:30. That was all the entertainment we had. The difference in the Navy chow too was a whole new experience for us, for me anyway. We went to work and when I first went to work there in 49' you could lay in your rack at night or in the morning[inaudible] and tell by the aroma in the galley what was in the galley for you to have for breakfast. For example one of the big meals was beans and cornbread. You could smell the beans and smell the cornbread. Another one was SOS okay. That you would sifer (?) down. You went from that experience to when I finished up down in Little Grove I went down there in 72'. Everything was like outside, it was a breakfast to order. We were feeding five-hundred men. You had Egg, Hotcakes, French Toast, Home Fries Bacon, Sausage, plus your pastries you get the choice. You come to the chow line just like you went to a dinner. You tell' em what you want. One man worked the grill, if you can imagine one guy working the grill feeding five-hundred to order. But that was the differences of the chow. You went from the aroma of the Galley.

**Q:** This was a land Galley?

**LH:** Yeah, but this is a board ship now too I understand that they do the same thing. Your super carriers go to work and have three mess halls and three galleys and one is kept open twenty-four seven and that's because the planes at night and the mid-watch you know that.

**Q:** Okay so after you had gotten back off-duty did you take any courses with the GI bill?

**LH:** No.

**Q:** Just went to work with the postal service and then worked straight through with that?

**LH:** Yeah.

**LH:** Did you have any friends or any relationships back in Korea?

**LH:** No, not really. I had one guy who joined up in '56 and we became almost like brothers we were together for almost fifty years. His children are my god children. I have seen them born, see them raised, see them marry, and have children of their own.

**Q:** So your experience in the military did it influence any of your thinking about anything that came on later on in life, act as a guide for you as it is for many people?

**LH:** I think it taught me responsibility and discipline. I feel today as I had felt so many times before, the military is the greatest thing in the world. I think that every individual should do at least two years to accept the responsibility and discipline as I say. That I think that everyone should have.

**Q:** Far as veteran's organization go you are with the American Legion, you with the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] also?

**LH:** I joined the American Legion, I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I joined both organizations back in 1960. When I got out of the trailer Navy. I have been involved with the baseball programs, Memorial Day, Veterans Day and in this post here in post seventy-two we have a funeral detail and an honor guard takes part in all military funerals. Which all veterans get and are entitled to. I think that whatever can be done for the veterans are being done through these organizations. Without these organizations there would be no

help appreciated or given to them or fed to them, by telling them what they are entitled to what they should be getting which we don't get today. It's a shame that more and more veterans benefits have eroded. The hospitals are in terrible shape, I have no concept of what's going to happen to the guys who come back from Iraq. I saw it during Desert Storm and Nam' [Vietnam] how many years they had to fight to get it and Korea was the forgotten war. It took them many years for us to get recognized. Along with other veterans of my era and it is really a shame. I have no idea where the future is as far as veteran's benefits organization. A lot of post unfortunately are being maintained by senior citizens people that have worked in the post for twenty, thirty, forty years maybe more. The young people like yourselves it is going to be in your hands that the people of the Gulf War, Iraq, Nam' you people are gonna' have to carry the sun.

**Q:** Anything else you would like to say about the reserves or closing statements?

**LH:** Well the reserves to me, I used to laugh at the reserves when I was in the regular. But I found that they were the backbone of the regulars. That the training and the responsibility that goes with it. It is a great thing it carries on a tradition of your individual services I don't care what branch. Today is a prime example, without the reserves this country is so bare as far as regulars. I read in the paper that recruitment is twenty, thirty, forty percent below. Where it's gonna' come from whether the draft has to come back but there has got to be an answer somewhere. It is gonna' be up to the various Veteran organizations I imagine to keep pushing.

**Q:** Okay then Lou thank you very much!

**LH:** No problem.