

**Donald Kochersberger
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
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Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
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Elderwood Senior Center
Hamburg, New York**

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

DK: Donald F. Kochersberger that's KOCHERSBERGER.

Q: Ok. Now where were you born?

DK: I was born Sloan, New York. Which is a, that's a suburb of Buffalo, New York. On the east side.

Q: And what year were you born?

DK: I was born 1920. May 2nd, 1920.

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

DK: I attended school 43 which is the local school from grade 1 through 8. Then I went to Buffalo Technical High School, 4 years and graduated from there. Then I spent two years. I couldn't find a job after I got out of tech. Times were not that good and so, I went to Bryant and Stratton Business College in Buffalo. And spent 2 years there and from there I entered the employe of Union Carbide Company out in Tonawanda.

Q: Do you remember where you were and how you heard about Pearl Harbor and your reaction.

DK: Yes, as a matter of fact, I like to tell that story. It was on a Sunday afternoon on December 7th, 1941. I was on a I went for a ride with my older brother and his wife and I had a lady with me, a lady friend and we were at Niagara Falls and we were driving along the drive along the gorge and all of a sudden, the telephone, or the radio bust out with the news we have been attacked, Pearl Harbor, the President has declared an emergency. And that was that Sunday afternoon on December 7th, 1941.

Q: How did you feel when you heard of this news?

DK: Well, I felt good really because I immediately knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to join the Air Force. And I came home talked it over with my mother, father, and my brothers. And I did just that. I went down to the post office the next day and enlisted in the Air Force.

Q: Now why did you select the Air Force?

DK: Because I like to fly. I think the thought of flying is my way of, I thought I was gonna become a hot pilot, and that was gonna become my job. Turned out it wasn't so.

Q: So where did you go for your basic training?

DK: My basic training was at Fort Niagara, New York. And from there I went to, oh boy. You know my life depended on, my memory is slipping a little bit. And geez I don't know how you're going to make out being 100 years old. But I took my basic training and from there seeing as how I was in the Air Force. Oh, this is where I ...

Q: What type of training did you go for?

DK: Pilot.

Q: Ok?

DK: Pilot training.

Q: Was it down south some place?

DK: Oh yeah it was Alabama. I was an aviation cadet. The initial training place was in Montgomery, Alabama. That was like the West Point of the year. You have to help me out a bit.

Q: The camp that was there?

DK: Pardon.

Q: The camp that was there?

DK: Yeah.

Q: It wasn't camp Rucker was it?

DK: No.

Q: I'm not sure either? Well how long were you there?

DK: Well, I was there for about, I think about 12 weeks, at least 12 weeks, I'm not really sure and from there because I was in for pilot training I was sent to an air field in Florida. God, these names.

Q: That is alright really?

Q: Now what type of airplane did you train in?

DK: A trainer. It was a.

Q: Was it a bi-plane with 2 wings?

DK: A bi-plane, yeah.

Q: Was it a steer man?

DK: Steer man, Steer man PT that's it.

Q: PT17?

DK: No PT.

Q: Right? Primary trainer. Right?

DK: Oh, is that what you said? Okay, yeah that was it.

Q: And how many hours did you get?

DK: Well, that was really the beginning and end of my career as a pilot. Because After 9 hours of training, pilot training I was washed out. I could not fly.

Q: Did you get to solo at all or no?

DK: Pardon?

Q: Did you get to solo?

DK: No, I did not, that was the point where I washed out and but the instructor I remember him telling me that he thought that being left handed was the reason that I couldn't make out as a Steer man because most of the controls favored the right side and I'm left handed and I was having trouble with the controls although there weren't that many. But in 9 hours my career was over.

Q: And where did you go from there?

DK: And from there I was sent up to a camp in Tennessee. It was a reclassification camp. And I was reclassified. I'm back in the Army now. I was reclassified because of my training at Bryant and Stratton, I was reclassified as a clerical Army man. And I stayed in, I stayed at this camp, probably I don't remember exactly it's been about a couple months and from there I was sent to California. And wait, back up a little bit. After I washed out as a pilot, I wasn't downgraded to a Private in the Army at that point. Because I had indicated that I wanted to fly I was transferred to an air field in California and I was to study being a bombardier. There were 3 classes of aviation in the Air Force, that was pilot, bombardier, and navigator and I seemed to be qualified because I didn't make the pilot, they thought I would make a good bombardier. Well, I didn't. I got sick. And they discovered I had an ulcer and I was only at the bombardier school for I think about a month, or month and a half, and that was when they decided because of my physical condition it was better that I did something else in the Army than try to fly. And so, I was reclassified. And now I'm back. I'm a Private and I was classified. I don't remember the grade it was to work on clerical work so from that base in California I was sent to another base in California at Santa Ana, the Santa Ana Air Force base and that is where I spent just about the rest of my career in the Army.

Q: Were you like the company clerk?

DK: That's exactly what I was doing, I was the company clerk. And I wound up being promoted to a Sargent. And I in the event of absentees of the other men, including the officer, I was doing most of the office work which involved enlistments and discharges and general office Army work. And that is where I spent 2 years, and that was my career in the Army. Not very eventful.

Q: Now, do you remember what was the fort that you were at in California?

DK: Santa Ana. You've heard of the Santa Ana Winds. Well, that's the Santa Ana Air Force base.

Q: On this form you said one of your greatest experiences though happened out there with a P38?

DK: Now, how do you know about that?

Q: Someone wrote it down on your form here.

DK: Is that right?

Q: Could you tell us about that?

DK: I was at Santa Ana. Right across the road was a P38 base and when I wasn't too busy I was wondering around all the time out there, so I wandered over to the Air Force base one day. And here a Pilot was out there shinning up his P38. And I stood there awhile talking to him and I said "you know any chance for a ride in this thing?" He said "sure is." A P38 is not really a 2-seater but there's room behind the pilot where you could sit, a little tight, but I managed to get in there and we took off. And he gave me a tour of that part of California, as a matter of fact, we flew over Pasadena around the Rose Bowl. Literally, flew around the Rose Bowl in a P38. Well, that was quite a thrill for me, because I love flying, but I was just unable to do it. That was the extent of it.

Q: Did you wear a parachute?

DK: No.

Q: Did he?

DK: He didn't either. I trusted him, and he trusted me.

Q: So that must have been a pretty wild ride because those are very fast airplanes?

DK: Oh it was. Well you know what a P38 looked like it was 2 propellers you know that's the funny thing if you think about it there all propeller driven planes. There was no jets so to speak. Anybody was flying there it was all propeller driven and that was a 2-engine plane. But that's ... I don't remember telling anybody.

Q: Yeah it was written down here on this form that you filled out?

DK: Well, I'll be darn I don't remember that.

Q: Anything else that you can recall interesting or exciting for you? Did you get to see any USO shows?

DK: Oh, I went to USO shows as often as I could. Absolutely, and I became quite associated with the church people in Santa Ana. I don't remember it was a Protestant Church and I became kind of a part-time church member. One of the fellows in the office where I worked, he lived, or his girlfriend lived in Santa Ana, and he took me to church one day and they were having a play and I was given a part in the play because that's another thing I liked to do at that time, was a little play acting. And the name of the play was "No Room at the Inn" you remember that story, I am for sure. And I had many good times when I was there because the fellow that I was with, he was a Sargent,

also, call him Clemon Green, his girlfriend's parents lived in Santa Ana and every Sunday and I was invited; every Sunday we went over to his future parents-in-law for dinner. And so, I had many an enjoyable time-off with my friend the Sargent.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with him after you left the service?

DK: Pardon.

Q: Did you ever have any contact with him after you left the service?

DK: No, well except the first few years a post card – a Christmas card. But no, I regretted that really, but I didn't try to change it by going out there to visit him again or anything like that. No, I lost touch with him.

Q: When did you leave the service? When were you discharged?

DK: 1943. I was only in the service for 2 years.

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

DK: No. Just before I went in the service I had graduated from Bryant and Stratton. So, I guess that's I had to say I couldn't see no reason for me to continue anything there. And, I did not take advantage of it, no.

Q: How about the 52/20 club?

DK: What is that?

Q: That was 20 dollars a week for 52 weeks. It was like an unemployment insurance after you left service?

DK: Never heard of it.

Q: You didn't buy a house with the GI bill?

DK: No. Now, when I graduated from Bryant and Stratton they had placement service for graduates. And I went to work for Union Carbide out in Tonawanda. And I did stenographic work out there I wound up with a private secretarial, lot of typing and that type of work. But I didn't have to go through any unemployment period of any length because I went right from school right to work for Union Carbide.

Q: Did you go right back to work there when you came back from service?

DK: Say it again.

Q: When you came back from service did you go back to work at Union Carbide?

DK: Yes, I did. Yeah, I went right back there.

Q: Did you ever join any veteran organizations?

DK: Investment?

Q: Veterans, like American Legions?

DK: Right. Now, I am a 60-year member of the American Legion. I'm a member of the oldest American Legion post in Erie County. Past commander 3 times.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life if you think it did?

DK: Well, that's kind of a tough question. I never lost the desire to want to fly even after I was, you know, after I was out of the service completely and back working I used to fly occasionally as a passenger. And I think what the Army taught me was its not always a good idea to reach too high because it's not liable to work out for you; and it certainly was that case for me. I thought I was going to be the world's hottest pilot, and I wasn't.

Q: All right, well thank you very much.