

**NPS-107**

**CHARLEY DE LEO**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL KINNEY**

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**BY: NICOLE STOTZ 8/2008)**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE EIMPLOYEE  
STATUE OF LIBERTY NATIONAL MONUMENT  
CIRCA 1978**

DE LEO: I started to clean out the tip of the torch which I refer to as the cone; in the second week of March and it was done on a Saturday. And I found a way get it there. It's a small platform that comes off at the top of the middle ladder. I found I was able to get in there. And I took safety precautions. I went in there with a safety belt on. And the first time I went in there with a bag, a canvas bag, and I rested on the second section of the torch before the cone and I started cleaning this stuff out with my hands, put it right in the canvas bag and when it was filled up pretty heavy, I shimmied out of the cone and I pulled it up from the top of the ladder and brought the stuff down. A week after that on the following Saturday I went up again. This time I went up with a mechanic to help me and (the same procedure). I went in there with a safety line. I got in there hooked up. I had to clean out the bottom of the cone now which means the going was getting difficult. My mechanic started lowering a bucket down with a rope and I began fishing out the stuff again and when I filled up the bucket he heisted me up and filled up a sack which we had on the outside of the torch, The hard part was getting down into the cone itself. And, although I did no have any of my weight on the cone at all, I put some of my weight on the last piece. I just had to put some of my weight down in the cone and cleaned it right down to the bottom of the core. There was a hole in the middle of that cone and after we did this, we went down. Incidentally when all the broken glass and all the particles were weighed it weighed

one hundred and forty two pounds.

KINNEY: How deep was the dirt actually?

DE LEO: I'd say it was at least three and a half feet, possibly four feet, but the being about it was that it was wide. The second section of the cone was very wide—the tiny cone itself was not that wide but it was three and a half to four feet deep.

KINNEY: So that some of the things you found in there you thing were dropped by workmen over the years?

DE LEO: Definitely. Ninety percent of the stuff was dropped by workmen. Maybe a lot more than that. But at least some of the stuff was dropped by workmen and as far as the tourists throwing anything in there it was open for at least thirty years originally and tourists threw little stuff in there. I was very disappointed. I thought I would find a lot of old papers and artifacts that tourists might have thrown in and old things and there was very, very little.

KINNEY: So what's the access from the torch itself to the cone section?

DE LEO: Just before you get to the top of the ladder pull-out, three-quarters of the way up the ladder in the arm itself, you just step and the cone is right on the inside of the ladder.

KINNEY: So you think that the workmen carried the bulbs down that far and tossed them in?

DE LEO: No, regardless of the broken bulbs and the few bulbs that were still intact I think that they just dropped from their sockets and a lot of times exploded in the flame and as they exploded they just dropped right down into the cone. I don't think that workmen literally threw bulbs in there although I do suspect that they did so in regard to silver wiring that was thrown in there—old pieces of metal, bits of paper. That stuff was thrown in there. Everything else was just dropped down.

KINNEY: And the birds had easy access into that?

DE LEO: Yes. For man years the window cut-outs in the room with the torch that go all the way around were open and we never had any screening there and they probably just flew into the cone and died.

KINNEY: And now they don't have access to it?

DE LEO: No, no as long as that door is closed, although occasionally when I went up to the torch in years past I have seen sparrows in the flame—that's when we had the old glass in the flames and some of the glass was missing—a piece here and a piece there—so they flew right in. No, they couldn't do it anymore. There is no way they can do it. Do you want me to identify some of the artifacts?

KINNEY: Okay.

DE LEO: Now I'm going to identify some of the stuff. Over here is an original iron brace. This is one of the twelve that used to support the underneath of the catterwalk. They are made exactly to the center of the catterwalk, vertical. This is from 1886. This is one of the oldest pieces right there. Years ago when we did a little work up there we took out these things.

KINNEY: So these items are about eighteen inches long?

DE LEO: Definitely, you can see that right here this one is. And in this part we went up to eighteen inches or longer, maybe twenty inches. There were about a dozen of these evenly spaced around the catterwalk underneath.

KINNEY: What is the catterwalk exactly?

DE LEO: People don't know that there were two catterwalks when you are walking on the outside. There is the catterwalk and there is a double deck. There is a catterwalk underneath and a catterwalk above. There are two decks and people don't know this. We found this when we did the work up there.

KINNEY: Why a second one, for reinforcement?

DE LEO: Yes, for reinforcement, to strengthen it. But this vertical strap, as I call it, is one of the twelve iron straps that used to support the catterwalk. And number two here is copper straps and these copper straps would cut out the rivets directly. They would have supported these iron straps. If they didn't, these iron straps were definitely supporting some kind of iron or steel just as all of the other straps throughout the monument.

KINNEY: So that there is no doubt that these are the original ones?

DE LEO: Yes, there is no doubt that these are the original ones. Going to number three now; number three is the glass copper straps. Originally in 1916 when the torch was remodeled and the glass was

put in naturally they would fit a piece of glass and they took these copper straps and drilled holes through the glass and copper that met and have them temporarily in place until they caulked it up and put a little caulk in them.

KINNEY: So that the holes were through the copper and the metal strapping?

DE LEO: Correct, that is exactly how it was done. Number four is just miscellaneous metal and copper items. I wouldn't know what they are, but as you can see, there are some screws and some pieces of wire and some pieces of metal there and I wouldn't know what they are used for. Number five is just paper. I would say that the paper is just a lot of old newspapers. There seems to be a little newspaper there, I can't find the date. But that stuff there doesn't seem to be of any historical value.

KINNEY: We've got Polaroid film casing and match books. All of it pretty recent.

DE LEO: Getting to number six, now. Number six is very interesting. For one reason it is wood. Now I wasn't around until 1972 in the torch, but I would guess that this wood, it is very, very thin wood, and this wood had something to do with the original lighting system in some way.

KINNEY: You found this wood near the bottom?

DE LEO: I found this wood near the bottom of the cone. Anything there near the bottom of cone has been there for a very, very long time and so the wood is old. Number seven is just a couple of old tools I found and I don't know how old they are, but God only knows how old they are. But this class cutter here could be one that was lost by the glazers in 1974. And this screw driver now might be thirty or forty years old. And these wire snips might be just as old. These could be from WPA days.

KINNEY: Pretty well rusted.

DE LEO: Number eight now are the original iron pieces. The original torch was lit up with glass carbon lights.

KINNEY: How did they work, could you tell me?

DE LEO: I don't have any idea of how they lit them up or how they worked. The only thing I do know is that when we dug up one years ago in 1973 when we were remodeling that stand on the torch, the guy

who worked with me was a blacksmith and he was a president. He headed the job. And he told me that these were carbon strikers and the lighted carbon lights and that on the farm he used to do them when he was a kid. And he told me that they had a gas carbon lights up there originally with carbon strikers. An interesting note, all of the strikers I dug up from the bottom of the cone and one of them was laying, you know, in the bottom of the cone there is a hole, a drainage hole, and one of the them was laying flat across it in the center and I thought it was a piece of pipe. Then as I got a little daylight in there, I realized that it was a carbon striker. If that was right there is the very tip of the cone that was definitely 1886. Number nine is they putty or caulking for glass. Number ten is old electrical wire. I'm not an electrician so I can't determine how old this wire is. All old electrical wire. Some of it is new as you can see, but some of it is old. A lot of it may be over a half of a century old. We come to see something interesting now. This is the original stained glass. As you can see this large piece is still in really good shape. The original stained glass of 1916 that was used when they remodeled the torch is right here.

KINNEY: Where did you find the glass?

DE LEO: The old glass I found about half way in.

KINNEY: So you think that was glass that was broken out by someone?

DE LEO: Yes, by someone. It could have been dropped there in 1974 when they put in the new glass. But I found a lot of this stuff inside the dirt itself. This is the original glass.

KINNEY: And you've got a red piece here also?

DE LEO: Okay. This red piece I number it with twelve with the other glass. This red piece there is a glass garter globe for the old aircraft warning light. Years ago we used to have an aircraft emergency warning light on a pipe rigged up with two sockets in the tip of the torch with two light bulbs, incandescent light bulbs, naturally, and each one was covered by a red guard. I dropped one of these by accident and it dropped down into the cone itself. It's no longer there. We have a new system now. But this is the very thick glass that was up there.

KINNEY: When was that taken out?

DE LEO: That was taken out in 1974, 1975. I didn't keep a date of when it was taken out. It was taken out before the bicentennial. I would

sway 1974.

KINNEY: So it that something that went on each night with all of the other lights?

DE LEO: No, it never went on unless the torch was completely blacked out. If the torch went out then this would go on. That was strictly emergency warning. That was the last light of all. That was never on unless the torch went out and all the power was out. These guards incidentally might be as old as thirty years old. Number twelve we have there is the old yellow plexiglass and that is the new stuff that went up there in 1974, and also here is the other new stained glass that replaced the original up there of 1916, and in some areas where the glass had to be mounted in, you had to bend the glass. Years ago they tool more pains and trouble to do jobs and they heated the glass and shaped it there. I guess that the new guys didn't have time to do so they moved plexiglass in to give the turn then. They only used several pieces though, not the couple of hundred pieces they used to have to use.

KINNEY: So most of the new glass is tinted or stained glass?

DE LEO: Right. Any piece that couldn't bend, naturally, they had to use plexiglass. And that's the reason for the plexiglass. I don't know, but that thirteen is fuses. Some of the fuses are very, very old. I wouldn't know how old they are but there is over a dozen of these fuses right here and only a good electrician might-- There is one fuse right here, it looks like an old fuse. I wouldn't know the date. Some of the fuses I dug pretty deep in the second section of the cone itself so that I would say that they are pretty old. Number fourteen is a very fascinating piece. It looks like an army captain's bars or the navy captain's bars, but I believe that they are army. Apparently some captain went up there years ago and either the bars dropped off his uniform or he threw them in there but they are captain's bars. And next is number fifteen which appears to be an old coin. It could be an old penny and obviously I would say that it an old coin.

KINNEY: You don't remember digging this one out?

DE LEO: No, I don't. It was just too small an item. I think that's an old coin, but if I'm wrong, it's just a piece of metal what has the same shape. Item sixteen is just miscellaneous stuff—a couple of old spray cans, caps, a plastic cover for a camera lens and a magic marker. Number seventeen is broken bulb sockets and, as you know, Paul, they are all large so obviously they are form a one thousand watt

bulb so that the big bulbs like the one I dug out or one thousand watts. I would say that these bulbs could have been dropped or could have exploded up there and my theory is that they could have exploded up there. As you can see by the condition they are in and the work value of whoever did it they could not have been taken down. Number eighteen is socket bulbs with porcelain in them. There is one good piece of porcelain right here which has a socket right there form a one thousand watt bulb. It could be an extremely old socket. I don't know how old. Number nineteen is just old pencils. Incidentally, one of them I just used a whole ago and it wrote a lot of these notes right here. There appears to be at least one pencil that looks to be extremely old. And this green here looks old, but there two don't look that old. But this one looks as though it could have been there for many years. It's completely dried out. I think that we are all done. But I think that I should mention that the total weight that came out of the cone was one hundred and forty-two pounds. And there was probably never any work done in there- no workman probably ever did it. Now the condition of the iron straps in there is in good shape with the exception of the cone. You see the handle of the torch is in three pieces. The first piece which is the top piece, the iron brace, seems to be in excellent condition, some of it is three quarters to one inch thick. The second section seems also to be in excellent shape. Its similar, three quarters to an inch thick iron bands that make up the frame, but the frame and inside the last piece of the torch which I call the cone and it is a cone in every way the iron bracing in there that's holding that together and connecting it to the second part of the torch is in extremely poor condition. It's less than a quarter of an inch thick. It's moldy and raggedly. It's pitted and it should be replaced.

KINNEY: So you didn't do any work on it this time you went up?

DE LEO: No, I didn't. I would like to do a little priming job in there but I will have to wait to see what my superiors say on that.

KINNEY: It's going to take a replacement of those straps do you think? So that is can be safe?

DE LEO: Well, I am no authority on metal but I would say that if all these years that if it held one hundred and forty-two pounds and if it held part of me too, I would say that at this point if is safe and that the only piece that would have to be replaced is in the third part of the cone-torch which is in the cone. I don't think that that is going to give especially now that all the weight is out of there, but I think that it should be replaced. But I do think that it is strong. And

incidentally, in the third part which is the cone there is a drainage hold made and it is a lot larger than a silver dollar. And it was made in 1886 for drainage, just for water.

KINNEY: So that section of the cone was made with that hole in it?

DE LEO: Definitely, if not, it was made shortly after the monument was erected. It looks like it was shortly after because it was a good job whoever did it. It's very, very rounded. It looks like it was done by a metal worker. We have all of this stuff and I think some of it should be displayed. In reference to the old pieces, the old glass, the carbon strikers there is a lot of old stuff there and new that I have pointed it out to you, Paul, you can make a fairly good display and a temporary display for the summer. I think it would be kind of fascinating. People would like to see it.

KINNEY: Now this huge bulb here, what is it that we got?

DE LEO: One thousand watts. That large bulb is one thousand incandescent watt bulb and for many, many years they had nothing but one thousand incandescent bulbs up there. In fact, up until for or five years ago we used to have fourteen sockets up there with fourteen, one thousand incandescent watt bulbs. That bulb was definitely buried in three inches of dirt up there. It's a bulb that's been thirty, forty or maybe fifty years. This small bulb there that's in my hands right now is definitely the most fascinating of all bulbs. This could be from a photographer, a photographer who went up there in the torch many, many years ago. That looks like a bulb that could have been a flash bulb.

KINNEY: Is that about four inches long?

DE LEO: It's about four inches long. You can't tell the wattage, but it looks like it could be a photographer's bulb from one of those big antique cameras that you see in those old movies. Or it could be a bulb they had in the lighting system. I don't know. It looks like a flash bulb, but it could be anything. I want to say one thing about this bulb. It was almost really in the third section of the cone, really buried underneath. It could be sixty years old.

KINNEY: What was the lighting like when you were you were up there? Could you see from the sunlight pretty well?

DE LEO: Yes, I could. On both of the mornings that I went up there to clean out the cone the lighting was excellent. I had no trouble. With a drop light it would have been a little better. But I had plenty of light.

I had no problem as far as the light was concerned. And actually when I got near the end of the job, when I opened that hole the light was just beautiful at that point.

KINNEY: What about the other two bulbs we have here? They are more modern?

DE LEO: Yes, they are smaller bulbs. I wouldn't know the age of these. But they look like bulbs that could have been up there thirty or forty years. In reference to the tip of the flame, we did have reds up there for many years not only for the emergency aircraft warning lights with the red globe but also to light the tip of the torch.

KINNEY: Now, you say you had reds. What do you mean?

DE LEO: These reds, Paul, were actually pipes with wiring inside of them. And naturally the wiring was hooked up to circuit breakers. But anyway, these pipes ran all the way up inside into the very tip of the flame and their only purpose was to light the tip of the torch. Naturally, they had similar smaller bulbs, one hundred fifty to two hundred fifty watts. Like I was telling you before, until 1974 they only had incandescent lights up there with a large glass reflector up there. The reflector was mounted in the middle of the flame or on the bottom of the glass dome where the yellow and the red glass is. That weighed eighty pounds. At one time you could not even stand up in the flame without hitting a bulb. Now you can. There is plenty of room now.

KINNEY: So the bulbs have gotten smaller?

DE LEO: Yes, the bulbs are smaller. They are medium vapor. They look like little missiles now, and yet they are a dozen times more powerful. Maybe far more than a dozen times then the incandescents. As a matter of fact the lighting system up there is only about fifteen, fifty watts as compared to about sixteen thousand watts up until 1973 and yet it is about three or four brighter up there.

KINNEY: I noticed the little bulb that you suspected of being a flash bulb, says inside it Wabash Everflash, made in U.S.A.

DE LEO: It doesn't have a date, but I think that your suspicion is correct. It is an old flash bulb from one of those monstrous big cameras. It served the purpose. Photographers have been going up there for many, many years. I don't know the age of these bulbs, but I've seen an old picture of the inside of the flame taken in the '30s and the incandescents, the one thousand watt incandescents were up

there then so I don't know how old these incandescents are. I only know about the original gas carbon lights, and unfortunately we haven't found those but we have found the strikers which is crystal clear proof that they did use a carbon type light that had these carbon strikers.

KINNEY: Now the lighting would have been inside the carbon?

DE LEO: Yes. Yes and very, very dull. Actually it did shine a light. Whether it was it or not, it gave a little glow. A very little glow. You could see it on a clear night, but on a night that was overcast and a little hazy you couldn't see it. The new lights up there you can see even through the fog.

KINNEY: The modern lights that are up there now?

DE LEO: The modern lights, not from a distance. But one night it was cloudy and I was at the Statue and as the boat passed we saw the clouds. You couldn't see anything else so apparently the new lights can penetrate that fog, but only at a short distance.

KINNEY: Well, thanks Charley. I don't think that we have anything more to talk about.

DE LEO: The only thing this that I hope you can get together with Paul and that a temporary display can be made. I think it would make a pretty interesting thing, particularly the bulbs, the iron straps, and of course the original glass. People would like to see the old sockets up there. Why not? It is something that no maintenance man, whether Park Service or anything else every cleaned this thing out. Obviously they thought that there was no other way to get in there or else it would be taking a chance and that it would collapse.

KINNEY: How did you detect that there was dirt in there for a long time?

DE LEO: You can see it. As you go up to the torch you can look into the cone and see that it was filled up with all kinds of things, glass particles and everything like that. And anybody could have seen it. I had always wanted to clean it out and every time I suggested it my supervisor said he didn't think it was safe enough. They thought that the way for a man to get in there was too dangerous. When I finally got the okay to do it and I went looking for an opening I found it to be just a matter of getting in there. I went in the first time to test it and realized it was safe. I wouldn't have if it weren't. Right now its strong in there, I'd like to see the iron bracing looked over by a structural engineer.