

Interview with Norman Lindsey

Interviewer: Unknown

n.d.

The following is an interview that I taped of my father-in-law who served as an aviation maintenance mate 2nd class flight status during WWII while he was stationed in the Marianna's, Iwo Jima, Borneo, Tinian and Palawan. He served in the Indo-Chinese Theater from Feb. 18, 1944, to April 22, 1745. He was attached to the 164 Bomber Sqd.

Q: What branch of the service were you in?

A: Navy, I took my training at Jacksonville, Fla; in fact, I think I have some pictures at the PBY's that we trained in. They modified them to the PBUY Privateer for combat duty. After my training, I was sent to the Philippines and from there I was at bases on Iwo Jima, Marianna's, and Palawan. Those were my home bases; of course, we used all of the fields in that theater. Here's a picture of the "Privateer." Here's our squadron book showing each of the crews in the squadron. There's the first crew to go down in our squadron. Our plane captain had gone along for the fun, he never returned. His first time out and he got it. It really shook us up man; here we had only been there three days on Tinian. After that, every time a plane went down, we were just glad that it wasn't us. That's about all there was to it. The rule of survival, boy, you couldn't afford to worry about the other guys. Here's Younger our new ship captain. Younger was a very cautious man. I guess that's why I am here today. One time we really got mad at him though. We were out on a flight when we picked up a boat on our radar. When we honed him in, we found that it was a picket boat, which was a small wooden Jap boat, which had only one small gun on it. Man, we all had itchy fingers and we wanted to go down there and shoot him off the map. Younger, being the cautious person decided that it was shooting at us, so he peeled off and flew home. I mean we really got hostile towards him. We were just dying to go down there and the boat up. We were stationed at Iwo Jima at the time and told us that even Goodloe the daredevil of the squadron refused to attack a ship that day. Goodloe would fly up the river on Japan and shoot up ships on the rivers. Perhaps that's why he got shot down. But the picket boat would have been great target practice with very little chance of our being shot down because it did have only one gun which had very little maneuverability. Younger just wanted to make sure he got back state side.

Q: Then Younger could be said to be overly cautious?

A: Yes, but there was reason for it. You take there were some of the pilots, Goodloe was one of them, on whom we were taking bets that they would never make it back to stateside and there was quite a few of them that didn't.

Q: What was the length of most of the sorties? Time wise that is.

A: A lot of times we would fly for eighteen hours at a time, but it usually was for about twelve or thirteen hours. We'd fill all of the Bombay's full of fuel, we seldom carried bombs because our primary purpose was reconnaissance. We'd spot ships then we'd radio to a submarine, which would usually reach the boat in about one-half hour and sink them. Of course, we did carry bombs sometimes, but we didn't sink to many ships. We wouldn't take the chance of getting that close. We did lose about 35% of the squadron during my tour. I wound up at Palawan. You know Lindberg was there the same time I was. During the whole time that I was over there I never did get to land on Japan although I did see it several times when we were flying sorties in that area. In fact, I was on Palawan when the war ended. The most interesting island over there was Iwo Jima. It was a very important base because it was

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strategically located. If a plane was crippled while on a sortie, Iwo was real close, and it could land at Iwo instead of being lost at sea. You see planes from Tinian, Saipan, Guam, and Palawan were flying continuous sorties against the Japanese mainland and Iwo was absolute necessary, not only for crippled ships but also because the planes carried as little fuel as possible in order to carry more bombs. Here's a letter from one of the guys who got shot down but was fortunate enough to live to tell about it. Here's a picture of the sugar dog spawning grounds. That's what we called the building docks of the small wooden picket boats built by the Japanese. You know we had guan set huts on Palawan even before the officers did and, as you well know officers always get what they want before enlisted men. We flew all over French Indo-China and all those little islands in the area of the world. In fact, we were flying the sector next to Goodloe the day he got shot down. He radioed to us that he had an engine out and that he was landing at Saigon. Of course, we all wished that we were with him because he was landing at a strange base, but lucky for us that we weren't because he never made it. We had two planes get shot down over Borneo that was a hot spot and a half. Now Iwo Jima although it was a vital island was also a very small island. The airstrip took up half of the island.

Q: Were there very many natives on these islands?

A: Some of the islands didn't have any inhabitants and those that did the people were half-uncivilized and the rest were apprehensive because of their fear of the Japs.

Q: Did the officials censor the mail you sent out.

A: Yes. In fact, I really pulled a boner. My brother Bill was stationed at New Guinea while I was at Palawan and I wrote him a letter telling about everything that I did and what kinds of planes we had and everything. Well anyway they took my letter and posted it on the squadron bulletin board telling all the no-no's that you shouldn't write. But me and my mother had worked out a code so she would know where I was. We gave each island a man's name and I would tell her that I met so-and-so and then she would know where I was at. Of course, when they put my letter on the bulletin board it embarrassed the shit out of me. You know they wouldn't even let us throw cigarettes butts overboard because they thought it might be found by a Japanese boat. When we would fly along the coastline, we would fly real close to the ground so we could see any small craft on the beach and at Borneo, we flew so low that you could see the birds along the shoreline, and we'd open up our guns for a little target practice.

Q: How did it feel to fly real close to the Japanese mainland?

A: Well, it gave you a good feeling knowing that you were flying that close to the enemy's homeland, but you knew that they were tracking you by radar at the same time. In fact, we had this machine that would tell us if we were being tracked by radar and sometimes, we would be tracked by as many as five radar stations. That would give us an eerie feeling knowing that we were constantly being tracked. Here's my logbook. Could you read some of it? You know some of the flights that you took. "August 15, returned to base, war is over." "August 2, Palawan to Manila." "Last patrol Palawan to Samara and return from Samara to Palawan." We had kept on patrolling after the war was over. "State side bound, Palawan to Tinian, Tinian to Kwajalein." That's the island that they blew off the map with an atomic bomb. "From Kwajalein to Johnson Is. Then to Kaneda in Hawaii." "Patrol Sector 8" "Landed at Tawi Tawi." That reminds me of the time that we were flying around Borneo and we saw these two

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speedboats flying to beat hell trying to reach land and cover before we reached them. We wanted to go down and get them, but the captain wouldn't do it. "Patrol returned-one engine out." "Patrol returned losing gas." I remember that time. Someone had left the gas cap loose and the vacuum from the air while we were flying just sucked the gas out of the tank. "Landed at Clark Field." Now that's a big base. "Patrol 1, Celebes." "Duration of flight 10.9 hrs." I had 740.8 combat air hours. I had 46.9 the month of Sept. 46 Talk about spotting ships. We spotted a cruiser once. These cruisers would lay dead in the water just waiting for you to get nosy and go down and investigate then they would shoot you down. We lost a couple of planes that way. Why one plane would have about as much chance of sinking a cruise as a fly does in trying to kill an elephant. "Iwo Jima to Tinian." Tinian was a small island Norman; in fact, you could miss it if you weren't careful. You'd run out of gas just looking for the place. Once when we were flying pretty close to Tinian, we heard this plane radio in that it was lost and running out of gas. We could hear the conversation between Tinian and the plane and Tinian told the plane to hold on because they were sending out two chickens to guide them to the roost, and you know it wasn't but just a few minutes before two P51's were right beside of us telling us that they were there to guide them in. I can still hear Mr. Younger, our captain, saying, "Chickens we're not lost," and they peeled off and left. I never will forget that, "Chickens we're not lost." "Tinian to Saipan – test flight." We were testing out some new types of guns that were to be installed on the P51's. "Sept. 9 – Tinian to Kaneda, Hawaii." I voted absentee ballot for FDR while at Hawaii "Feb. 10 – Kaneda to Tinian." "Feb. 18 – covered Iwo Jima task force."

Q: Did you get any medals during your tour in the Pacific.

A: Oh, I got a few. I had a total of 740.8 combat hours. That's the reason that I got the seven air medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross and a couple of Gold Star Service Medals.

Q: You must be pretty damn proud of the DFC.

A: Not really. I think that it's a pretty cheap way of expressing appreciation, but you are right it is an honor to receive the DFC.