

**Louis DeFichy
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
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New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on August 2, 2004
at his home in Seaford, New York**

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth?

LD: I was born March 11th 1919. I am 81.

Q: Where were you born?

LD: I was born in upstate New York. I don't know where because my mother died giving birth to me.

Q: What is your full name?

LD: My full name is Louis DeFichy. D, e, f, i, c, h, y.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

LD: Primarily, high school. I didn't go to college until I got out of the service.

Q: Do you remember where you were and your reaction to when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LD: I was at Mitchell Field.

Q: You were still in the service?

LD: Yes. I was still in the service and in the Air Corp. I had transferred from the 3rd [unclear] to Mitchell Field, 1st Air Force.

Q: Do you remember the reaction ...

LD: Tremendous reaction.

Q: Where was Mitchell Field?

LD: Garden City, Long Island. It's an airbase.

Q: Where you drafted or did you enlist?

LD: I enlisted in the 3rd Calvary, in Fort Myer Virginia.

Q: Why did you enlist in the army?

LD: Just wacky at the time and I loved horses.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

LD: Fort Myer, Virginia.

Q: While you were there did you ride horses?

LD: Oh yeah, every day and I was a company cleric. I had two captains above me;

Captain Polke and I can't remember the other guy's name, who always thought we were going to get involved in more. I was the company cleric and I did whatever they asked me to do.

Q: Can you tell us about your training with horses? You must have been one of the last people to be trained with horses.

LD: We would ride one and lead two, two with the halter and we'd go to assure the personnel. We'd have to clean the picket line. You'd have maybe ten horses lined up and you'd have to pick up the manure all along it with a pitch fork. We'd go on maneuvers in upstate New York, and places like that.

Q: Where did you go? Fort Drum or ...

LD: Plattsburg.

Q: Did you have mules too or just horses?

LD: No, we just had horses. They were all herd bound. See, the trouble with the Calvary, most of the horses are herd bound. When they put me on a scouting mission, it was tough to get the horse to do what the commander wanted me to do. Go here, go there, you couldn't do it. They'd throw their head back and ... I was quite an experience being with horses. I eventually thought that someday I would be a horse trainer. It never worked out.

Q: Did you carry a saber or a sword?

LD: Oh, everything! I had a saber, a 45, a Gram rifle, boots, a campaign hat and all the equipment.

Q: Did you carry the rifle in saddle?

LD: Yes, in the saddle. We had inspections every Friday, footlocker, all the equipment had to be stripped apart, the rifle, the pistol and the saber. We were like a [unclear]. They are a show place now, but at that time we were on a show place but we were there. I use to be responsible for sending GIs to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on duty. That was part of my duty.

Q: How long were you with the third Calvary?

LD: Close to two years.

Q: Did you ever get bitten by any of the horses?

LD: No, No!

Q: Where you assigned to grooming the horses as well?

LD: You had to do it. Between all of the horses, you took care of them all. Plucked their heels and clean out the manure, fed them and all that stuff. It was quite a job. The two officers in charge were great. They were West Point graduates and very tough. At that time, GIs were getting thirty one dollars a month and we had guys in the outfit who'd use to barrow your civilian clothes and take them to town and [unclear] them. It was incredible. We had another guy who forced himself onto a young recruit and we had to put him away. I has to do the court trial on that one, the charges. His name was Paunchy Eras, I forget the name. What else?

Q: When you were on maneuvers, what kind of tents did you sleep in?

LD: Normal tents. We'd put up our own tents?

Q: Like the A-frame tents or...?

LD: Yeah, the A-frame tents, and the kitchen there and all that stuff. Pretty good food.

Q: How did you end up in the Air Force?

LD: Well, I wanted to be with the wife?

Q: Oh, forgot to ask you. When did you get married?

LD: I can't remember the date.

Q: Was it while you were in the service with the Calvary?

LD: Yes, right. We were both nothing people living in Brooklyn. So, I asked the captain for a transfer and he agreed. "Go where you want to go Louis" he said. Luckily, I transferred to Mitchell Field, and the base commander use to have his own horse on the base. I guess that's one of the reasons why he accepted my transfer. He put me in the gym and I became a phys-ed. director.

Q: Did you also work with the horse that belonged to the general?

LD: No, no. He had what they called "dog robbers". He had a groom, a GI, who took care of his horses and the groom was a trainer from California, Wayne Stuckey. Colonel Johnson was his name.

Q: Why did you decide to go to the Air Force?

LD: To just be near my wife.

Q: Was she able to live on base with you?

LD: No.

Q: Even though you were enlisted?

LD: No. She lived in an apartment on Ridgewood.

Q: What rank were you at that time?

LD: I was a staff sergeant. I became a tech sergeant later.

Q: What did you do as a Phys- Ed, director?

LD: Mitchell Field was amazing. We use to condition GI's on obstacle courses and things like that and then we had phys-ed. programs in the gym. What we did have there was the best basketball team in the country, I thought. The LAU basketball team, which was coached by Clare Mi (?), had seven people enlist into the Air Force at Camp Upton. I heard about it and I called Camp Upton, and I got them all transferred to Mitchell Field. We had one of the best basketball teams. They beat service teams. They beat professional teams, and, if it wasn't for the war, LAU would have won the NIT (National Invitation Tournament). They were that good.

LD: One of the players, [unclear] Labello, eventually got sent overseas, and he was killed at the Battle of the Bulge. But the other guys, I don't know where the hell they went. We had a hell of a time. We had basketball and boxing every week in the gym for the benefit of the GIs. Tremendous crowd. We would play some service teams and some pro teams. We had a baseball team that I thought were minor league caliber. We played one or two major league teams at the base. We always had guest people over at the gym.

Q: I saw on the sheet that Sugar Ray Robinson was there.

LD: Oh yeah. That's another thing. We had a colored outfit that was stationed in Santini in Mitchell Field. Santini was a colored area, and the colored area was amazing. Sugar Ray Robinson and George Nickelson, Joe [unclear]'s sparring partner were in that outfit. I was one of the Phys-Eds that put on the boxing shows, and Ray use to be waiting for me. He'd say "Lou, what you want?" He'd then get in his station wagon, go to Harlem, get four guys, bring them back to the base, and do box exhibitions. That was great. George Nickelson we had him box sometimes, but it wasn't like Ray Robinson. Eventually, they got transferred. That's when you had the colored line in the army.

Q: Yes, Yes, Yes. Now, at the time, how well did you know Ray Robinson?

LD: At the time, we were very good friends. Then later on, nothing. At the time, he was very cooperative, and I'll never forget. We had other boxers there. We had Marvin Bryant, a heavy weight contender, "Kid" McCoy, Adam [unclear], Tommy Marlow. We had a lot of fighters. We had one wrestler called John Godinsky. He put on the professional crap that you see now. They caught him putting pamphlets in lockers, s they sent him away. He was alright though, John.

LD: The baseball team had a lot of minor league and ex-major league ball players. Kenny Pine. The manager was Tony Renaldi. They had a hell of a record. Sports was a great thing at Mitchell Field, and it provided a lot of entertainment for the GI's that were stationed there. We also had a newsletter that came out once a week. The gym was always full. I use to call us Newsday and give them the results when we had basketball games or baseball games. That's how I got associated with Newsday. They were very cooperative and published all the scores. Now what else?

Q: So you spent time at Mitchell Field until you were discharged?

LD: No, from Mitchell Field I got shipped out.

Q: Where did you go from there?

LD: CBI (China, Burma India Theater)

Q:How did you get to CBI?

LD: "Get rid of all the guys that have been stationed at Mitchell Field. They been there too long. Get 'em out." That's what happened. I was first sent to a base in Louisville, then boom, I was shipped right back to Mitchell Field, and then to CBI. I was at Mitchell field too for long.

Q: Did you go by ship or by plane.

LD: We went by ship. It took thirty days. Liberty ship. I don't know how we got that one. I use to sneak into the kitchen and act like a KP so I could get some more food. At CBI, at first, I was Intelligence.

Q: Where did you land once you got to CBI?

LD: We landed in India in Karachi, and from there, I was transport to China.

Q: Where in china?

LD: I was stationed in Kung Ming.

Q: That's where the Flying Tigers were.

LD: Yeah the fighter base. Nice base. I worked for a Captain there in Public Relations. So I use to send that stuff home about the GIs stationed there. All those press releases.

Q: Now, did you know any of the original Flying Tigers?

LD: N, I never got to meet any of them. I got to meet some war correspondents, but that's all. There was a lot of black market deals going on while I was there.

Q: In what way? What was happening?

LD: I didn't smoke, but I'd go to the local town and palm off my cigarettes and get money for them. A carton of cigarettes were worth big money. The captain I worked with was alright. I loved the G2 more because I use to brief the pilots on what to expect if they go down and go over the hump.

Q: What kind of air crafts were they flying out of your field?

LD: 47s and 46s.

Q: Did you ever get to up in one?

LD: Yeah! As a matter of fact, I came back on a 47.

Q: Now what was they unit you were with

LD: At the Air Force? I don't remember.

Q: Did they decorate their flight jackets?

LD: No, no. Nothing unusual. No combat. We were lucky. No war there. Just the pilots. They were the ones that had the problems.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Chinese people?

LD: Yes. We had girl who was a Chinese Secretary and we also saw them when we went to town. One GI was smart though. He was there quite a while. He was running a bar in town, and making good money from the GIs who would patronize his place.

LD: It was horrible. I didn't like it, Kung Ming. I think Kung Ming has a different name now. Its Beijing now?

Q: It might be. I know they changed the name. Why didn't you like it there?

LD: I just didn't care for it. I am lucky, though. No combat.

Q: Were there any problems Malaria or other tropical diseases?

LD: Yes. I contracted dysentery. We were taking pills for malaria all the time. They kept me in the hospital for two weeks when they were treating me for dysentery.

Q: Did your airfield ever get bomb by the Japanese?

LD: Never. We were lucky. It was like a vacation. We'd drive around the Jeep all over the town.

Q: Did you ever have any USO shows come to your base?

LD: Yes, but they were nothing exciting. Nothing unusual.

Q: Did you ever see General Chennault ?

LD: No, but there was plenty of black market by the Chinese people. Tremendous. Even sell these big wheels on the plane. They'd steal in. Chennault didn't help much I thought. Based on my memory of CBI, I wouldn't go back there.

Q: Did you get over to Burma at all?

LD: No. Just India and China. A short stay in India, then to China.

Q: How long were you in China?

LD: About a year, and then I had enough points to be shipped back because I had one child and she was pregnant. And also all the service I had. Again I went in in 1940! That's a lot of points. I was able to get out early. In fact, I remember what happened. The charge of Quarters came in one night and told me "You gotta go tomorrow. Goodbye!" I saw the orders and that was it. I then shipped back by plane, but I never stopped anywhere. I just wanted to get back home. I could have seen everything on the way back.

Q: Were you discharged before the war was over?

LD: Yes.

Q: So, about 1944 or so?

LD: Yes.

Q: After you were discharged, where did you go and live? Did you return to New York?

LD: Yes. I lived in Richwood with the wife. She had an apartment in Glendale, which is actually Richwood. I was looking for work. I worked for a short time at the unemployment office, and we use to get a lot of GIs. This woman in charge would say "Now, I want you to ask everyone if they are looking for a job. Ask them all the time if they are looking for work." I wouldn't always ask them because how do you ask a GI. This is a guy who just came out of the service. He might be a veteran who got hurt or something like that. So, she'd stand behind

men to listen. Then, she fired me. That was that job. I was right in Queens' plaza in the Unemployment office for GIs. Then, eventually, I got a job with Newsday. It was between Newsday and the Daily News. Too bad I didn't take the Daily News. Newsday offered me \$45 a week and Daily \$40 to work as a sports writer, or sports assistant. I took the Newsday job, and I worked at Newsday for many years. I think I would have done better with Daily News.

Q: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

LD: Yes. I went to NYU for a while and the news school.

Q: How about the 52-20 club?

LD: I took care of that all the way. I had nothing.

Q: Did you ever join a veteran's organization?

LD: Nope, never did. I was that into parading around and saluting and all that stuff. As a matter of fact, in the army, I use to duck saluting.

Q: Did you keep in contact with anybody you served with?

LD: I did, for a while, but then a lot of them died. There's only one guy left now. He lives in Florida. Colby Gunther. One of the best basketball players. He requested a transfer from Mitchel Field to go into the paratroopers. He got hurt, and now he's living in Florida. He calls me every once and a while, but he's the only guy left! I use to keep in contact with the manager of the baseball team, but he died.

Q: How do you think your time in service changed or affected your life? Do you think it did?

LD: I guess it made it more stable.

Q: You probably wouldn't have gone on to college would you, if it hadn't have been for the GI Bill?

LD: Yes, that's right. Definitely. I had no complaints against the army, except the poor pay in the beginning.

Q: Well, thank you very much for your interview.