

Louie Zehfuss: WWII Veteran

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Louie Zehfuss was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1923. His mother was German and his father was born in Switzerland. Six months after his birth, he and his family moved to Norco, California. He grew up in the roaring twenties but also encountered the Great Depression. He was about nine years old when the stock market crashed and remembered living in a very small house, his room was about as big as a chicken coop. Of course he still attended school but the times were very hard for the family.

Zehfuss graduated from Corona High School in June 1941, he was 18 years old and in the same month started working at the Lockheed Aircraft factory. In January 1943, he was drafted into the Air Army Corp at 20 years old. The conscription of World War II was necessary and inevitable, and Louie Zehfuss was drafted without complaint. Even if there was not a draft, he would have volunteered to join the service anyway. He recalled that few men were not drafted, even so this was only due to physical ailments, but everyone else, who was physically able, joined. There was not much emotion behind the draft for Zehfuss. After being drafted, Louie partook in routine training in Fresno and basic training in Salt Lake City and Texas. After his basic training Zehfuss attended Aircraft Mechanic school in Oakland, for six months of strictly aircraft mechanics. He was then stationed in Oklahoma to assist pilots as an airplane mechanic.

For most of his time in the war, Louis worked as an airplane mechanic. His first assignment, after spending 45 days at sea getting there, was to join the 312th Bomb Group as they were moving up to the Philippines. The 312th flew mostly A20 aircraft as well as others as

needed and was recognized for their part in the war. Zehfuss worked on B25s (twin engine medium bombers), B32s (four engine heavy bombers), and A20s (twin engine low level light bombers) and started working in Okinawa after going to the Philippines. Zehfuss did not encounter any type of discrimination himself and also did not witness any among his peers. Everyone was treated equally. As the war continued, Louis and his fellow comrades did not accept what was going on, but followed orders without question and maintained the utmost respect for people in authority. He stated that the commander set an example for everyone to follow and they truly honored him.

One of Zehfuss's duties was to help conduct a few food drops flown from Okinawa. The cargo planes they used were C47s, twin engine utility crafts. Although he was not the pilot, Zehfuss and his team flew very close to where the Americans were stationed during the war and delivered food to them. One of these Food Drop missions ended with a plane crash. It was suspected that a sniper hit the fuel tank and the aircraft gradually ran out of fuel. Consequently the plane ran out of fuel and plunged into the ocean. Louis and other survivors of the crash were left in the middle of the ocean for a few days until a submarine came and rescued them. That was the first and last time Louis travelled in a submarine.

According to Zehfuss being overseas was a lot more adventurous than being in the states. However in the states you were not continually shot at. He was stationed in Okinawa until the end of the war. Overall about 150 men in his field lost their lives most of them were age 22-23 years old. Everyone was happy about the end of the war, but Louis did not encounter any type of extra celebrations. The 312th went home from Okinawa, but since Zehfuss was not apart of the original group he did not accumulate enough points, from battles and missions, to go home right

away, so he waited in Okinawa for three to four months. When Louie was finally able to go back to America, he still had to endure traveling around the states before he could go home. In February 1946, he was discharged from the Army at the age of 23.

Zehfuss was the only child and did not have any close relatives to keep in contact with. He stated that no one was waiting for him to come home. Fortunately, Louis was hired back at the job he worked at before the war. He had the chance to get an education with the aid from the GI Bill, but did not pursue it. It was a bit awkward for Louis to become acclimated to society right after the war. He went straight into the war soon after high school, so it was only natural that it was hard for him to become accustomed to the norms of adult society, considering he had never really be a part of it to begin with. It was difficult for him to settle down and he became very restless. Over time Louis was able to create his own business as a land surveyor. He met a young woman named Grace on a blind date, and they ended up getting married. As of today the couple has been married for sixty-five years. They have three children: Ruth, Ted, and Dan. His sons work as land surveyors just like he did and his daughter is a teacher. He has a young grandson now and loves to spend time with him.

Zehfuss is currently retired and enjoys travelling around the world with his wife. He has been to most countries in Europe and South America. Today he has a cochlear implant to assist his hearing as time in the war damaged his hearing abilities. For some time he was very active in a veteran organization call the American Legion in Hollywood, but he is currently inactive.

In response to today's society, Louis can see the grand transformation of technology from the 1920s to the present. He is also not pleased to see America's involvement in the wars of today. Overall Louis Zehfuss made the best out the situation of World War II. He knew America

was going to need him and set out to do the best he could for his country. Zehfuss said that being in the war truly helped him to mature as a person and disciplined him. Although World War II has no affect on him currently, Zehfuss is a changed man because of it.