

LUTHER LYLES INTERVIEW

Matt: Rolling and we're speeding.

Linda: Mr. Lyles, look at me and tell me your name and your rank and what you did on the ship.

Luther: Luther....my name is Luther Curtis Lyles.

Linda: Start over.

Luther: My name is Luther Curtis Lyles and I was Seaman, First Class and a deck swabber, I guess you'd call it. Painting.....whatever they needed.

Linda: Whatever they told you to do you did, huh?

Luther: Right.

Linda: Who was your immediate supervisor?

Luther: I don't remember their name.

Linda: Szymanski?

Luther: Szymanski was his name. Oh, right.

Linda: Cause he was in charge of the boat, the deck crew.

Luther: Oh, yeah, well, he was the boatson....I mean, the boatson mate...

Linda: How old were you when you went into the service.

Luther: Eighteen. I was eighteen years old when I went in the service.

Linda: You look pretty young too, didn't you?

Luther: Yes, maam.

Linda: Where were you when you were enlisted, or did you get drafted?

Luther: Well, I was raised in Georgia. I turned eighteen in August and then in September they drafted me. Said, "Come on! I want you."

Linda: What'd you think about that day?

Luther: Well, I didn't like it, but wasn't nothing I could do about it. I got the greetings from the President of the United States, so I had to do what he wanted me to do.

Linda: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Luther: Yes, maam.

Linda: What did they say?

Luther: Good-bye.

Linda: And your mom and dad?

Luther: Good-bye.

Linda: Good-bye Luther.

Luther: Take care of yourself.

Linda: You left Dublin, Georgia and they shipped you off to the great lakes.

Luther: Yes, maam.

Linda: So where you had your...uh...boot camp....'So I went to boot camp in....'

Luther: Yeah, in Great Lakes, Illinois in...uh.....went training there and then when I got through with boot camp they sent me....well, I have about a week off and we went to....sent me to Fort Pierce, Florida. They had...uh...I can't even think of the name. Amphibious department down there and stayed there two or three days and then theys..._____needed some ship

mates in New York and they picked me and two more boys and then sent us to New York and got on the LST 534 in New York.

Linda: What did you think when you saw that ship for the first time?

Luther: Oh, man, that was a monster. I never seen a ship before.

Linda: And I bet you never seen New York before or the Great Lakes before. I mean, here you were a guy from Dublin, Georgia.

Luther: Just from Dublin, Georgia....(cannot understand).....that thing and it was so much there I didn't know what to do....what to do.

Linda: Did you ever sit there and say, "I wonder what I'm in store for."?

Luther: Yes, maam. I wondered what I was in store for, but...uh...had all new experience on an old Georgia boy come out of the woods.

Linda: When you got on the ship and they said, "Here's where you're going to sleep" who was around you? Do you remember that day?

Luther: I remember the day, but I don't know who was around me or anything about it. There was three of us went aboard and with the seabags on their shoulder and...uh...then they had I believe a runner at the gang plank and he carried us around to where we were...assigned us a bunk as we come on.

Linda: Who was the captain?

Luther: Pardon?

Linda: Who was the captain?

Luther: Captain French, R.J. French.

Linda: Do you remember the first day you ever met him?

Luther: No.

Linda: Didn't seem to make an impression on you, huh?

Luther: Well, it was taking a few days to get around. That's a big thing and a lot of walls, so...I don't know.

Linda: Who were your best friends on board the ship?

Luther: Well, they was....

Linda: Drew.

Luther: Lamay was....I forget his name now. Lamay and Alredge. We went through the boot training together, boot camp together....Fort Pierce and then went and got on the LST.

Matt: Linda, we need to make sure the questions are in the answer.

Linda: Okay. So Aldredge and Malay.

Luther: Malay. Yes, maam

Linda: Did you know my father?

Luther: Yes, maam. After you sent me the picture of him I remember the face.

Linda: So tell me...tell the people that are going to be watching....

Luther: Oh,...uh...

Linda: 'I remember your dad, Linda. He was...'

Luther: Well, I remember your dad, because he was the coxswain on there. I'm sorry.

Linda: That's alright. Did he ever take you to shore?

Luther: I'm sure he did, but I couldn't swear to it.

Linda: That's alright. I'm sure he did, too. Probably one time or another he took everybody...

Luther: Why I have no doubt. No doubt.

Linda: Did you have any times that you went on liberty after you got on board?

Luther: Yes, maam. We had liberty in Hawaii and man you talk about some good pineapple juice. You can't buy that now.

Linda: What else did you do in Hawaii?

Luther: That was it.

Linda: How long were you there? Do you remember? A week or...

Luther: No, it wasn't no week. Two or three...a couple of days. I think just long enough to let the port side go down and get them some pineapple juice and the starboard side go down to get their juice. They would...at liberty port side would get it one time and the starboard side would get it another time, divide it up. You didn't...well, he couldn't have more than me.

Linda: I can't even imagine. I remember when I first saw Hawaii. I was...I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen in my life. What was...what did you think when you first saw Hawaii?

Luther: Well, now it....there was a bunch of sunken ships around there and we was out...I don't know....I guess, the coxin had a pretty hard time a getting down to where we could get off and get on the dock for them sunken ships.

Linda: Because this was after Pearl Harbor.

Luther: Oh, Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, this was after Pearl Harbor.

Linda: Was there a devastation around?

Luther: Yes, maam. There was a plenty of it around. Them ships...Japanese came in and bombed Pearl Harbor, that's the reason we had World War II. I'm sorry, I'm getting it mixed up. I know you want....

Linda: That's okay. We can take out and rearrange and everything in post.
(Pause) When you were getting on the ship in New York and they said that you were going to go sailing over to the Pacific do you remember being scared?

Luther: They didn't tell us that we was going to go over to the Pacific. They just put you on the ship and you stayed with it. You went where it had to go.

Linda: Okay, that makes sense. Tell me about crossing the International Dateline.

Luther: Well, we crossed the International Dateline and they hollered the seaman...shipmates that's done been across why they had to initiate the greenhorns. Somehow or another they rigged up a tarpaulin(?) on the floor and put old salt water in and grease and oil and anything that they could put in it and stripped us down to our underwear and we go through a line and they'd have a two by four or a boat paddle or something or other and spanking you on the way down. If you run fast, well it....it wouldn't get so many licks. You had to get on pass them, you know, but anyway, then you put...go in it, dive in that border and come out the other side. GO get you a haircut, take ten snips, snap off a piece over here and over here...somebody'd take a razor and shave off a little bit back here and you had to get a haircut after it was all over with. Take you two hours to get

the grease and the grim and slime off of you after you go through there and then go down to the barber shop and get a shave head, a haircut. And the hair was just getting back long enough to where you could comb it after boot camp.

Linda: Okay, we got to stop here, because if you guys keep laughing and stuff you got to leave the room, because we can hear it. Matt, we gonna have to do that whole story again?

Matt: No, I think the story was okay.

Linda: Okay. Okay. Keep these two under control here. So your hair was just getting long enough, huh, and you had to get it all shaved again.

Luther: Yeah, I had to get it....well, as close as the clipper...the barber could clip it. We had to start all over again. It'd take a long time to grow your hair back out.

Linda: Tell me about getting thrown in the brigg. Where were you stationed at?

Luther: I was down...we was on the tank deck and...uh...the senior office come down was talking to the guy sitting right side of me and I put my feet up and my arms around my knees and laid my head over on their arms and said I was asleep. "I'm going to put you on report." So he did and we got up in front of the captain. "How do you plead?" "Not guilty." But then the right one spoke up and said he was asleep and I called him and put him on report. That's all he'd do and send you to the brig. I...bread and water....five days bread and water every third...bread and water....on bread and water for five days, one full meal every third day. That was it. It was

over with. But I had to wait a few days before they could put me in there and get another one out.

Linda: What was it like, the brig?

Luther: It was just a five, eight or something liken to that. You couldn't sleep in the bunk. They had a guard by the door, he had a dummy rifle, didn't have no ammunition, and...the bunk you could swing it upside to put upside the bulkhead, but you could take your blanket off and lay on the bulk...they wouldn't let you lay in the bed asleep in the day time. Down there it was close to the engine room it'd make to put you...want to go to sleep. You'd take your blanket of your bunk and put it on the floor and lay down there and go to sleep. Gained two pounds while I was in there. It was right close to the.....called it the canteen. One piece of the wire was broke lose up at the top. If you wanted a candy bar, just give a...somebody'd come down to buy some candy bar, you gave him the money, he goes to buy you a candy bar, bring it back and give it to you. An the cooks if they had something or other like apples...I don't know whether we had apples or not, but anyway, they was always giving me something or other when they'd come out of the freezer or the ice cream stuff. I gained two pounds while I was in there.

Linda: So you were on bread and water for three days and you gained two pounds.

Luther: Five days.

Linda: So you're on bread and water for five days.

Luther: Yes, maam. And one meal...one full meal every third day. So we got one full meal and when you go through the chow line and boy, they just pile that stuff on. "Man, I'm hungry." You know, they just pile it on. I couldn't...no way couldn't of eat half of it.

Linda: Now you have to say one thing over. You have to say, 'The brig is a room that's five by...'

Luther: Oh, the brig is about five by eight.

Linda: How many times were you in the brig?

Luther: One time. I was in the brig one time.

Linda: One time's enough, huh?

Luther: One time's enough. Yes, maam.

Linda: What do you remember about Captain French?

Luther: He was awful quiet. Looked like he was a straight and he didn't want...didn't have no...I don't know how you would put it, but...I guess.....he was talking to...the certain amount of officers, but he wouldn't have much to do with the seaman. I mean, they painting and all of this, that and the other around there, but he seemed to be awful quiet.

Linda: Did they have any incidents going from San Diego and Hawaii and Guam and Sapin over to Okinawa that you remember?

Luther: Not that I remember. No, maam. Of course, when we crossed the International Dateline....

Linda: So you ended up in Buckner Bay. Tell me about that, the day that you....the day before the kamikaze attack.

Luther: All I know is it...uh...when we pulled in there and docked they started unloading. The CB's started unloading the tank deck. Well, we stayed on general quarters pretty early all night. Then the next morning we was on general quarters again and then the plane come around and hit us. And where I was at it come around the fan tail and hit the right side. I was on the opposite side from where he hit.

Linda: What were you doing when he hit?

Luther: I was down manning my gun. We was under general quarters.

Linda: So after the plane hit then what happened? Were you on damage control or did you stay on the gun, or...?

Luther: No. That other part was on damage control. All I was on was....stayed with my gun until they had the fire and when they got the fire and they got....the fireman got the hoses nd put the fire out. And then...I'm messing up. I'm sorry.

Linda: That's alright. It's hard to remember, isn't it? That was a long time ago. One thing you told me that you thought was real neat was the day the war was over.

Luther: Oh, yes. Oh, right.

Linda: Tell me, 'The day the war was over....' and tell me all about it.

Luther: The day the war was over I was standing guard late in the afternoon. I was standing guard up on top....on topside and I don't remember where they was having the movie at, but it was below the top deck. The ship close by....I heard it on the....

Linda: Mr. Lyles, hold on a minute. There's a siren outside and we'll pick it up on the...could you hear it?

Luther: Okay.

Linda: Hold on a minute. Stop tape. Now, start over again, 'The day the war was over...'

Luther: The day the war was over I was standing guard on the tank...on the top deck and the crew was down....I heard it on the address system on a ship in the harbor close by, that the war was over, so I go down to where they're having the movie at and told them that the war was over and everybody come back to the topside and when we got back tot he topside there was...uh...all the ship sin the harbor, or some of the ships was in the harbor was shooting the guns and a lots of them were...they had tracer bullets in there and boy, it was something rather likin to Fourth of July celebration or something or other and all them guns and the tracers was going all up in the air. I don't know where we shot any, but the captain....534 shoot any or not. I don't remember that. But that was a happy day. I can go home now baby.

Linda: But you didn't go home.

Luther: No. Not til...they wouldn't let us go. But the war was over, thank goodness. Nobody else'll get hurt. Then we had a typhoon that come along and broke us loose from the Liberty ship we was tied up against. We had quite a go....scare with that. There was a typhoon come and broke us a loose and they....motorman's....uh....one of the engines was hard to start

and it.....it cranked one engine, the steering...when we caught on fire the steering burn up. They couldn't steer it by the wheel. The only way they could steer was one motor ahead and one back. And one engine that couldn't start for...right off, and then this big old Liberty ship he ws going to stay anchored in the harbor and most of the ships that could get under way well, they went on out to see. But anyway, he broke....he was dragging anchor, or broke anchor or something or other and it was heading right for us. The bow....whenever we seen him...the saltwater was over and it drowned the generator out and we didn't have no light, so the captain got one of the signalmen out there with his portable light. Anyway, ships come together closer...they turned and got side by side, up and down and one man got off of the LST 534, got over there on the Liberty ship and they made him get back off of the Liberty ship back over on the LST. They just part and never did touch. It just parted. I don't see how in the world he done it.

Linda: So you mean one of the ship mates jumped.

Luther: Yes, maam, got off of the 534. It was the radar man. I don't know what....don't remember his name, but it was radarman and he jumped off the LST 534 over to the Liberty ship and he landed on the Liberty ship and they made him come back.

Linda: Who made him come back?

Luther: Huh?

Linda: Who made him come back?

Luther: The officers. He was going to get on that and he....see....it was underway. He was going to go out in the deep, out in the water and then the LST running around there and floating around it, it's crippled and...on engine a running. They finally got it to running and it'd take it all night to get it to the beach. The next morning we was sitting up on the edge of the beach.

Linda: What would have happened to that kid if he would have stayed on the Liberty Ship?

Luther: I don't know. Well, he'd to have had to transfer from something or other, but I'm sure they would have figure out a way to change his papers.

Linda: Maybe he would have ended up in the brig.

Luther: Well, he probably would have. You'll have to check. I guess that would be deserting, wouldn't it?

Linda: So you landed on a beach.

Luther: Yes, maam, after the typhoon hit. We finally wound up on the beach.

Linda: That must have been scary.

Luther: You drew up. I mean, you couldn't do nothing. It was scary. Yes, maam.

Linda: How long were you on the beach? For like a couple of months or...?

Luther: Oh, I don't know. We left the ship on the beach. And they put it back on the tent....I mean, back on the ground over there, on the mountain in tents. And then we got to come home. The last account I had they was going to decommission it. I don't know what they done to it. I haven't seen anybody to talk to or anything about it.

Linda: You'll have to watch the documentary and find out what happened to it.

Luther: Well, thank you. I will do that.

Matt: Linda, you may want to do a little forehead

Linda: Okay, we're going to stop for just one second. (Pause) We're almost done.

Luther: Well, good.

Linda: So when you got transferred off the 534, did you go home?

Luther: Yes, maam. When we got to San Diego they was going to give us a week or two. Anyway, we told Captain...the Lieutenant Wright that if we didn't get survivors leave, a thirty day leave, we were going to jump ship, we wasn't coming back 'til the thirty days was up. So we...they gave us thirty...survivors leave. Thirty days. I had to go back to San Diego and stayed there for two or three weeks and then they shipped me back to Jacksonville give me my discharge.

Linda: So you really were only in the service maybe fourteen months or something, right?

Luther: Well, from '44 to '46-'47....well, it lacked a little bit being two years, wouldn't it?

Linda: Yeah.

Luther: Somewhere likin to that.

Linda: Were you excited to go home?

Luther: Yes, maam. I had enough of that.

Linda: Have you kept in touch with any of your shipmates over the years?

Luther: No, ma'am. I have not touched....I've talked to Richard Drew two times after I got home and then I left Georgia and came to Florida and I haven't talked to...until you got this started. You bringing back all that old memory that done faded out and what....forgetting.

Linda: What do you think about, now that you are 71, what do you think about having such an impact in World War II? Are you proud of that?

Luther: Well, I'm proud of what I done. I mean, as much as I done. I don't figure I'm no hero or anything liken to that, but I'm proud I went and done what I could.

Linda: When you got back home was it hard to get a job?

Luther: No, ma'am. When I got back home I hadn't made up my mind what I wanted to do. I went back to mom and pop and fooling around and a fella...uh...two or three weeks he come by and wanted to know what I was doing and I told him 'Nothing.' And he said, "Well, I want you to go put some planters on that tractor for me, in the morning." I said, "Well, okay." Go to work. There was plenty of work.

Linda: When did you meet your wife? You didn't know your wife when you were in the service, right?

Luther: No, ma'am. I met my wife after I come from....got out and she was a nurse in the hospital. A friend of mine was dating a girl up there, so he taking me along to date her and from that we've been married 51 years the 31st of this last January.

Linda: Well, congratulations.

Luther: Fifty-one years with the same woman.

Linda: She must have liked red hair.

Luther: She did.

Linda: Do you have children?

Luther: Yes, maam. Two adopted.

Linda: Two adopted kids.

Luther: Yes, maam.

Linda: So nobody got to inherit your red hair, huh?

Luther: No.

Linda: If you had to describe the personality of the ship, how would you describe that? The personality of the crew.

Luther: Well, I don't think you could find a better....well, it wasn't no bickering or no....it was...everything seemed to mesh together. I don't...I can't explain it to you.

Linda: A good bond, huh?

Luther: It just bonded. I mean, we had a job to do and we done it...went out there and done it and got it over with, I think, and then we were ready to come back home.

Linda: Nothing like coming home, right?

Luther: Right.

Linda: Is there anything else you want to say?

Luther: I want to tell you 'Thank you' for getting...bringing some of that old cobwebs straightened out...some of them, in my mind, but now, you got it

started I want to see all of these here all shipmates that's still left and renew that...I don't know how you explain it...friendship it used to be, put it that a way.

Linda: Tell me how you felt when you saw Johnny Madeiros down in the lobby.

Matt: I'm done in ten seconds here.

Linda: Oh, wait a minute. We got to change tape. (Tape change) Okay, you need to tell me what you thought when you first Johnny Madeiros in the lobby downstairs.

Luther: When I first saw Johnny Madeiros down in the lobby I thought it was Overstake. I knew it was a ship mate, but I had my names on the wrong pictures up here in these cobwebs. But I had to go over and ask him if he was Overstake and then it...he just called me...what...two or three weeks ago and talked to me on the phone. I figured we'd get all of this together when we had the Florida Association, I was going to beat them all. And then you'd come along and want to do this over here now and going to get me just today and then some tomorrow, but I'm going to go home tonight and come tomorrow, if that's alright with you.

Linda: Oh, we'd appreciate it. We're going to have another room you can all sit in and be air conditioned.

Luther: Well, I'm fine right now. Don't worry about that.

Linda: You know, like I would never ever be able to say what you can say that you were on a ship with these same people for over a year, so when you saw him was it a little bit exciting or?

Luther: Well, I don't know how to explain myself. I far from wondered what happened to them while after I left Georgia and then you don't see one...that was 53 years now and then you know it's there, but it just don't...you can't put the name to it. Or get it, put a name to it and it's the wrong one. But....Lordy Mercy.

Linda: Did you ever talk to your wife about your time on board the ship?

Luther: Not too much. I told her about being in the brig and there was two or three, what you call them smart alecs, they want to do this and then want to do that, but always talk them out of it or something or other. But that's all.

Linda: Well, do you have anything else? I don't have anymore questions.

Luther: Well, that's fine. I don't have anything else to....

Linda: You have no more answers, huh?

Luther: No more answers. No

END INTERVIEW