

Louis Montanti was born in Staten Island, New York on November 24th, 1921 as one of four boys growing up during the Great Depression. He went to Curtis Island High School and then joined the Reserves. He was called from the reserves to active duty and had his training duties on the USS Reuben James as an apprentice seaman, an old destroyer which, in 1941, was sunk by a German submarine. As it was sinking, the large explosives on the destroyer went off, but Louis was not on the ship at that time. He, then, went to a Naval Academy in Connecticut, and then to a base in Seattle, where he stayed for a little over a year.

After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese then infiltrated the Aleutian Islands, islands on the southern tip of Alaska, and Louis was stationed to do anti-aircraft work. He was stationed there for 18 months, and described it as truly grueling weather, many of the soldiers suffered from frostbite and pneumonia. The wind, called Willow Waz, was equivalent to a hurricane, so the ships could not even make it to the mainland: the soldiers would be put on barges and then wade through the freezing water. The conditions were so bleak that the soldiers would drink the contents of the torpedos at the airfield as an alcohol substitute. They invaded one of the islands, but the Japanese had already left. Luckily, they were still on one of the other two islands, so Louis' infantry bombed and then invaded that island--the original inhabitants were evacuated before this.

After the end of his eighteen months in Alaska, Louis returned to Seattle and eventually went to amphibious school in Virginia. He then was part of Landing Ship Medium (LSM) 284 which crossed through the Panama canal towards Japan. The soldiers thought that they would be invading Japan; however, while they were getting ready, the bombs were dropped. Personally, Louis does not agree with the dropping of the bombs. He did not re-enlist, and came back to the United States. He worked in a shipyard in New York as a merchant marine for twenty years. He then worked as a bus driver and then as a diver.

Louis also shared a story about his time in Morocco, while in uniform: He was at port with his camera and was walking around the street. He took a picture of a man, not knowing that he wasn't supposed to, and soon found himself surrounded by Arabs. Louis was chased all the way to the French consulate and the French gave the people money.

Louis' advice for future generations is to be a good person with good morals, and to help others and never be a wise guy.

Margot Montanti was born on August 3, 1930 in Boxberg, Germany and grew up in Heidelberg, Germany. She has one brother and described her childhood as wonderful, with her only complaint being how strict her father, who was a World War I veteran, was. Her grandparents were bakers and she went to live with them, so all six people (Margot, her brother, her parents and her grandparents) lived together. She is not Jewish.

When the war broke out, it was announced over the radio that Hitler had started a war. Her parents were devastated. There was a big campaign to "Save Heidelberg" where pamphlets were dropped on the streets, and luckily, no bombs were dropped on the city. The war, however, did change daily life for the young German Gentile. There were many breaks in their school time, and there was an economic depression plaguing the country. Margot remembers Easter of 1944, when all six family members spent four days in a cellar. The following Monday, there were many dead soldiers who were then buried in a mass grave. What she suspects was due to her age and the kindness of her parents, Margot never knew about the treatment of the Jewish people until after the war.

Although life was not normal for many years after the end of the war, Margot went to college and worked in a hospital in Heidelberg as a dental hygienist. She came to America in 1961, after she met and married an American soldier in the Heidelberg headquarters.

Her advice to future generations is to be kind, don't judge and to love one another.