RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCIEN V. CAMPEAU

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Elaine Blatt: This begins a very short interview with Lucien V. Campeau about his experiences in WWII, we are in Washington, DC [Herndon VA], on the 14th of April, 2007.

Jessica Illingworth: I am Jessica Thomson Illingworth

EB: And I'm Elaine Blatt. Do you want to provide some back ground information about what you wrote?

Lucien Campeau: Yes. I want to begin by saying I was born in Conrad, Montana, in 1920, February 14th, which is Valentine's Day. I was my mother's valentine. She took one look at me and they had to take her straight to the hospital and they slapped her instead of me. [laughter] Those are all Henny Youngman one-liners. The last line we used to use was, "I was born just out of wedlock, that's a little town in Nevada." [laughter] But at any rate, that's where I grew up, went to many schools throughout Montana, and I enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps in August 7th of 1940.

EB: 1940.

LC: And at the age of twenty and the draft would have taken place in about two more months, I think. Hershey drew the first number in, according to my memory, October of '40. [Editor's Note: General Lewis Blaine Hershey was the director of the Selective Service System from 1941 to 1970. The first director, Dr. Clarence B. Dykstra served from October of 1940 to April of 1941.]

EB: Did you want to volunteer so you could go where you wanted to go and be in what branch you wanted to be in, instead of being drafted?

LC: Exactly. It was the deep dark Depression of the '30s in Butte, Montana, a mining town. The unemployment was extremely high and by the time I was eighteen I finally got a job in one of the mines, four thousand feet under. All drill and blast, every inch, and [I] was making five dollars and forty cents for every eight hours, four thousand feet down. I got raised to six and a quarter by 1940. It wasn't that that I was running away from [mining], but … I felt that we were on the verge of a bad, big war, and from the [news] leading up to that point, of course Hitler's antics into Europe. Anyway, all my buddies said, you know, they figured I should be fitted for one of those white jackets backwards because the draft, you see, was for one year, and then you're out. They tell me, "What, are you goofy?" I had to enlist, see, for three years, and so I told them I thought they may be in forever, and, strangely enough, it wasn't that I was such a forecaster of history, but that's how it looked. Anyway, I enlisted and, strangely enough, wound up in Missoula, and went to March Field, California, and wound up in a weather squadron, and everything you did there. You had to take tests, which I did, and then they trained you, and I wound up going through forecaster's school, meteorology school, and everything leading up to that, I got in-station type training.

EB: To figure out the weather to see if they could plan the battles around the weather?

LC: Everything they did was, if possible, planned … with weather in mind.

EB: Okay.

LC: There was some terrible mistakes made in World War II with the best of forecasting. But it is so different now. Now it's technically advanced so far that it is incredible. Our last weather squadron reunion last year was at Offutt Air Force base in Omaha, and you wouldn't believe the technical, like I asked a question, one of the booths they had for us on their displays. The fellow Stan Nicky said, "What's going on in Baghdad?" The guy said, "You want to know?" He said, "Yeah." He went over and pushed a button and on the screen came the instantaneous dust storm that was like a hundred feet high in dust that you could, like a wall.

EB: Right.

LC: And that was at that moment, while we were [there], we had very little equipment.

EB: Right.

LC: At any rate, I got out with six months … speeded up [training], and it was accelerated to get as many people into everything they could, and so, [I] wound up through, I guess, it would have been about March of '41, through graduating from meteorology school. I had really performed a real political accomplishment when it was a very difficult place back there. [At] Chanute Field they treated, the local people treated the students that came in from all over [badly]. Anyway, I was about to "go over the hill" a couple of times and my first sergeant talked me out of it, and I still have the letter from the West Coast. I'm back in Chanute Field, Illinois, anyway, I said, "Okay. I'll tough it out." But I said, "I'll tell you what," I said, "when I get through with this I want to go to Portland, Oregon where they're building a new air base, the Columbia Air Base," and he said, "You got it." So, I thought, "Man, I really, really, swung one." Reason being, my wife, whom I call "Superskirt," you might have seen her, she's only eighty-four, she's a child bride. I'm eighty-seven. I ran around with her older brother, and all of a sudden, she grew up. We went together for six years, of course, five of those I was in the service, three of them overseas. The miracle was, she waited for me. She was getting her degree in nursing.

EB: You didn't get a "Dear John" letter.

LC: I can't believe it. Anyway, she got her degree in nursing [from Portland University] and she lived in the same town, Butte, Montana, [studied] in Portland University, and that's why I wanted to go, swung the deal to get to Portland. I was real proud of myself for that accomplishment, and then the next thing, I'm in Portland, and, like I said, I couldn't believe I was that smart, and within about three weeks I got orders to go overseas. [laughter]

EB: Well, it must have been a nice three weeks.

LC: Yeah, so anyways, we went to McClellan Field, Sacramento, formed a new squadron. They took people from all over the country, they didn't rob any one squadron. Formed a new squadron, [went] overseas, from San Francisco into Melbourne, twenty-four days in a zig-zag course on an eight boat convoy. We were on the [USS] *Matsonia*, forty-five hundred people, so

the groceries were a little tight. … Anyway, [we] went to the University of Melbourne for a couple of weeks to indoctrinate us into the southern hemisphere weather. Got my first station with about eight guys. I was a tech sergeant by then, so, up in Cooktown, Australia, which is toward the Equator, northeast Queensland, Australia, on their east coast. And then I got some more good news, in November, I was transferred to Milan Bay, New Guinea.

EB: Okay.

LC: … I had a bigger station up there with twenty-five people, and made a few promotions and [was] up there for a year. Got malaria, best I could count, I can't remember if it was twenty-five or twenty-six times, between there and Australia, after I come back, I meant total stuff. … I had some guys who were really sick. Mine was called Vivax, frequently recurrent and mild. I'd get up to a 104 plus for three nights in the dark hours, not too bad during the day, and then [after] maybe three days it'd subside. But anyway, after a year of that they gave me relief, took me down to Australia, and [I was] down there for about a year. … Didn't go back to malaria infested area if you had a positive smear, and that could be negative-positive.

EB: And what year was that by then?

LC: By now, I'm in '43. Let's see, late '43, I'm guessing. Then the next thing, I was getting kind of, I didn't want to be painted, "Queens Street Commando, Brisbane Australia." Some people got down there, and swung some stuff, they stayed there for the duration. You know what I'm saying.

EB: Right.

LC: … They couldn't tell me from one of them, and I kind of got a little restless and there were a lot of landings, tough landings coming on, up on the north side of New Guinea [and] I was going to catch one. … I thought that may not be too cool, ten thousand people coming in on a bunch of ships and we'd be in our business, in meteorology, we'd have been third wave. Well, even so, I had a life-size picture, "I got a better chance of getting shot by one of our guys then the Japanese."

EB: Right.

LC: … So this is running through my brain, when I was presented with a proposition by a friend of mine, whom I knew when I was a private and he was a tech sergeant and he was now a major and my CO, Joe Kelly. He offered, or he sicced another guy onto me that had one officer to volunteer to take six commandos into the Philippines, which was about twelve or fifteen hundred miles behind the enemy lines; the Japs held it. I guess that's politically incorrect, but to me, they're Japs. [The officer backed out.]

EB: I know my grandfather used that.

LC: … Anyway, I'm not in love with Mitsubishi, Toyotas, or Nissans. In fact, in New Guinea we were bombed every clear night, on the hour, anti-personnel [bombs], single planes, just

sprinkle them, which is bad. They weren't going for targets, just keeping you up all night, by twin engine biddies, Mitsubishi bombers. Don't I see that cute little symbol on the car next to me in the next lane, I don't get a thrill out of it. But that is my generation of people, and my opinion is that is not racist, that is hard memories of a tortuous people in that war, that's what. Here's the heroes, Americans, these guys. I snuck in there, they gave me six commandos, we called them junior commandos. The original party went in on the [USS] *Narwhal,* flew us to Darwin, Australia, and this is a big submarine. I was a guest of the Navy, we were [on their] for fifteen days, sneaking in to the Philippines, and [we] left a couple of men off and so on, and my job was to try to organize a weather reporting network. I went in about a year before the Americans landed on our island of Mindanao, they by-passed us in … October I think of '44. They hit Leyte and moved north. I didn't leave until probably March [of 1945], when the 41st Division landed on Zamboanga City on Mindanao which is …

EB: Yes, Father Bob [Phillips], I spoke to [him]. Do you know him?

LC: No.

EB: He was on Mindanao.

LC: Was he the Chaplin for this outfit?

EB: Yes.

LC: I got to get together with him. Because there was about six, eight, ten New York society [of Jesus] Jesuits sprinkled in the Philippines. I mean, on Mindanao.

EB: He wasn't a Chaplain at the time.

LC: No, I understand.

EB: He was on Mindanao.

LC: I see.

EB: He went from the Philippines to Mindanao.

LC: Well, Mindanao is the Philippines.

EB: Oh, no, sorry, I meant the main island, in Manila.

LC: He was in Manila?

EB: Yeah. He was in that area and they moved him to Mindanao to the Del Monte plantation.

LC: Okay. Well, I was down on Mindanao near the Del Monte plantation, only I was on Zamboanga Province.

EB: Okay.

LC: Up in the mountains, we had good radio [reception]. So the job was [to collect signals?]. They fed more people in other locations by other submarine trips, and this original six were set up like that, one, two, three, possibly four of our own. … Then, see, in place was about eighty five, to the best of my knowledge, or recollection, eighty-five spotter stations from the northern tip of Luzon through seven thousand islands, not everyone of course, but, you know, the major ones, all the way through the Straits, all the way to Borneo. In there we had about forty-one weather reporting stations within a year, reporting every half hour. I would collect de-code, re-encode, send it to Allied intelligence, as it started out, in Brisbane, and VIXO were the call letters for Navy intelligence in Perth, Australia. They would disseminate to the Fleet, to anyone who was in need of it.

EB: That's a really important job.

LC: As all of ours was, to collect intelligence, and stay out of trouble. That suited me fine. They couldn't catch me, so that's how it went. Now the rest of that is, the rest of that story, I will drop off, which is in some detail [Editors note: Mr. Campeau's booklet is called "My Air Force Weather Mission From April 1944 Through April 1945 with the American Guerillas of Mindano."] … I came back in '45, in June.

EB: Did you marry?

LC: We got married in June [1945], we'll be married sixty-two years June 30th.

JI: Oh, wow.

EB: That's amazing.

LC: But quite true.

EB: Did she know that you were alive through the whole war? Did you write letters?

LC: They did, in the sense that a major, that sent me into this in intelligence, you know, on the American side, advised my family. Nothing about where I was, or what I was doing, but that I was going to be *incognito*.

EB: So that you were all right and that you were alive.

LC: Yeah, and then, as I say, three years later I got home, and, as I said, one of the saddest days was leaving Pier Fifteen, San Francisco, and watching the Golden Gate Bridge get smaller. Coming back watching it get bigger, quite a thrill, so that is a little bit of a background.

EB: I'm glad that you could talk to us, it gives a voice to your booklet, "My Air Force Weather Mission From April 1944 Through April 1945 with the American Guerillas of Mindano"…

LC: It has more details.

EB: Yeah.

LC: There are a couple of rough spots in there, but I guess you can understand it. I'm not really politically correct.

EB: That's fine.

LC: … Can't stand too many that are. [laughter] But, anyway, thank you.

EB: Thank you very much.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------
Reviewed by Elaine Blatt 9/6/2007
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 2/22/2008
Reviewed by Lucien V. Campeau 3/14/2008

For further information on Lucien V. Campeau, you can contact the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia. He was interviewed in Phoenix, Arizona, at the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Convention on May 18, 2006, by Lou Jurika and James Zobel.