

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
DONALD LIEBMANN,  
U. S. Navy, World War II

2003

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**Liebmann, Donald**, (1923- ), Oral History Interview, 2003

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 25 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

The Preble (now known as Green Bay), Wis. native discusses his World War II service as an engineering officer aboard LSM (Landing Ship Medium) 129. He talks about participation in Naval ROTC at Marquette University (Milwaukee, Wis.), meeting his crew in Charleston (South Carolina), and shakedown cruise. Liebmann mentions rescuing the crew of a torpedoed LST, landing at Palawan and other Pacific islands, his opinion of the atomic bomb, discharge from the service, and joining his family's business after the war.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Liebmann (b. May 6, 1923) served with the Navy in the Pacific theater of World War II. He was an officer aboard LSM 129.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2003.

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

**Interview Transcript**

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And we are at Chula Vista Resort, in the Dells. Today is June 2, 2003. And we are talking today with Don Liebmann, a veteran of the United States Navy in World War II. Don, before we get started, can I get your home address?

Liebmann: 508 South Langlade Court, Green Bay, Wisconsin. 54301.

John: And can I get your phone number in case I want to call and get a spelling, or something?

Liebmann: 920-339-0833.

John: Okay. Don, if we can just start at the beginning. When were you born?

Liebmann: May 6, 1923.

John: Okay. Where?

Liebmann: In Green Bay. It's Green Bay now. It was Preble, at the time. Town of Preble.

John: Oh, okay. Town of Preble. Early life? Family?

Liebmann: Well, I had two brothers and sisters, and ordinary life, I guess, in those days.

John: Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

Liebmann: I sure do.

John: Can you tell me something about that?

Liebmann: Well, I was at Marquette University at the time.

John: Okay.

Liebmann: I was in the Naval ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] down there.

John: What were you taking at Marquette?

Liebmann: Engineering. I was having lunch in the Student Union when I heard it.

John: I remember, we didn't know where Pearl Harbor was.

Liebmann: I knew where it was.

John: Okay. How did you get into the Navy?

Liebmann: Well, I was in the Naval ROTC. I joined that in the Spring of '41, they signed us up. And started that Fall. Fall of '41.

John: Okay. And then when did you go in to active duty?

Liebmann: Well, they put us on active duty in the Summer of '42, but we stayed in college to study and then in February of '44, January or February, one or the other, they commissioned us ahead of time because they needed officers for these LSM's [Landing Ship Medium] they were building. I got my commission and went to Little Creek [Virginia] to take training for the LSM's.

John: I spent some time at Little Creek. I had never seen an LSM until they got a model of one in the Vets Museum in Madison. I was on LST's [Landing Ship Tank] and APA's [Assault Personnel Attack], but I had never seen an LSM. Where did you and your ship meet up?

Liebmann: In Charleston, Virginia, or South Carolina, not Virginia.

John: South Carolina, okay.

Liebmann: Yea, that is where we picked it up. They built it there.

John: Were they named, or just numbered?

Liebmann: Just numbered.

John: What was the number?

Liebmann: 129. We were the fourth one built, in Charleston.

John: Okay. What was your billet on it?

Liebmann: I was the engineering officer.

John: The engineering officer. How big a crew?

Liebmann: About fifty men and five officers. Enlisted men. We were all men.

- John: Oh, yea. Unlike today. Okay, you reported aboard. What happened then?
- Liebmann: Well, we had a shake-down cruise out in the ocean, there, from Charleston. And fixed a few minor things that were still wrong with it. And then we went up to Little Creek.
- John: Out of the five officers, were any of you experienced sailors?
- Liebmann: No.
- John: You didn't have to be, I guess.
- Liebmann: Our commanding officer was a lieutenant (j. g.) and he was an older fellow who had come up through the ranks. I don't really know his background other than that, but he had seen some sea duty, and our executive officer was a young fellow who had served some time on the [battleship] South Dakota. But he wasn't really happy coming to an LSM.
- John: Yea. That is quite a step down. After the shake-down cruises?
- Liebmann: Well, then they made a training ship out of our ship, to train crews for other LSM's. We spent two or three months in the Chesapeake Bay doing that. And the outer islands, Chincoteague Island and some of the others.
- Irv Koren: I have one more, a couple more. I'll have one more come in here, so he is on deck.
- John: Okay. Okay. Is that okay, if someone...?
- Liebmann: Sure.
- John: Okay, that is fine. That is great. Okay, how long did you train other crews?
- Liebmann: Until November, of '44. Yea. Then, on Thanksgiving Day, we left and went down, stopped at Key West, I don't know what for. We stopped there, anyhow. And we went through the Canal and across, all by ourselves. No ship to accompany us.
- John: What kind of armament did you have on an LSM?
- Liebmann: We had one forty millimeter on the bow and four twenty millimeters, two on each side and two astern. And I think there were a couple .50 caliber machine guns, too.

- John: Well, fortunately, you didn't need them, going over there.
- Liebmann: We didn't run into anybody, going over. Not until later. We dropped off the cargo that we had, which was small boats, LCM's [Landing Craft Mechanized] and LCVP's [Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel] at Tulagi, next to Guadalcanal.
- John: In the Solomons.
- Liebmann: Yea. Then we went up to, and stopped in New Britain, and over to Hollandia, New Guinea. And picked up a convoy, from there on. And we were four or five days out, and one of the LST's in the convoy took a torpedo.
- John: Oh, wow. Oh, man.
- Liebmann: Broke the LST in two. The stern went down within seconds, took most of the Navy crew with it. And the bow, it was listing pretty badly, but the commander of the convoy told us to go over and pick up everybody we could find, that was left on the ship. And we got about three hundred guys off of that hulk and out of the water. We transferred them to another LST, then. We didn't have room for them on our little ship. That was the LST 577, if I remember right. We transferred them to the 1028, if I have the right numbers in my head. I got the numbers at home, but I didn't bring them along with me.
- John: You didn't know you'd be taking a test here.
- Liebmann: No
- John: Okay. Then where?
- Liebmann: Well, we were headed for Leyte when that ship took the torpedo. And from there, we took another convoy going through the Mindanao Sea and up to Mindoro, which was just east of Luzon. And on that trip, the destroyer escort that was escorting us took a torpedo.
- John: Oh, man. You were bad company.
- Liebmann: We knew there was a war going on, by that time.
- John: Oh, yes.
- Liebmann: That torpedo killed about twenty men on that destroyer escort. But they went back and got picked up, and lived to fight again, that ship.

- John: This was about when? This was early 1945?
- Liebmann: Yea. That was in January or February of '45. I forget the exact date.
- John: Okay. Did you make any of the landings?
- Liebmann: Yes, from Mindoro, we joined a convoy that was going to land on Palawan, which is the westernmost island of the Phillipines. Porto Princessa was the port.
- John: Do you know how to spell that?
- Liebmann: Porto Princessa?
- John: No, the other.
- Liebmann: Palawan? P-a-l-a-w-a-n. Palawan.
- John: When I get to transcribing this in a couple of days, I'll forget that totally.
- Liebmann: Yea, that is right. That is easy to happen. We didn't have too much trouble with the Japs on that island. They had a couple of LCI's [Landing Craft Infantry], several of them, rigged up with rocket launchers, and they blanketed the beach good before they had to go in.
- John: One of the fellows here was telling me he was on an LSMR, which was a rocket ship.
- Liebmann: That was a rocket launcher. Some of the later LSM's were changed into LSMR's. But they had previously converted some of the LCI's to rocket launchers, and that was what they used in this operation.
- John: Sure. Okay, after Palawan?
- Liebmann: Well, we made a couple of runs, oh, half a dozen runs on small islands around Mindoro, Marandique and Romblon, and some of the others, carrying in supplies for the army and marines. And we had to go back down to Hollandia to get a load for Batangas in southern Luzon. After that, they were invading Borneo, at Balicapan. They needed ammunition for the cruisers, bombarding the beach down there. So we had to take supplies of [unintelligible] down there for them. We picked that up at Leyte and were supposed to join a convoy at Tawi Tawi to get down to Borneo but by the time we got there, they had left so we had to be on our own again. We caught up with them, but they didn't let us get close, because we had the ammunition aboard.

- John: I can imagine. Yea.
- Liebmann: Going into the harbor at Tawi Tawi, we saw mines floating in the water, so we used small arms and plugged them. We didn't have to use our ship to explode them. We supplied two cruisers down there. I forget the names. One I can imagine.
- John: That's okay. They aren't important. Your story is what we are waiting for.
- Liebmann: We got the ammunition transferred over to the cruisers and we went back by Mauritai and to Leyte. And it wasn't too long after that the atom bomb went off.
- John: Yea, that is what they were saying, some of the other fellows, I don't care what you think of the atom bomb, if it hadn't gone off, you guys would have been the front edge [of the invasion of Japan].
- Liebmann: We would have been right on the front edge of it.
- John: You would have taken the guys right in. Yea. That's right. What was the general feeling among Navy guys when they heard about the bomb?
- Liebmann: They were glad.
- John: Oh, yet?
- Liebmann: When we heard that, all the pyrotechnics and everything they had to shoot up in the air that would make sound.
- John: Like the 4th of July.
- Liebmann: Big 4th of July celebration.
- John: That was my birthday, August 6. I was nine years old.
- Liebmann: You were just a kid. You can still remember that?
- John: Oh, yea. Okay, then, after the bomb and after the surrender, what did you do?
- Liebmann: Well, our captain had enough points to get out, so he flew home, or he took a ship home. I don't know how he got home. But he went home. And a couple of weeks later, our executive officer got his orders to leave. That left me to command the ship. So, I got the ship back.



John: Did you? Back to where?

Liebmann: Orange, Texas.

John: Okay. I never heard of the Navy there.

Liebmann: Well, they had a whole mess of these LSM's lined up there in moth-balls. They were moth-balling them.

John: I see. Okay. I remember seeing the ships at, somewhere near Norfolk, there.

Liebmann: They lined them up in various ports.

John: Chained them together and just, a hundred of them, or so.

Liebmann: Yea. I don't know how many were there, but there were quite a few.

John: Okay. And after that, who long did you stay in after the war ended?

Liebmann: We commissioned the ship on May 6, '44, and on May 7, I think it was, or May 13, we decommissioned it in Orange, Texas, two years later. I was aboard for those two years.

John: Okay.

Liebmann: I think there were only four or five men other men that stayed aboard for the full two years. Otherwise, they were transferred.

John: Then, did you get out? And come home?

Liebmann: I came home.

John: Did you have reserve time you had to do?

Liebmann: Yea, but they had so many people they didn't know what to do with them. So I didn't do much.

John: Okay. How about when you came out, vets organizations? The Legion, or the VFW?

Liebmann: I didn't join anything until maybe ten or fifteen years ago, when they had all this to-do about the flag being desecrated. The Legion put on a big recruiting drive,

and I signed up them. I joined the Legion. Otherwise, I never got in to anything.

John: When did you get in with this group?

Liebmann: '91. St. Louis. St. Louis was the first organization, the first reunion I went to. I believe that was the third one they had.

John: Yea.

Liebmann: I heard about it from my previous commanding officer. He had heard of it from one of our cooks.

John: Did you stay in contact with people after you got out?

Liebmann: No. Didn't know where they were, or anything. But, oh, about '88 or '89, somewhere in there, I got to thinking, I want to see if I can find some of these guys. And I located quite a few. Found out from the Veterans Administration there was about twenty of them were dead, with the dates, and so on. And I think two or three, I located two or three live ones from that source, and various other sources. And then we started to come together, one at a time, and another one, and there was about twenty or twenty-five of us that we know of now, that are still alive.

John: That's great. That's quite a story. What did you do after the war?

Liebmann: Went into the family business.

John: What was that?

Liebmann: My dad and uncle had a slaughter house, Liebmann Packing Company, in Green Bay. And by that time they had acquired a rendering plant in Appleton to take care of their inedibles. And I ran that, Liebmann Rendering.

John: Thinking back, you got taken right out of your life and sent overseas. Thinking back from here, what is your reaction to that?

Liebmann: I was glad of the experience, but I don't think I would want to do it again.

John: Okay. I know a lot of people say exactly that. That's great. That is a great story. Anything else you want to put on there before we wrap this up?

Liebmann: I can't think of anything at the moment. Probably tomorrow, I'll think of something.

John: Yea, like me. Probably think of fifty things. This is a great story. I need a release, okay?

Liebmann: Sure.

John: And what the release will do...

**[End of Interview.]**