

Lloyd Fons

Born: 6/19/1922
On Island
Died:

Period of Service WW II
Navy

Sources: Himself: interview
with daughter Valerie

Entered service. 1944

Discharged:

Valerie I wanted to know about your time in service, and how you got there.

Lloyd: Well, Link (his brother Lincoln) had already gotten there and was in the Navy and was in P.T. boats, and I volunteered and actually one of the reasons why I volunteered into the Navy was because I didn't want to be drafted into the army. So they sent me to Dartmouth College under the V-12 program and I played basketball there with a fellow named Whitey Larson from the University of Connecticut. We played a couple of scrimmage games, and then we were supposed to be shipped out and I found out coach Paul Brown had arranged it so we would stay in school another semester, and both of us were really incensed and we quit the team. (Coach Brown came in second to Utah in the NCAA championship, and he thought Whitey and I could have helped him win it all.) The midshipman's schools were filled so I went down to Asbury Park, NJ and that was actually a poorly run operation, and we just waited around until I could get into midshipman's school in Abbott Hall in Chicago. Asbury Park was nightmarish. They didn't have enough food, maybe just bread and a salad, so I took off my shirt and appear like I was a cook's helper and ate with the guys. But we finished the midshipman's training in Chicago.

Valerie : How far had the war progressed at that time?

Lloyd: We were told that the enemy was evil and kill them off. This was in officer training. When I got out of Tower Hall, I was an officer ensign. I went in as a seaman third class to Dartmouth and I got out of Tower Hall an ensign. I got into that category because I volunteered for PTs. It was interesting. The PT boaters took only people with small boaty experience and of course those were the guys from a wealthy family who owned yachts. So Squadron 12 was called the Millionaires Club. Then John Bunkley was sort of the mentor for the PT boaters. He took MacArthur off the Philippines and it was sort of tough duty, so he was selecting athletes, and I was an athlete from the University of Chicago, and I was lucky enough to get in. PT boats was hazardous duty. At one time they wouldn't take married men. They had the highest casualty rate per capita base of any surface unit of the Navy....more combat time, more decorations. Very, very nice people. I saw that if you got on a battleship you might be a laundry officer five decks below the main deck, and on a PT boat you saw what was going on, and it was exciting to be on a 78 foot boat that weighed about 45-50 tons that could go 50 miles per hour.

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Valerie: How did you choose that? How did you know that was where you wanted to be?

Lloyd: Partly because my brother Jack Lincoln was on PTs. PTs were less formal in the Navy. I had skivvy shorts, just under shorts, and a pair of shoes, and a cap, and on the other Navy ships you had to wear shirts and things and we didn't do things like that. Like the toilet on a PT boat: we had one in the officer's cabin and one in the crew's quarters, but all the while I was on a PT boat I never used them. They built a couple of 2 by 4s together and had a little one holer on the back of these things, and the guys would eliminate into the water off the back of the boat.

Valerie While you were going how fast?

Lloyd Well, it didn't make any difference. If it was rough you had to be very careful, but when it was rough you didn't think about anything but the weather. I was in part of a typhoon in the China Sea in this 78 foot boat going to Palawan and the waves were 50 feet high and we went for six hours as fast as we could safely go and only got a mile and a half so we turned around and went back to base. PT boaters were great guys. Some of the finest men, the most dedicated people I've ever met in my life. They treated that PT boat with reverence and respect. They were such conscientious fellows.

Valerie: What was the name of your boat?

Lloyd: The "Wet Dream". And it had a picture of a sailor on a cot and he is dreaming of this girl and the Wet Dream. There were two types of Higgins boats, one was the Higgins and one was the Elko. Higgins were the wet ones. They had a clear deck but you got more spray. The hull was built so you got more water so they always said that the Higgins were wet boats. Some admiral that came by made us x out the 't' so it became the "We Dream". He didn't like the connotation of wet dream but it was. I sort of enjoyed it.

Valerie: When you were based in Mindoro, when were you introduced as captain to the crew?

Lloyd: Well it was three months training there and it was excellent training. They had little kiddy cars that we rode on with little torpedoes, and they even put us downwind of poisonous gas so we would recognize the smell. I also learned to swim in Melville in motor torpedo boat squadron training. I even played basketball with the Melville team. We had 33 All-Americans there at one time, in different sports. The base was called Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Training Center (MTBSTC) Melville, Rhode Island, between Providence and Newport. After my second month there they came and asked me if I wanted to go to the Mediterranean and I told them if they needed me I would go, but I thought if I cut off my PT boat training I wouldn't be as good an officer as I should be and they accepted that. After training I went to Treasure Island and then took a luxury cruise ship, the Laurline, to Hawaii. The food was amazing, various steaks and how you wanted them cooked. It was just being used as a transport, but they may have had a Navy gun on it. We spent three or four days in Hawaii and saw the destruction, and went aboard some submarines.

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Then I got on another troop transport and went to Manis Island in the Admiralties. This was interesting.

They made me “officer of the day” and gave me a gun and everything, and this was again non-Navy, and I went around and found that the davits that launched the life boats were so rusted that they were inoperable and I raised some Cain and almost got into a fight with some merchant marine people who didn’t like me telling them how to run their jobs but they fixed them so that in case something happened at least they could have launched them because they couldn’t have launched them the way it was. The poorest paid merchant man – the cook – made more money than the captain of a destroyer. And I always sort of resented that, and then when they unloaded munitions on one of these islands the merchant marines would only work so long and then wouldn’t work and they would bring the Navy in, the Seabees, to do the merchant marine jobs. So I thought the merchant marines were sub-standard.

Valerie: This was all happening on the way to where you were stationed?

Lloyd: Yes, on the way to Mindoro. Part of Squadron 17 was still in the Hawaiian Islands and three boats were on Mindoro. Then the rest of the boats arrived on Mindoro. I was the third officer there. One of the boats was hit by a torpedo from a Japanese plane, went right through the bow but didn’t explode, but wrecked the boat. The commander, Bursaw, went , and I was made commanding officer of PT boat 229. That was the biggest honor of my entire life. I was only an ensign and we had full lieutenants as executive officers in our squadron. I was eager and really trying to do a job.

Valerie: Was the mood at that time. Fear?

Lloyd: Well, some of these guys were going out for the second time. There was no apprehension. One of these guys who went back for a second tour had two suitcases. One was filled with whiskey and the other half full of whiskey and half personal belongings. They gave you an A box, and it had some clothes and sea rations, a 45 automatic colt pistol and cartridge belt and odds and ends they thought we might need. And as soon as we got there we threw the cot away and stuff like that because we slept right there on the deck of the PT. I don’t ever remember sleeping down below. We had a little canopy that we rigged on the top of the boat and we slept on the deck. If I didn’t sleep under that, you would wake up stiff.

Valerie: Are you talking about when you were in harbor?

Lloyd: In harbor. The longest time I ever spent at sea away from land was 33 hours. Usually these patrols would last about 5 or 6 hours. There were still some Japanese on different parts of the island and we would go to a base on the northeast of there or Marinduque Island, and the Army had a little radio station there, and there was a guy named Mass that ran it, and it was lovely. We went in and the natives were there and they were lovely. We went into the mayor’s house one time and he was the only guy in town that had a bathtub. It was filled with drinking water. It was never used as a bathtub. The houses were all built on stilts and there were chickens running around below. They were lovely, lovely

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people, and at that time I thought the Filipinos were maybe the nicest people I've ever met. Of all my travels, I think they were the most kind and generous and loving people, even over the US.

Valerie: Were Japanese on that island?

Lloyd: No, not that island. Not Marinduque, but there were some on Mindoro and the little island of Lubang and of course there were a bunch of them on Luzon.

Valerie: What was your job on patrols?

Lloyd: Well we once went up to a Japanese submarine. We were supposed to destroy it, but I did it all wrong. You know if you hunt for deer the best way to do it is to go to a blind and sit where the deer are and wait for them to show up. You don't run up and down the woods. We were running up and down looking for this thing. If I had been smart we would have just stopped, turned the motors off and used our radar to see when one of these things surfaced. I did that wrong. I did a lot of things wrong. I ended up as squadron navigator.

Valerie: How many in a squadron?

Lloyd: There were 10 boats in a squadron, and ten enlisted men and two officers on each boat, so there were about 150 plus a base crew that looked after maintenance and electronic and radio people and a torpedo man that would replace the torpedoes that were fired.

Valerie: As navigator what did you do?

Lloyd: I would calibrate the compasses and things like that. Keep track of where we were. Use a maneuvering board to determine from radar the speed of the enemy ships relative to our speed and direction, and be able to fire a torpedo correctly and hit the target. In the battle of Surigao Strait they fired all their torpedoes and hit one cruiser by accident and sank it. If they had really fired those torpedoes properly they would have sunk five large Japanese ships.

The time we were out for 33 hours we were convoying what they called a 'double bubble', a barge with two tanks that could only make 6 knots and we were to keep the Japanese away. We were going into the Ragay gulf in southeastern Luzon and drop some guerillas onto Japanese held territory. We went to pick up the guerillas and that was almost the spookiest thing. There was this gorilla commander and we sat down at his table. He had people fanning us during the meal (no air conditioning) and others shooing flies away and he would give one of his underlings a command and that man would just turn white and run to do the captain's bidding.

We picked up the guerillas and found a forested place with no roads so the Japanese wouldn't have any good transportation, and we landed the guerillas on the sand beach and waited a little while. The maps we had were old and poor, and it worked out real good. Later on we picked up a Japanese at Calaran a

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northeastern city on Mindoro, that had been beaten up pretty good, and burned with cigarettes. I gave him a banana and I can still see the expression on his face. One of our sailors came up with a pistol and wanted to kill him but I wouldn't let him of course. So we took him in our PT boat to Mindoro and I imagine he was interrogated and killed because the standard procedure there was not to take prisoners. That was wrong of course, a violation of international law but common practice. It was too bad.

Valerie: Did you see that happening?

Lloyd: No, I did not see anyone killed but I have talked with many people that would actually kill them. And were given orders not to take prisoners. It was a no quarters type of thing. We need to interview some of these people and get what the truth really is. These Japanese weren't barbarians. They really weren't. We committed as many atrocities as they did. No question about it. I talked with people on Batangas where the Death March took place and the consensus was that it wasn't all that big a deal. That was according to the Filipinos. So I really don't know what the truth is but I see a different view that is not told in history books.

Walking down the beach on Mindoro who do I see but my brother. I thought he was in Squadron Four, a training squadron, but they shipped him out. Linc then went down to Samar where we had the largest base in the Philippines and was the executive officer of the base from which they supplied the other PT boat bases. When the war ended they gave some of the PT boats to the Russians who used them against us in Korea. A few were saved, but many cast into the sea along with brand new tanks. I wish I had taken the steering wheel off one of the boats. They were beautiful mahogany things, just gorgeous. I ended up with a YP and went from Manila to Hong Kong.

Valerie: What is a YP?

Lloyd: A Yard Patrol vessel. They were made to supply food and they had refrigerators and freezers on them. I was executive officer on the 641 and went from Manila to Hong Kong. Then I was given command of 348YP which was about 138 feet by 35 feet wide and we would take on 40 or 50 tons of frozen food from the big supply ships and then supply the ships in the harbor. We even played basketball. We took on guys from the cruiser Los Angeles and beat them in a basketball game even though there was a young all-state guy from Illinois on their team. We played in the Chinese YMCA.

Valerie: Why did you go to China? Was the war over?

Lloyd: The war was over then. But we were afraid of Russia taking over more of China than they took. We had felt that the US hierarchy didn't consider the Russians as their allies. There was turmoil in China and we were supporting the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek who were fighting the Communists, to ensure that Russia didn't take over huge chunks of China. When Chiang-Kai-shek was defeated on the mainland we transported them to Formosa which had been a Japanese colony for 80 years and belonged to China before that. Chiang-Kai-shek took a million and a half troops to Formosa and began

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to kill off the ruling class there. Many fled to Canada to avoid being killed. I can't understand any justification for anything we did in Formosa.

The day the war ended we were in a theatre watching "Oklahoma" when a guy came into the theatre and started shooting a machine gun. I thought "we've been invaded" but they never finished the play. We went back to the boats and started firing flares and all the ships in the harbor did the same thing so it almost looked like daylight.

Valerie: Even though the war was over that didn't mean you could go home. You knew that?

Lloyd: Oh no we still didn't. I didn't get home for a long time, a year after the war ended. I was in active duty four years and eleven months. We didn't get any leave out there either. Of course, my brother had spent a couple of years out there and went back for a second tour. And some of the time I felt sorry for those guys who went back for a second tour. I thought that they had earned their keep and there were other guys to do it but they had the experience. Which was worth something.

Valerie: Did you get some hours off each day?

Lloyd: Well, as captain of the ship we were just sitting in the harbor and it was pretty boring. I went ashore once and the people were starving and they would come up to you and want money or something, and they were grabbing me, fifteen or so on each side of me, and I ended up hitting them and that was a very painful thing for me, but I was almost in a panic. I didn't go ashore after that for almost a month. I picked up a punching bag and worked on that pretty regularly. The chief of police of the harbor used to bring me things, like a couple of pistols, in return for some jam and cigarettes I gave him. I swapped some things but I never sold things on the black market. Once another guy and I took an old jeep and drove up a dry river bed into the mountains. It was bumpy but we made it OK. Up there we saw people, aborigines, dressed in loincloths and carrying spears. We turned around and went back. These people were back in the mountains and all the while other Filipinos were in the modern world.

Valerie: Did you have your torpedoes shot at or....?

Lloyd: No, I saw some strafing and bombing off of Negros, and a Japanese plane that went down, and of course we landed some Japanese. It wasn't like Linc. When he was there he was standing about three feet away from another officer at the wheel and they saw tracer bullets go between them and neither of them was hit. One of Linc's men was killed, a motor mechanic, who stuck his head out to see what was happening and he got hit.

Valerie: When you were in the harbor for 30 days or so, what did you do?

Lloyd: Not much, a little reading, especially Navy books. Sometimes we went to Kowloon. I was going to go to Macau, but there was mainly opium and stuff like that and gambling and I just didn't go there. I bought some nice things from the vendors in Kowloon, shawls and wooden carvings. Once another

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sailor and myself got some coolies with their rickshaws and we put the coolies in the rickshaws and my buddy and I had a race through the streets pulling them. It was interesting. I forget who won but it was close.

Valerie: Did you write letters to gramma and grampa? Did you get letters?

Lloyd: Yes. One of my jobs as captain of the vessel was to be the censor. I had to read the mail of my men and edit out things that might let the enemy know where we were and how many ships we had and things like that. Linc actually wrote a letter home in which he underlined a letter in a word here and there that let the folks know where he was. I had a chance once to go on a bombing run over Formosa because I was pretty good with the 50 calibre gun. I was going to be in the tailgun on a B24, but the commanding officer of our group said No, you're not going to do that. We can't risk losing a man.

Valerie: So you were on that boat with those men for more than a year. That must have been quite an association?

Lloyd: Yes, it sure was. And people were nice. I got hacked off once when someone stole a little can of shrimp that my mom had sent me. I couldn't tell who did it, and no one told, so I didn't consider them family. This was on a later boat after the war ended. There was a guy who killed a Japanese and he was going to bring his head onto the boat to hang it on the mast, but I said no. Another of our guys was on the beach and found a skull and he was going to bring it aboard but I told him to bury it. I was actually shocked when we dropped the A bomb. We were preparing to invade Japan on September 15, but I was still hurt when we dropped the bomb. We killed more people with our A-bombs in Japan than we lost in both theaters in WW II, and most of those people were civilians. In Hiroshima there was a military base about 8 miles away and they didn't bomb it. At our reunions, some guys are still bitter over the Japanese and one would still bomb Tokyo today.

Valerie: Do you remember about being on St Martin's and Rock Island when you were a kid?

Lloyd: I remember playing in the sand on St Martins. I was probably only about 2 years old, and I remember falling off the pier, and I remember playing in a corner of the log cabin where my mother would bake bread for the 20 or 30 lumberjacks that were logging the island. I remember my Dad helping to build the big boat house on Rock Island.

Valerie: What was the landscape like in Mindoro?

Lloyd. It was gorgeous. There is a little bay in there with palm trees that is one of the most beautiful scenes I have ever seen. When we took the guerillas to land one of the guys yelled: "Shallow water, we are going to run aground." You could see huge jellyfish swimming, white and even black jellyfish and it looked like we were going to run aground and we put out the lead line and there was 9 fathoms of water, 54 feet, and the bottom was so clear that it looked like it was 10 feet down.

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Valerie: One of your assignments was to bring food to a leper colony. Were there some people on the boat who were concerned and afraid to go ashore?

Lloyd: They were concerned and there was a European man there who was looking after them and he said, suggested that we not touch them but he figured that there was no problem. Although this guy didn't have any eyebrows and Smiley Myers said that it was one of the symptoms of leprosy in the guy who was living there. But yes the people were pretty well crippled up and you looked at them and they just had stubs. But we were sent over there to bring them food and look after their well being.

Valerie: Thanks for talking about it.

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