

Louisa Jaffe

A Perfect Blend

On the morning of September 11, 2001, LTC Louisa Jaffe now retired from the United States Army Reserves, was working as a supervisor for a cable provider in Florida, not on active military duty. A few weeks out of the year she trained at the Pentagon where she worked for the Office of the Secretary of Army Public Affairs. She never imagined that the very desk she worked at earlier that year would cease to exist -- forever.

"On 9/11," Louisa recalls today, "the plane that hit the Pentagon took out the entire Army public affairs office. My usual desk went up in flames that day."

The resounding transformation of our nation's identity with that tragic event was felt on a very personal level for Louisa and her family when her cousin's son also was killed in the attack on the World Trade Center. Indeed, the paths of every single American were altered that day, in ways small and large. For Louisa, now the co-founder, CEO, and President of TAPE, LLC, it served to cement the insurmountable commitment to serve her country that had been a fundamental aspect of her character all her life.

"I was really angry," she recalls. "As with so many others, I wanted to do something, so I called up the Army and asked them to put me on active duty. I said I'd go to Afghanistan or wherever they wanted me. I just wanted to serve." To which she said the Army responded by saying, "Why yes, Louisa, thank you for volunteering, we were just about to call you anyway."

By October, 2001, Louisa was on active duty and back at work in Washington DC, and living in Virginia. But before long, she would face a brick wall of her own which meant the formal end of her career in the military. That wall was her nearly three decades of active and inactive duty.

"I expected a long tour of duty after 911" Louisa says. "Ten years earlier, Congress had put

forth a stop-loss order during Desert Storm. After 9/11, I expected this to happen again, as did the unit I was supporting. But it didn't happen. My 28 years were up, and with no waiver available. I was out."

Louisa's military background extends far beyond her own service. Her father was an Ordinance officer in the Army Air Corps in World War II who participated in loading the atomic bomb "Little Boy" into the Enola Gay bomber, which dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, contributing to the end of the War in the Pacific. The existence of the 509th Composite Group that Louisa's father belonged to was classified for many years, but shortly before his death, he and the rest of the 509th Composite Group were given a Unit Award for being the unit which ended the war, as recognized by former President Harry Truman and bestowed upon them at a reunion in Washington DC in 1999.

"In the War, my father reported to then Captain Paul Tibbets," Louisa says. "Tibbets was the pilot of the Enola Gay. There was a long time when her father was proud of his contribution, though it was not generally acknowledged to the public until later in his life. Still, our family knew what he had done, and that he had this great sense of pride in his moment in history. That had a big influence on me."

Louisa's uncle also served during World War II in Europe as part of the 82nd Airborne Division, seeing major action in Sicily, Anzio, and Operation Market Garden. "They were right in the thick of real war," Louisa explains. "This was a tradition that became a part of me, and at an early age I knew that I wanted to go into the military. I didn't talk about it with my family, it was just there. I knew it would be interesting and meaningful, and something I would be proud to do."



These military currents are not the only forces imprinted on her childhood, however. At the end of the War, her father left the military and her father reignited his lifelong passion: entrepreneurship. "I grew up in a very entrepreneurial family," she says. "My father liked to buy businesses, run them, and then sell them. I was often involved in them when I was growing up, although I didn't think of it then as being hooked by the entrepreneurship thing. It was just how life was in my house. I probably have a brain hardwired for that kind of thinking, but it was cultivated in that environment by my father."

Louisa recalls one of the more mundane jobs her father had her help him with while he worked as a stockbroker. As a teenager, she was responsible for stuffing envelopes with stock reports, which she found absolutely tedious. But she remembers that at some point she started to catch glimpses of what was written on the papers, and she started to ask her father questions about the stock market. "He probably had some ulterior motives there," Louisa says with a laugh, "trying to get me to learn something!"

When Louisa was older, she became more involved in the various businesses her father invested in. She worked for him as a cashier in one of his convenience stores and at one time she was even a real estate broker for his real estate investment firm. "He would sell one business and buy another," she says, "just on and on. He didn't care what the business was; he just loved to create revenue and jobs. The art and science of entrepreneurship was what he was all about."

Growing up with her father, Louisa inherited his work ethic and passion for business, but her desire to succeed was all her own. When she eventually left for college in the late 1960s, she found a new obstacle. "My college advisor was an elderly man," Louisa says. "A British professor. When we met for the first time to discuss my major, I expressed interest in English. He explained that there were different English programs and said flat out that we both knew I wasn't going to do the post-graduate program, because women don't go to grad school. That was my first real encounter with sexism in the work place."

Louisa was upset, but she refused to play the victim. She understood that there was discrimination against women—she had experienced it first hand, and not for the last

time—but she was reluctant to align herself with any group or movement that "did a lot of public whining about how unfair it all was." "I wasn't looking for excuses to blame someone else if I did not have enough imagination to create success," she affirms. "My attitude was that I would succeed despite the obstacles that were being placed in my way. Those obstacles, helped to fuel my determination for success."

When Louisa graduated in 1972 and applied for a job at a travel agency, the owner came out to interview her. "We were talking for just a few minutes," Louisa says, "when he asked me, 'Why should I hire a cute little girl like you? You'll just get married and leave me.' He didn't care that I had a college degree."

It was around this time that her father suggested that she speak with military recruiters. "The day I went to speak to the Army recruiter, it just so happened that the regional director for recruiting command was a woman, from the Women's Army Corps (WAC)," she recalls. "I got to go in and talk to her, and even though I did go on and also explore the Navy and Air Force, the real truth was that when I left that office, I wanted to be like her. I wanted to be what she was!"

Louisa received a direct commission as a Second Lieutenant in the WAC in December of 1973, and was on active duty for six years. In 1978, the WAC was merged into the United States Army and for the next 22 years, she would serve in the Army Reserves, assigned to the Individual Ready Reserves (IRR) as a Public Affairs Officer.

During that time, Louisa pursued several career paths while serving in the public affairs office at the Pentagon, or other locations for about two months a year. She received a second bachelor's degree and worked for her father on a citrus grove he had invested in. She also worked as a supervisor for Xerox and for a cable provider in Florida. But her true passion through and through was always service time the military.

It's understandable, then, that when 28 years were up forcing her retirement, Louisa did not take it well. One night, she found herself bemoaning her fate at a networking event at her church in Virginia. "I was saying how I couldn't believe it," Louisa recalls, "that I had been in the Army for 28 years, and that I had to leave. A few weeks earlier, I had met a man named Bill Jaffe, and that night we would have our first real conversation."

"Maybe there's a whole new way you can serve your country," Bill had suggested.

"At that moment I just wanted him to feel sorry for me," Louisa says, laughing. "But he refused, while he felt that I could still pursue my passion and continue serving my country."

Bill had been in government contracting for about 25 years. He began describing his occupation to Louisa, and something clicked. "He was telling me about his work," Louisa explains, "about how important it is, and how much the Army needs good business people. I had the business background. I had had it since I was old enough to stuff envelopes. And I knew how the military worked. The more I learned, the more it appealed to me, the more I realized that contracting was the perfect blend of entrepreneurship and working with the military."

A year and a half later, Louisa and Bill were married in Las Vegas with an Elvis impersonator as witness. "My husband knows me so well," Louisa says, "and he loved me so much, he even gave me a red, white and blue wedding ring." Shortly after they tied the knot, they decided to form a service-disabled, woman-owned government contracting firm called Technical and Project Engineering, (TAPE), founded in 2003. "Bill helped me see that the wall I hit, the end of my time of being in the military, could actually be a bridge," Louisa says. "That there could be a whole new way I could work for the military. And so what led up to founding TAPE was truly my entire life experience up to that time."

Today, the TAPE team consists of expert system engineers committed to the highest integrity in their work. "We design and implement processes, systems and management solutions," Louisa explains. "We also do research and development, testing and evaluation, education and training as well as cyber security and contract support."

For the first year, Bill was a consultant for hire "We called him Rent-a-Bill," she laughs. "In that first year, we did \$135 thousand of hard-won revenue. Then followed a few more years of contracting for the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard, and others. Then we got a break. It wasn't blind luck; we created an opportunity for ourselves. The break was with the Army. It was almost as if, in my imagination, I created the opportunity long before it actually happened."

TAPE actually won the bid taking the work over from a larger incumbent firm. Bill had done the original work on the subject of the bid: Army Training Models (ATM). Today, the incumbent firm is TAPE's subcontractor.

In an incredible leap, TAPE went from \$135 thousand in revenue in 2003 to \$850 thousand by 2005. The next year, before winning the Army contract in 2007, they finished at \$1.6 million. By the end of 2007, the first year with the ATM contract, our revenue jumped again to \$6.5 million. Over the next few years, they reached \$16.5 million, \$19.5 million, \$21.5 million, and in 2011, TAPE's revenues were \$25.5 million. "But it hasn't been accidental," Louisa avows. "We did get a break in winning the ATM contract, but we rose to the challenge. We had to build a whole new infrastructure and hire an executive staff and more employees."

In advising young entrepreneurs entering the business world today, Louisa emphasizes the importance of being bold, whether one finds oneself confronted with outdated gender stereotypes or competition that may be larger and more established. "Don't be afraid to challenge entrenched beliefs or entrenched opponents," she avows. "In finding that perfect blend of business, expertise, and passion, you become a force to be reckoned with."

Today, Louisa and Bill Jaffe are committed to offering their employees benefits that rival those found in bigger companies. They offer a generous 401K, and instead of pulling money out of the company, they remain very focused on putting that money to work, creating a good employee experience. "We haven't pulled money out of the company," Louisa says. "We've got our eye on a bigger target."

And what is that target? 100 million in annual revenues, and the perpetual pursuit of finding new, invaluable, and fulfilling ways to safeguard and serve the country we call home.

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*About Gordon J. Bernhardt
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Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing

high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).

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