

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

LaMarr D. Davidson– Life During WWII

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Box 1 Folder 7

Oral Interview conducted by David Gaskin

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

LD: Okay, I remember well World War II. I was a sophomore in high school during the time of Pearl Harbor.

DG: Where were you born?

LD: St. Anthony Idaho, that's where I lived until I got married most of the time.

DG: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

LD: I don't remember a lot of details, I know everything was very upset and we knew that, that meant we were going to war and was very upsetting and that was on a Sunday.

DG: Now what did you think when you heard about the attack?

LD: I was very upset and everyone else was upset because there was a lot of turmoil and that meant war was declared very shortly afterward.

DG: So you didn't serve in the armed forces during the war?

LD: No I dint, I was going to school at that time.

DG: At Rick's College?

LD: No, I was a sophomore in high school at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor and during the war, my special boyfriend who I was engaged to was off in the war. The attack was in '41 I think and I met him the following summer in '42 and at the attack we had Japanese people in our town, and they were good friends of ours, and that was very upsetting for them to. But it didn't change my feeling for them because I knew that they were one of us. But I do know that they had a bad time during the war. They were sent off to special concentration camps, and I think that is the kind of thing the United States has to feel sorry about, the way they were treated during the war. Most of them I think I think were very good citizens, but I can also understand they were just doing it for national security.

DG: During World War II did you meet and make new friendships? I know a lot of young men were gone, did you find it easier to make friends with people and was this common?

LD: Well we lived in a small town and everyone knew everyone in high school, you know the younger knew the older and the older knew the younger. It wasn't a big school, but we knew everyone fairly well and if we didn't know them our brothers and sisters that were in school knew them.

DG: What was your image of Hitler and Hirohito during the war? How did you preserve these people?

LD: I hated them, I learned to hate them because they were trying to take away from us the freedom that we had and everything in our country stood for and that was something very important and valuable to us. Even though we are not suppose to hate, we learned to hate them.

DG: When did you first hear about the German concentration camp?

LD: I don't know, it was during the war. It was in the news and we knew it was something terrible, the things they were doing to the people especially the Jewish people. And that was something else we knew we had to fight and help to prevent happening to the people and to keep these things from happening to our own country. We loved our country and everyone was doing all they could for the war effort. We all worked together so our country could win. I don't think there has ever been a time in history everyone has worked together in unity for the same purpose. It seemed like it affected every family. Some had sons go to the military, my brothers went, my sweetheart went, my classmates went after they graduated and became of age to be drafted. Every family was affected.

DG: How did your life change because of WWII?

LD: Well my two older brothers went into the service, my sweetheart that I was engaged to had to go. Everyone I knew was going into the service. That was just something you knew that just had to be. With the men all leaving, there were lots of jobs women had to do in place of the men. Things women had never done before. We had a family dairy and my two brothers were gone, and that left the rest of us to run it by ourselves. I got to step in and did everything in the dairy there was to do. I learned to keep the books and do bill collecting. These are things my brothers had been doing. After I graduated from high school we sold the dairy. We just couldn't keep

it going. Then I went to college at Ricks College, which was a great experience.

DG: Was that during the war still?

LD: Yes, that was still during the war. At college there were very few men. Ricks was a smaller college than most. We only had two buildings, and there were a few men when school started but at the end of that year, year '44-45, we only had 6 men left in college. Most of the men going to college were either put to work on the farms or drafted when they became of age to go to war.

DG: How did your religious beliefs help you cope with the World War II experience?

LD: Well it helped in lots of ways, it gave us hope. We also knew there was a hereafter, even those who were lost in the war we knew we would see again. Even my oldest brother paid the supreme sacrifice, he was killed in action and that was very sad. The thought of it still makes me feel bad.

DG: Which front was he on?

LD: In the Royal Canadian Air Force. He had been stationed in England and they had gone over to Germany and bombed them. But their plane was so shot up coming back they didn't quite make it back to the airfield and all but 1 or 2 of them were killed in the plane. Those that were left were burned very badly. At one time we were in touch with one of the boys' moms, but that was a very sad time and we are not sure if he made it through or not. When the boys were killed in action, it affected the whole community.

DG: How did you contribute as an individual in your community to the war effort?

LD: I remember sometimes we used to make cookies and send them to where they had to be. We bought war stamps, and as we could save money we bought war bonds. Also our school dances were very different too. The girls didn't get corsages with flowers they got corsages with war stamps and everybody did all they could. Something I remember we had recycling like some people do now but not a whole nation. We recycled everything. The little kids would save tin foil, and they would even stop to peel off the foil

on the gum wrappers. We had ration stamps, that's one big thing I remember. So many things were rationed, like bacon, meat, butter, gas, tires, no cars were bought or even made during the war, it all went to making things the soldiers needed for instance like tanks and things of that sort. We didn't even have nylon for girls to wear; girls would paint their legs with make up and then draw seams up the back to make them look like nylon hose. Soap was scarce; material was scarce to makes clothes out of. People would line up in front of the stores if it was having sales on sheets, blankets, towels, and so on. There was never enough to go around, they would just grab what they needed the most. We just had to make the best of it all. We had to do it all without complaining because we knew it was very important.

DG: So you didn't regret going without these things during the war?

LD: No. You did it without complaining. Everyone was willing to work together, so we could maintain our freedoms. Another thing we had to conserve was energy. We were very careful on how many lights we burned. Christmas time you never saw Christmas lights on the street. They also had a 35 mile per hour speed limit on the road to conserve on gas. I remember in high school I was taking a business, shorthand, and writing class. As we were released for a couple of hours during the day to go find a job for experience, the office I worked in, I was in charge of thee rationing stamps. Those stamps were the way to get sugar, gas, and things like that. Each family had to fill out a questionnaire for the rationing stamps and however many were in the family is how many stamps you got. Depending on what the person's job was, was how much gas they got seeing if they had to walk to work or if they had to drive to get there. It all depended on the distance. The farmers were allowed more gas so they could run the tractors and get the farming done. It was all done with ration stamps. Another thing was you could only get so many pairs of shoes a year or so many this and that. So I got to work in that office while I was still in high school.

DG: Did your experiences working during the war helped you get a job after the war or did you have a job after the war?

LD: During the war while my fiancé was gone I finished high school and went to Ricks College, and then I went to Salt Lake City and got me a job working in an office. When I went to apply for this job, by the way Ricks College recommended me to this employer. I went and had an interview, and I told them what my qualifications were and then I told them we had a

family dairy, and told them that that I learned to keep the books and do bills and things of that sort. All they were looking for was the experience. So I guess that was one thing the war helped my out on was that I had to work in the dairy and learn things I never would have learned. So then they put my as secretary to the head book keeper.

DG: After your husband got back from the war did you continue working?

LD: No, I went to work with the idea that I would quit when he came back and we got married. When he came back I was working in Salt Lake. He came back to Port Douglas where he received his discharge, and I quit my job within a few days and came back home. We decided we weren't going to rush into getting married because we had been separated for three years. We loved each other and it didn't take long to know that everything was the same, and two weeks after he got home we got married in the Idaho Falls temple. We were married in the temple two weeks after it was dedicated. Now we have the privilege to serve there now. We have been there for over 20 years, and we love it.

DG: Did you know any young men who dint return from the war? I know you said your oldest brother didn't.

LD: No. My oldest brother didn't. Kendal's brother had his leg blown off, but he lived and came back and got an artificial leg. But it seem like the one wounded in action have had lots of trouble in their lives. Some of my classmates dint come back and some of my friends and neighbors that I knew dint come back. I knew a lot that didn't come back from the war.

DG: How did their families cope with that?

LD: It was a very sad time, like I say the teaching of the church show us that we will see them again. My brother was killed the day after his 22nd birthday. He was just in the prime of his life.

DG: How did the community cope with the lost?

LD: They all worked together and supported one another. In town they had a big glass case with a roof over it, and in it was every name of those who were in the service, just so everyone could honor them and the ones who died got a gold star by their name. I remember at that time people were

proud of their sons and daughters that were serving in the military and when one was lost they put a gold star in the window. There were lots of gold stars everywhere.

DG: Now your brother and boyfriend were in the military, in what ways did you keep in touch with them?

LD: I use to write to Kendal (my boyfriend) everyday for three years, but there was a big percent of those letters that he never got. You never had their address, you just had their dog tag number and things like that. Then you put that on the envelope and sent that to New York, and they would get the letters to the men. That was the only way they could be reached, because they didn't have phones or anything like that they could use. You had to be very careful with the things you wrote in the letters to them, and they especially had to be careful of that what they wrote home because the mail was censored.

DG: How often did you get letters from him?

LD: Not very often, I have a little stack of letter still that I got during the three years. They are very dear to me.

DG: Did a lot of those letter get lost too?

LD: Yes, plenty got lost. There were ships that got sunk and planes that got shot down, and he dint get a chance to write regularly either because he was right on the front lines. He was one of the engineers, and they went ahead and fixed bridges and prepared roads, and they were involved in conflict so much of the time that I guess it was a great day for them when they got mail.

DG: What arte some of the most vivid memories of World War II that stand out in your mind?

LD: Well, I think that when my brother Martin was killed. Just a few days before he was killed, or we got notice that he had been killed, we got a letter in the mail thanking my parents for the package he had receive from them, and he said he was especially thankful for the Book of Mormon and for the church letter and church message from the first presidency. He said he read those first when he got the package before anything else. He waited so long for that, he asked for them to send him more because it would mean so much

to him, because he was far away from home and away from the church. It was a few days later we got notice saying that he had paid the supreme sacrifice and was killed in action. But you know in that letter we had gotten he said this, and let me read it to you because it means so much to me. "And now I am homesick in a land of strange. Sometimes I am lonely too, far from all that I cherish most. But there is a job to do, and that's why I am here and then choice was mine to make. I wouldn't come back, no not yet, for something is at stake. Something we must fight to keep and die for willingly. That dear, sweet, that precious thing, that men call liberty. And so until the battle's won, in exile I must be. But just one little thing I ask remember me." And that's kind of to let you know how the fellows felt. They really felt they were fighting for the country, for their country, for their homes and for their families. If they needed to give their life they would of. I have a few statistics from a book called The Greatest Generation. It is very special about the World War II. It has lots of experience of people and what they went through and their reactions to it all. And this is just some of the statistics he had in it. He said that the national involvement was reflected in numbers. By 1944, 12 million Americans were in uniform. War protection represented 44% of the gross national product, almost 19 million workers then there had been 5 years earlier, and 35% of this increased number of workers were women. I think it was this time that women left their homes and went out to work or find jobs. The nation was involved in the war effort at every level. Like I said we were just all working together and everyone was involved. It was something we all wanted to help with and to do out part and to with the war. People were also doing victory gardens. Everyone had a garden, even if it was a box in the window.

DG: With the victory gardens were you growing food for the soldiers or for yourselves?

LD: Mainly for ourselves. Everyone was helping with the raising of the food and helping with the production. I remember at the end of the war I was in Salt Lake, and that was a great day when the war ended. In Salt Lake everyone was so excited, they even had a street dance. The Army band came out, and everyone just danced, and it didn't even matter who they danced with. They just danced. Everyone was so excited. It was just a wonderful time, and I knew then that I would get to Kendal again real soon. But that three years seemed so long when he was gone. I thought I would never see him again. So we both felt very blessed that he made it through. He did have some injuries and things but he was able to come home. And

even after we were married rationing was still going on. I remember the day we were married on the 19th of December, and he got his discharge on the 5th of December, and then we were married on the 19th. From there we were going to go on our honeymoon, but we didn't have a car because gas was rationed, and our folks didn't have extra so we couldn't borrow their cars, and we couldn't take the bus because they were on strike. So Kendal's folks took us to a hotel in Idaho Falls, and we got a school bus to take us to Blackfoot to my grandmother's. At my grandmother's house they had a wedding supper for us there. Then we stayed at my grandmother's overnight, and then the next day we took a train to Salt Lake. Hotel rooms were very scarce. My girlfriend and I had an apartment there so we planned on staying there. The land lady rented it out why my friend went home so it was no longer available. So we had to stay at my other girlfriend's apartment, and so we had her there with us part of the time while we were on our honeymoon. It was fun, and on Christmas Eve we took the train back home and got there early Christmas morning. But it was a great time.