

**Louis R. Corte
Veteran**

**Michael Lucca, Dan Macarone, and Blaise Cumo
Chaminade, H. S. Mineola, NY
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on May 12, 2004
Westbury VFW, Post 945
Westbury, NY**

Q: Today is May 12th, 2004. We are at the VFW branch of Westbury post 945 and we are interviewing Louis Corte. The interviewers are Blaise Cumo and Michael Lucca and the camera man is Daniel Macarone. Can you tell us your full name sir?

LC: Louis R. Corte

Q: Where and where were you born?

LC: I have to think fast. 4-25-27

Q: Hometown?

LC: And I was born in Bronx, New York, home of the Yankees.

Q: What was your previous occupation?

LC: I'm sorry, I'm a little deaf on this side.

Q: What occupation did you have before going into the service?

LC: Well, I got out of high school, as a matter of fact, I only served three years of high school. I couldn't finish the last year because of what we're sitting here for right now. I finished the third year then went right into the service. So, I had no previous other than the education I was given. Let's put it that way. But, I went into the Seabees, 121st naval construction and there I learned what the good lord gave me these things for. I don't know if you want me to go into this section but, if you want me to elaborate

Q: Sure, go ahead.

LC: In 1944, I would join the Navy, I was a little young my dad had to sign for me because at 17 you were not allowed into any service unless you lied. I don't lie. He came down to Church Street, New York, signed a friend of mine and myself both and we went in. Two months later, we're in service. He branched off into regular Navy I went into the Seabees. The difference was that we both served on boot camp time at Samson, New

York he stayed there, I transferred to Davis Hall Rhode Island which was a Seabee training camp and believe me gentlemen the Seabee training camp, we trained with the 4th Marine Division and if there is any crackerjack outfit, the marines are the crackerjack outfit. We learned the hard way and sometimes you see pictures of this in movies, some of that, believe it; it's true. When you think you're smart, that DI that's standing on the side is a lot smarter than you and that's what he's there for to teach you to keep yourself alive. And if you want to be a fool, don't listen. But if you want to stay alive, listen. It's for your own benefit. From Rhode Island, we went aboard there was 6,000 Seabees and we left Rhode Island, once appoint their local scene, we went to San Francisco. On our way to San Francisco, we had 20 cars we used to call cattle cars I don't know if you gentlemen are familiar with it but when you put all of us men in there with the equipment and everything else, we feel like we're cattle but it's a joke. All us guys are not these people that we met from one place to another, you have to remember one thing when you're with when there's 50 Navy or whatever they may be, you're no longer from anywhere. You're brothers, I protect you, you protect me that's the name of the game and that's the way it has to be until the day you leave each other. And by that I mean many a guys saved my hide and I saved a few in my time but that's the idea you become brothers more ways than you do to your own brothers believe me when I say that. We were a day out of night in San Francisco and we hid 40 boxcars on the same track that we were on. Naturally we had a few accidents there you know, guys were hurt but we managed to get there. That was strike one. We get into San Francisco and we get to Treasure Island which was the parting point we get aboard the hornet we get few days out of Guam and we strayed a few times and believe me you talk about sailors, there's 3000 of ships company along with us 6000 CBs and you learned how to apply your abilities that you learned you know, when you were in camp. We were welding bunks on the hangar decks so we could sleep because you don't have 9000 bunks on the aircraft carrier in any ship let's put it that way. But fortunately we managed. We went to Guam we got off at Guam we boarded other ships after three days went to Saipan and that's where the trouble started. We had quite a few jeopardies on the island and there were quite a few men that got there before us along with the marines and the 27 army division, unfortunately the 27th Army Division lost their cars not to their fault but to the stupidity of someone that was hired and I mean hired the marines were the men to be in the pacific they were to do the fighting in the Pacific along with us fellas. The army god bless them all they belonged to the European. They never fought jungle fighters to that point. The Bees were used to it, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and so on you can list them all day long there's so many islands. But these gentlemen were equipped for that type of fighting and when I say that the Japanese were very good when it came to camouflage. The man could be standing right next to you and unless you heard them breathing you never saw them. And just a little appreciating it at the end as you get your moments

when you can laugh after things happen. On Saipan we were given a warning we were on the lower part of the island and we had base commander, the island commander call divisions up at the top of the mountain for a very good reason; there's a hundred foot tidal wave coming... a typhoon. Naturally, given the Seabees we're in construction, we had a lot of equipment. Not only bull dozers, graders and so on, we had a lot of fuel tanks. Everything had to be moved: jeeps, ton and a half 2 and two and half, all these things have to be moved or we go. Up one road, when the time was called no one was about to go up or down that road without being shot that was the commanders quote well this is where the schooling paid off. 2 o'clock in the morning I'm standing there on guard duty, you have to remember we're talking about tankers that'll hold 4 to 6000 gallons of gasoline or aircraft fuel or whatever you want. Because we're building the runway for the B29 Bombers so you have to pay attention to what you're doing. 2 o'clock in the morning, I see something moving, the orders were "fire" you don't ask, fire. I just yelled out, "Halt", you didn't halt and I opened up my carbine not one of these, the carbine was a short version of these which we carried in the jungle and a very good piece of equipment unless you fired a hundred rounds of this it just got so hot. We woke up to again and finally when we went down to see what I ate; it was a wild boar, we all laughed about it but the Japanese used to crawl on their all fours also so when the base commander, some of the guys were kidding me about it, the base commander comes over and he says, "Fellas thank him, he could have got the grenade if it wasn't for the Jap, and he wouldn't be here to laugh about it." So we know that you're always, you know we laughed about it but you know when you're laughing like this, it's not really a laugh. But we also heard at the time when the 29s took off on Tinian which is only 3 miles from Saipan you can actually see the bombs taking off.

Also the ones that took off at Iwo Jima. And Nagasaki. That whether we liked it or not it's not very good for us Catholic people because we don't believe in that type of killing, or any killing. But in the long run they said we would have saved at least 2 million men on the invasion in Japan. That was one bomb that saved quite a few lives. And maybe today they'll wake up as to what's going on right now in Iraq and start using something instead of killing all these young fellas, let them come home, use what you have and I don't believe in it but I do believe in the fellas that are over there that they should be back here. We all have problems, warfare is not the end of the problem, and it will never solve the problem. We have to teach people our way of life. Right or wrong, I think myself, Bob and some of the others fellas you'll be interviewing will tell you the same thing. Anyone that loves war belongs in a, plain English, belongs in a nut house okay because the man is out of his mind. No one loves war. You don't serve the purpose with war. You know it's the old cliché, we fought Japan and since that time, we made them the richest country in the world so what did you gain? You lost 2 and a half million men and gained nothing and that's the way it is today you keep killing all these people right

now whether it's their side or our side and 5 years from now, you'll have the same thing someone else sitting here saying "what did we gain?" So guys you're coming up the ladder you young fellas, think before you act, I'm very serious about that. And all the fellas that are my outfit we only had one married fella and he was the first one that was killed. And believe me, I went to see a few of these people their families, it's not easy. You don't bring up a child the same age, and these things happen. It's not right, I feel very bad about these people that are getting killed right now. We have a very fortunate young fella that we saw him last night, he's back from Iraq, I have his paperwork here. He would've been here now, if you looked at him you could put on the same uniform as he wore because he looked exactly the same, a very young boy. But if you saw the pictures and you listened to this fella, it's not good. War is never good, you don't prove anything. You say "I won", what did you win at war? What did you stop? You could have stopped it talking. You don't use these unless there's nothing else to be done. That's all I can tell you gentlemen unless you want to ask something else.

Q: Did you receive any medals?

LC: There were few, I had 5. Victim medal, Asiatic Pacific, your occupation and so on there's so many of them.

Q: What was the date of service?

LC: I went in '44 and came home '46.

Q: How long was the training you had?

LC: Training that I had particularly like I said we trained with the Marines was excellent training. If you paid attention, that's what it was for. Those gentlemen were there, most of the trainees rather DI or the sergeants that we had were overseas in Guadalcanal and so on and when they came back they knew exactly what the warfare was hand to hand they told you don't do this. Otherwise, I have to admit the Japanese when it came to warfare were excellent. As slow as they were, didn't mean anything. They used to booby trap steps, they put a beautiful revolver on the floor, machine pistol, Japanese machine pistol, everybody wanted those, well naturally. But as soon as you put your hand on it, that's when you went up to see our father, because that was the end of it. And they told you before, don't touch, stay away from souvenirs. The worst thing in the world, because you never see the rest of the world after you do it. See these are the things the marines are trying to teach us and if you're one of those that stayed alive, you listened otherwise once you're dead I never heard anyone come back to say how nice it was. Fortunately I'm still here, thank God. I got to stay for a long time.

Q: How was the equipment that you had?

LC: The equipment we had the best there was nothing better. Compared to some of the things that they have today like in Korea they had the AK-47 they were jamming all the time. When you make a rifle, one, you take your time. When you make a million and one, you're bound to make a mistake so these things have to be, you know, you just have to look into them. There were few pieces of equipment that would fall apart or something wouldn't do the job so you rectify the mistakes that were made which they did back in the states. But we, overseas, we had good equipment, I couldn't complain about anything I carried. And I carried on me 45 and a caterpillar so if the Japs are going to come shoot me, they had to do it from a long way away that's all I can say. Like I said, fortunately we had a few shots thrown at us but the marines would watch over us. When we were out on the runway, like Bond was saying, when you get out there with your caterpillar on the islands you have to understand one thing, topsoil is in the united states, out there they have material out there that's harder than your concrete that you have in the states. When you start bulldozing these things, you got to be very careful, you got to watch what you're doing. That's why you can't look ahead at what you're doing when there's someone over here trying to pop shots at you. That's why we used to call them Gyrenes they used to watch over us. Thank God they did.

Q: And how was the food you received?

LC: Food was decent. I'll be very truthful with you, the Navy aboard ship we always had good food, of course on the islands it's a different story because not many ships hit the islands that brought you food. And some of the food that we did get laid in a hole on the ship for 4-5 months well you know with the rest of these states that you're going through you'll probably have some of the fellas say the same thing, when flour which came in hundred pound sacks, laid a hole in the ship for 9 months, you're bound to get some friends. And I don't mean mice, and I don't mean cockroaches, we used to have boll weevils, very small they ate your flour. When the gentlemen in the alley started making the bread, they had to sift the flour somewhere along the grind, some of these fell through so naturally when you put it in the oven, don't worry about it because you had meat with your bread, go ahead and eat it, what else are you going to do fellas? There is no other bread. Don't bother, believe me after a while they always said brother you got to eat a lot of dirt before you die. I take it I got about 3 quarters of it right now. But you know it was a lot of good things and bad things but wonderful variety of it believe me.

Q: Did you keep in contact with your loved ones back home?

LC: Well mail wasn't, you know, you had to be lucky to get a letter so imagine when you find sheets of paper, if you had the paper, you would be lucky to have the paper or you could grab one from one of the other boys that was it. The only paper we had were poker cards and that's it, we played a lot of poker on the side. What else can you do? You

couldn't go to a dance, there were no bars, so you know that was all state's side, overseas, forget it. What else can I answer for you gentlemen?

Q: What was your most memorable experience?

LC: Most memorable? You'll laugh when I tell you but in the harbor area, on Saipan, we had quite a few ships and destroyers a couple of aircraft guys and so on then like I said, when you're on land the food is good but it could be better. We went aboard a YOG which is a yacht, oil, and gas tanker, we met a couple fellas, some of our guys went to school with these fellas in Brooklyn, right off the bat, Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Log Island, Staten Island were our neighborhood boys so somewhere along the line we'd meet some we didn't know. The chief of the YOG says fellas come down and eat with us so seven of us did and believe it or not that was the first time in 2 and a half years I sat down to eat a steak. The steak was a good 12 inches long, it was 10 years old and cut one inch steak and it was solid meat. This was one big chunk of meat let's say and it was cut on a band saw and I tell you it was the most delicious piece of meat I had and haven't had a better one since. Those are the little things that make everything else, you forget about it.

Q: How do you feel about your overall military experience in relation to the rest of your life?

C: Well you know, in the beginning, you want that gun-ho business and then everything else, and you meet a lot of good guys maybe a few deadbeats along the way that you'll always do, even in regular life. But it's alarming where the other guys are from, later on if the wars over and everything else you get to see these people with their lives and their wives rather and children which I still do today. It's like I said before, you had your own family but now when you meet these fellas these also become part of your family. I still write to at least 8 to 10 fellas and they don't live around here at all they're scattered all over the United States but I love them. I'm sorry I can't see most of them but what can I tell you. That's what I like about the whole deal.

Q: What did you do when you arrived home in terms of occupation?

LC: Well at that time in Westbury, they didn't have the transportation they have today. Today you have taxis all over the place, buses, trains, and so on. Here in this town, the 10 o'clock there are no longer any trains the same way with the bus you use that bus from Westbury the 10 o'clock is the last bus so you had to make sure that you got home during the day. If you didn't, it was a long walk, I was this shy from Lido beach. Most of the fellas know where Lido beach is today. No one knew when I was coming home and I kept it that way. I wanted to surprise them but the surprise was that I had a full red beard and I had lost 30 pounds. So here I come off the bus in Westbury, I had the

Japanese rifle which I still have and my bayonet, my sea bag and a samurai sword. I met at the bus my Reverend father at that time had just been walking up the street and he said “son you’re just coming home?” I said “yes father”. He said “come take a walk with me I’ll carry your sea bag” and I said “Father I carried it 9000 miles already.” He said, “Well I’m going to carry it to the end of 5 blocks for you.” He carried my rifle for me and he became one of the best friends I ever had. Those are the things that stick in your mind, these little things, it’s great believe me. Since then, getting back from Westbury you get involved and I went to work at Mitchel Field in the air force. From Mitchel Field in the county in Nassau, when Mitchel Field closed it was no longer an air base it closed in 1960 and fully closed in ’61. In the county of Nassau I saw all kinds of aircraft there and worked on a lot of them but I was mostly in construction.

Q: Have you attended any reunions?

LC: No my offer disbanded in 1946-47, as a matter of fact I am in touch now with the gentlemen from the 35th Seabee outfit and I’ll see if we can get the paperwork out to see if some of the fellas are still alive, I know quite a few are no longer with us but I’d like to have a reunion believe me.

Q: Are you part of any Veteran Organizations?

LC: I’m also with the American Legion here in Westbury Post 101.

Q: Have you seen any World War II movies or read any World War II books?

LC: Well we have quite a few of them here any time any of you gentlemen want to read them, these are the complete facts there’s no fiction in these books like places where Bob was in his interview. Those are the facts, every piece of machinery every gun anything that was ever made by the Germans, the Russians, the Americans, everything’s in those books. If you ever need them be glad to call me, I can loan it to you anytime because they’re hard to come by believe me.

Q: How big of an influence do you think your military experience had on your life as a whole? Do you think it’s made a big impact on your life?

LC: I’ll be very true to you, I don’t know what would have happened if you know, coming out of high school and you start your life but I think I myself going into service and meeting other people, I woke up a little sooner and became a much better man than I think I would’ve been if I just grew up the street. I think you become a better person when you meet other people throughout the world and so on, it’s a lot better.

Q: Thank you for your time, appreciate it.