Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ROBERT LIZON

Navy, World War II

2014

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Lizon, Robert. (b.1925). Oral History Interview, 2014.
Approximate length: 1 hour 47 minutes
Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Robert Lizon discusses his World War II service as a signalman with the Navy Armed Guard, his boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center (Illinois), signalman's training in San Diego (California), using the G.I. Bill for schooling after the war, and being in the Navy Reserves. Lizon explains hearing the news about Pearl Harbor, and what he was doing that day and how that event inspired him to enlist in the Navy. He describes his boot camp at Great Lakes and signalman's school at San Diego. He discusses being assigned to the Navy Armed Guard and his reaction to his first assignment aboard a Liberty Ship in the Aleutian Islands. Lizon outlines the three ships he served on and provides a sketch of life aboard the different ships. He describes his reactions to V-E day and the dropping of the atomic bombs. Lizon then discusses being discharged and going to college on the G.I. bill, and staying in the Navy Reserves until his retirement.

Biographical Sketch:

Robert Lizon (b. 1925) served with the United States Navy Armed Guard during World War II, and stayed with the Navy Reserves for 37 years.

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, 2014.
Transcribed by Charles N. Bellinger, 2015.
Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.
Abstract by Jennifer Kick, 2016.

Transcribed Interview

Brooks: Today is Tuesday, April 8, 2014. This is an interview with Robert Lizon, who served with the US Navy Armed Guard during World War II. The interview is being conducted at Mr. Lizon's home in Madison, Wisconsin, and the interviewer is Ellen Brooks. So I can call you Bob?

Lizon: Please do. Good morning, Ellen.

Brooks: Good morning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Lizon: I was born in Kaukauna, Wisconsin on February 8, 1925.

Brooks: Okay, great—

Lizon: I will soon be ninety.

Brooks: Can you tell me a little bit about what you were like growing up?

Lizon: I was a lovable kid, the pride of the family. I ended up being the oldest because I had a brother that died in infancy, so I became the oldest boy of the family, and had a wonderful childhood at Kaukauna, Wisconsin.

Brooks: And how many siblings did you have?

Lizon: I had an older brother who died, and then I had two younger sisters and a younger brother.

Brooks: And what did your parents do for a living?

Lizon: My dad was a steamfitter, a pipefitter at a paper mill in Kaukauna; my mother was a homemaker, and then actually had employment during World War II while both my dad and I were in service in the Navy, and then my mother was a seamstress after the war, and was an excellent clothing maker.

Brooks: Great! And so what were you doing prior to 1941, prior to the September—?

Lizon: Strictly a student, grade school, middle school, in those days it was called junior high school, and then Kaukauna High School. Pearl Harbor happened in my senior year and a group of us went down to the Navy recruiting station to join up in December of 1941 and the recruiter was very intelligent and said, "You guys, first of all, you're only sixteen years old, so you can't get in the Navy, and the Navy runs on brains, so we want to be sure that everybody at least has a high school education, so after you all become seventeen and are graduates of high school, come and see us and we'll take you in."

Brooks: So that Sunday that Pearl Harbor happened, do you remember where you were and how you heard?

Lizon: I was at a CYO dance, looking for girls in Menasha, Wisconsin with three of my best buddies, and we were at a dance and we heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor was bombed, so we immediately got into the car and went back to Kaukauna, went back to our favorite local restaurant, and hundreds, dozens of us hung around the radio, listening to the news about Pearl Harbor. All of us had friends who were in service pre-Pearl Harbor and we were very worried about, especially three of my buddies who were on ships in Pearl Harbor. All three of those were bombed. Fortunately no casualties with our Kaukauna friends but it was a very terrifying day.

Brooks: So what were your feelings when you went to the recruiter?

Lizon: Uh, patriotism, combination of anger, a desire to want to make up for what we thought was really a dastardly deed, and a feeling in the high school and in the community of togetherness, of oneness, that we're going to make this thing right and we're going to get the heck and get this country going. It also involved my father who was a World War I sailor, and when Pearl Harbor happened, he volunteered to the Navy to see if he could be used and they gladly took him back as a ship fitter.

Brooks: So what was your reaction to the recruiter when he told you that—maybe you weren't ready yet?

Lizon: We thought it made sense that it was a little early to go and high school was important to finish and to get that high school diploma.

Brooks: And the Navy, was that because your dad was a sailor?

Lizon: All my life, I heard nothing but Navy. My dad loved the Navy, he loved his World War I experience, told me constantly stories about what he did in World War I. I ended up being a signalman in the Navy, and ironically he tried to be a signalman in World War I, and because he was from a family that was very disorganized he ended up in an orphanage and did not get a great deal of education. He claimed he didn't have enough smarts to make signalman. But he remembered the Morse code, so he would try to teach me the Morse code. He'd take me into the living room, and he blinked the living room lights with the Morse code, which drove my mother nuts because she said, "The neighbors will see all these lights blinking off and on and they'll think there's some kind of a family emergency and the cops will be at our door shortly, so you guys better stop that training in the Morse code." But that was part of my orientation and I knew from little on that as soon as I finished high school I would be in the Navy, whether there was a war or not.

Brooks: Okay, so then, so you're sixteen and the recruiter turns you away for now. What happens next?

Lizon: Finish high school, uh, my dad leaves for the Navy, he was stationed in Staten Island, New York, and had some thoughts about maybe moving the family out, which, uh, scared the heck out of me 'cause I really didn't want to leave

Kaukauna, and New York seemed like such a bizarre place, but the next letter we got from him said, "Don't worry about moving to New York, because I just got assigned to a ship, even though the Navy said I was gonna be in a shipyard, and I'm on my way to Africa. So I don't know when I'll see you guys again." So we just made our home in Kaukauna, then, for the entire World War II.

Brooks: And what were your thoughts when you got that letter from your dad?

Lizon: Uh, I think surprise that he was at sea; he was forty-two years old, and as a high school senior I thought forty-two looked pretty ancient. I wondered about my dad being able to stand the rigors of life at sea, especially. He was assigned to a very small ship, either a patrol craft or sub chaser. It was very tough living for a guy his age. But he survived the whole war and served on several ships, and was involved in a number of naval engagements that were pretty scary.

Brooks: So when did you finally enter service?

Lizon: I tried to enter as soon as I graduated from high school, but I was only seventeen and my mother refused to sign. She said, "Your dad in the Navy is enough," so I got enlistment papers from the recruiter, I sent them to my dad, and asked him to sign, and he sent them back unsigned, he says, "Your mother is right. Just wait a while before you get in the Navy." So I kept pestering and pestering, and before I turned age eighteen, I told my mother it was just very important to me that I be in the Navy when I was seventeen years old, and she gradually relented and I did get into the Navy before I was eighteen.

Brooks: Okay. And so this is 1942, or—

Lizon: Actually, in 1942 the papers were signed, but because of the Christmas holidays, and because there were so many enlistments, the Navy couldn't build facilities fast enough to train sailors, they delayed my entrance until February.

Brooks: Okay, so February 1943. So can you tell me a little bit about the induction and those first few weeks?

Lizon: It was confusing, it was scary, it was demanding. We actually—we were enlisted in Milwaukee, we were put on a train at night, like at midnight, and got to Great Lakes like about two in the morning, got unloaded, we were stripped of our clothes, they were all packaged in boxes and addressed to our home, and we were given temporary uniforms to wear until we got into the boot camp, and then the following week we were issued complete uniforms, and it was in the middle of winter, in February, very, very cold. The barracks were just lumber and tar paper, very cold; they had big stoves for heating, and my dad who was in the Navy and knowledgeable told me that to avoid a lot of problems in boot camp, I should sign up for things. I happened to be a bugler in the Sons of the American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps, so he said, "Well, you're a good bugler, so sign up to be company bugler; that'll get you out of marching," I was a boxer in high school for four years and not real good but enough to survive, so he said "Sign up for the boxing teams," I did both of

those things, but I didn't realize that reveille was at six but the bugler got up at five and I got out on the drill field to blow into the megaphone and the microphone, and it was so cold it almost froze to my lips. So I thought that was a dumb decision, and on the boxing team I won a couple of fights and then I met a Golden Glove champion from Cleveland, Ohio, who hit me when the bell sounded for the first round and for three rounds I just took nothing but a beating and in fact I think I ate soup for about a week. So I wrote my dad and told him the boxing thing was a bad idea, then I thought of what else I could do, and I was in the mixed chorus and the boys' glee club in high school, so I signed up for the Great Lakes Choir, which I thought was safe. I found out that we had three church services on Sunday mornings and we had to sing at all three, so, Sunday mornings were very busy. The highlight of being in the Great Lakes Choir, there was a bond drive at Soldiers' Field in Chicago, the main speaker was the wife of Chiang Kai-Shek, who was the Premier of China, and her name was Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, and our Great Lakes Choir was asked to be part of the ceremony at Soldiers' Field, so I saw Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, which was really a highlight of my boot camp experience.

Brooks: That's great! So when you went into training for boot camp and everything, were you with anyone that you knew? Did you go in with friends?

Lizon: No, and I was the only one from Kaukauna, but I made friends very, very quickly. There was a lot of camaraderie at boot camp because you all suffered the same pangs from the chief that ran the unit, and of course they were very demanding. I think one of the biggest shocks was early on, maybe the first week I was given head cleaning—a head is a toilet—and I'd had no idea about head cleaning, or toilet cleaning, because my mother always did it, and so to be handed a toilet brush and cleaning fluids, and cleaning up after a hundred twenty guys that used the head was--that was really a shock for me.

Brooks: I can imagine. So, can you tell me—

Lizon: And doing my own laundry was also—my mother always did that, and you had to do your own laundry at boot camp. That took a lot of relearning, too.

Brooks: And what about, um, obviously you did a lot of activities and things, but I'm sure you couldn't avoid a lot of the training, was it pretty rigorous?

Lizon: Oh, uh, in spite of boxing and glee club and bugling, I still had to do a lot of marching. One of the nice things about boot camp, they started early, evaluating each of the persons in the boot company to see what you were best suited for in the Navy. I wanted to be—I started to be a quartermaster. Quartermaster are people that are involved with navigation—they're also involved with visual signaling. And I had a counselor who I still remember to this day, from 1943. He might have been a high school teacher that was in the Navy as a counselor, he was just such a perfect guy and you had to take a lot of tests to evaluate what you might be suited for, and so when we got all done, he looked it all over, and he said he thought I was best suited to be a signalman. I thought, well, I think that might be better than quartermaster, especially since my dad tried to be one in World War I, so maybe I could carry on the family

legacy and be a signalman in World War II. So I signed up for it, and I was selected for signalmen's school.

Brooks: Okay, so can you tell me, before we get to signalmen's school, can you just tell me a little bit more about Great Lakes; can you just kinda describe it for me?

Lizon: It was very cold, and I was surprised at the way the food was doled out. It wasn't all you could eat. You were dished out food on the chow line. I love milk, and then, milk was not available, but I learned in the morning that there was oatmeal, you could have a bowl of oatmeal and then they'd give you a dipper full of milk to go with the oatmeal. So I would get a bowl of milk and then I'd get a bowl of oatmeal, and I'd not eat the oatmeal but I would drink the milk out of the bowl, so I got my supply of milk. During boot camp, which I think was either twelve or sixteen weeks, one week you had each boot camp company had to work in the galley, and some worked on the chow line and I got the job of actually doing the dishes. I ran—I worked with some other boot camp members in what was called the scullery, and you had to take the dirty dishes and run them through a dishwashing machine. It was a very dirty job, and you got very sloppy, and you had to report an hour before breakfast and then you stayed an hour after supper. That was a very tough, demanding week, very painful. I think I made boot camp because I had a favorite aunt and uncle in Chicago, who drove up when visitors were allowed, I think after the third or fourth week, and they came every Sunday to visit me, and I just lived for the Sundays when Aunt Lil and Uncle Mike would come up from Chicago and visit, and I think that helped me get through boot camp.

Brooks: Were they allowed to bring you anything?

Lizon: Ah, they did. They brought candies and cookies and hugs and family memories.

Brooks: That's great! So then, so next was signalman school?

Lizon: Yes.

Brooks: So what did that consist of?

Lizon: Uh, it was a sixteen-week program, and I really screwed up on signalman school. I was in what was called the OGU, the Out-Going Unit, where you were waiting to be assigned to various schools. While you were in the OG unit, they didn't just let you lay around, you had to work. They got a group of us to cut weeds along the lakeshore, along Lake Michigan, lakeshore by Great Lakes, and it was a very warm day in May, and I took off my shirt, my skivvy shirt, because we were below the hill, we were able to take off our shirts and try to get a tan. Unbeknownst to me, the sun was so hot and burned so hard that when I got back to the barracks that night I was so sunburned and so red that I just couldn't sleep so I reported for sick call the next morning, and I knew I was scheduled to go to signalman's school at the University of Chicago, which was my dream, I'd be right in Chicago near my aunt and uncle, and the campus would have been just a delightful place to be. I reported

to sickbay and I said, "I'm sunburned," and the pharmacist said, "Well, you're red and there's some blistering, but we don't know if that's a sunburn or if you've got some kind of disease, so you've gotta go to the hospital and get checked." And I said, "I swear I've got a sunburn, you know, my company's leaving for the University of Chicago, so let me go," He said, "No, you've got to go to the hospital." So I think I spent three days, and finally a doctor came through and he said, "What the heck are you doin' here? You got a sunburn! There's no malaria or typhoid or anything." So they discharged me from the hospital and they said, "Well, since you went into the hospital and you really weren't sick, you gotta pay for the time that you wasted in the hospital, so we're going to assign you to a special cleaning detail for like, a week or ten days," and in the meantime the group left for the University of Chicago and I was on the cleaning detail in the hospital, and then I reported back to the OG unit and my next assignment was San Diego Naval Training Center for signalman's school, but I screwed up by getting sunburned and not going to the University of Chicago.

Brooks: Well, I don't think that was your fault, but that was unfortunate, definitely unfortunate. So can you tell me a little bit about what a signalman does? What's your job?

Lizon: Signalman is a very important rate aboard ship. He handles all the visual communication, which is done by semaphore flags where you have, ah, semaphore flags that you transmit the alphabet, or you do it by flashing light, and various lights from an Aldis lamp that you use at night, to a twelve-inch searchlight during the day, to a huge sixty-four-inch carbon arc light that will go to the horizon. And then the signalman is also responsible for all flag hoists. There's a series of signals to maneuver the squadron, or the fleet, or the group of ships that are together for speed, for compass headings, for alert for submarine attacks, for air attacks, general information about where you're going, and then at night there are sound signals that signalmen man. Then there's what's called the Christmas tree, there's a series of red and green lights that go up the mast, and depending how the red and green lights are lighted, it would send information to the ships that are in formation. And then there's also what's called a little FM radio. FM was invented in World War II, and the signal only went to the horizon, so you wouldn't have any danger of submarines picking up your signal. That's the first experience I had with FM, and they were called TBYs, and the signalmen called them "Talk By Yourself" for the TBY, and then you had that as a way of talking to other ships because at night you couldn't show any lights or expose the ship. So it was a twenty-four hour watch on my first ship. I was--there were only two signalmen, so we stood six hours on and six hours off, seven days a week, and all the while the ship was at sea you had to have a signalman on the bridge, so that was a long, hard work week. And since I was the junior signalman—I was only eighteen years old—I got the midnight to 6 a.m. watch, and then noon to 6 p.m. So that's what a signalman does. I always thought it was the most important job on the ship, because, what happens to the ship, you found out before even the captain. Because you would get the signal about where you were docking or berthing or speed or something to do with the formation even before the captain or the officer of the deck knew it. And signalmen were highly

regarded. Incidentally, the rate has now been abolished. The Navy have gotten into the twenty-first century with radio, and they don't use light and flags anymore.

Brooks: So do you think that your expectations when you were going into training and signalmen's school—do you feel like everything was pretty much what you expected?

Lizon: Oh, fabulous! It was a fabulous experience. We went twelve weeks, quartermasters and signalmen trained together at San Diego, you got liberty every other weekend. We worked--we were in school six days a week and we not only learned signaling, we learned navigation, we learned how to identify enemy aircraft, a lot of the training aids were developed by Disney--they were cartoon characters that would show ships' lights, and ships coming up and down channels, and leaving ports, all well-done by a cartoon, animation, which was very fascinating. And one of the people I didn't meet but I was aware that he was in class was Henry Fonda. He actually was a quartermaster, and he was in the quartermaster group that signalmen trained with, and at the end of twelve weeks, quartermasters got intensive training for four weeks and then signalmen got intensive training for another four weeks.

Brooks: Okay.

Lizon: And then we were shipped out.

Brooks: And what did you usually do on your liberty weekends?

Lizon: Ah, I went to the Christian Science reading room to read my Bible.

Brooks: Uh-huh.

Lizon: [laughs] We would go into San Diego, and I was only eighteen, so taverns were off-limits, so we would go to some dances or—I met a couple of guys from Kaukauna. One friend of mine was in the Air Force, and he was training—in those days it was called the United States Army Air Corps, and that was Billy Mitcheler [sp??] that I met, and so I would gang up with him, and if we could sneak into a store and have somebody old enough to buy a bottle of wine, we would sit in a park and suck on some wine. But we would have had—it was every other weekend, it was only one day; the other weeks you had to do your laundry, and you had to study, so liberty was only once every other week, so on sixteen weeks out I only got eight liberties in San Diego.

Brooks: So while all this—you're in San Diego, it's 1943, were you paying attention to everything that was going on abroad? What were your thoughts about—?

Lizon: Um, very little that was going on abroad. More aware of the city. I was just amazed at how the city grew from a sleepy little southern California town to a massive industrial naval-marine-army complex. The streets were so crowded when you'd go on liberty, I actually had to walk in the street; the sidewalks

were so jammed with servicemen that you actually couldn't walk on them. And all the places you want to go, like restaurants, or drugstores—it was belly to belly at the counter, and you know, just a massive economic boost for the city of San Diego, but the city was just overwhelmed. So my consciousness was more—I was aware of the airplane factories that were being built and the planes that were being tested. I was aware of the massive fleet that would come in and out of San Diego harbor, 'cause we trained right at the naval base. I would watch the ships come in and out and—not too much aware of what was going in the greater war. Our life was pretty much fixed on just the local activity.

Brooks: So before we move on and kind of leave San Diego, is there anything else about training that you want to mention?

Lizon: It was extremely well done; in fact, I had a couple of chiefs, CPO's that reminded me of my dad. They were actually World War I signalmen that were probably in their forties, maybe even crowding fifty, that the Navy didn't want to put on ships, but brought them back into the signal school for training the young signalmen. And they were very, very rough. They were profane, they were gruff, they had no compunction that if you didn't behave, they would grab you by the collar and bang you around. I remember one time, we were out having a semaphore drill on the drill field, and I wanted to get some sun, so I pulled my sleeves up on my undress blues, and the chief with about ten golden hash-marks came up and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and said, "You're not here to get a suntan! You're here to learn semaphore, so get those damn sleeves down!" and literally almost threw me to the ground. So I had a lot of respect and fear for those instructors, but they were impressive.

Brooks: Sounds a little rough.

Lizon: They were rough.

Brooks: Okay. So, then, what was your first assignment?

Lizon: Ah, I was so disappointed when I graduated from school. I was in the top ten percent of my class, which I was very proud of, and I was told I was going to be assigned to the United States Navy Armed Guard. And I said, "Jeez, the Armed Guard? God, I joined the Navy; I think I'd like to be on a carrier or a battleship or a destroyer, or--what in the world? Why get stuck on the Armed Guard?" and they said, "No, we take the top ten percent of the class because signalmen in the Armed Guard are usually on a ship by themselves or only one or two, so we want the most skilled signalmen to go into the Armed Guard, where other guys that go on a regular Navy ship" Like on a carrier or on a battleship there could be maybe fifteen or twenty signalmen, so if you didn't know the rate too well, the senior signalman would train you when you were aboard ship, but in the Armed Guard you had nobody to train you, you had to know the rate, and you had to know the signaling. So I was sent to San Francisco for four weeks of what's called mersing[sp??] training, it's called—it's called merchant ship training and it's beside—I had to learn all of the Navy signaling; I had to also learn all about merchant ship signaling, because in

convoy we had ships from Greece, ships from England, and from Sweden and Norway, and they had a special form of signaling, because the US Navy signaling didn't work with the foreign ships. So I had to go to four extra weeks of school in San Francisco, which was very intense and very demanding, as in four weeks we had to learn that entire manual and then we also had to be aware of all of the Navy signaling, because we also travel with Navy ships that were escorts in convoy, and coming in and out of ports, we would signal with Navy ships, so I had to learn both brand of signaling, both the merchant signaling and the United States Navy signaling. And although I was disappointed, as I got into it and found out more about it, I felt very proud that I was selected as the top ten percent of the class to be sent for that special training.

Brooks: So what's the, as you said, you ended up feeling proud that you were selected for the Armed Guard, but what was the difference to you? Why was the Navy more appealing—

Lizon: I thought the Armed Guard would be kind of slovenly and kind of non-Navy and who knows where an Armed Guard ship might go, where if I got on a destroyer or I got on a carrier or I got on a battleship, I knew we'd be going right up to the line, we would be right in the action and there'd be all kinds of war activity going on, where I didn't think being in the Armed Guard I would see that, and I was really very wrong, because I saw plenty of wartime action on merchant ships.

Brooks: And so there were one to two signalmen on a ship. Was that because of the size of the ship? Or—

Lizon: Uh, because of the scarcity of, uh, signalmen.

Brooks: Okay.

Lizon: On my second ship, I was all alone for about the first three months, so I had a cot up at the wheelhouse on the bridge, and sometimes I'd sleep up on the cot, or I'd go down to my bunk, and if there was a signal they'd come down and get me, but I was all by myself, and that was very demanding. That was on that tanker.

Brooks: Okay.

Lizon: My first ship was the Liberty ship, and my boss was a guy who was twenty years old, so he was an old, old guy. I was eighteen, and he was <u>seton [sp??]</u> from North Platte, Nebraska, and he was very tough, and he made me do more work than I was expected to do.

Brooks: And so you did four weeks in San Francisco, and that's when you got assigned?

Lizon: That I got assigned to my first ship after I graduated from <u>mersing [sp??]</u> school and was sent to Seattle, got on a World War II Liberty ship, which was

very disappointing; I thought, "Jeez, I gotta ride one of these old bathtubs and, you know, here's some sleek-looking destroyers and battleships in the harbor, and I'm stuck on this old tub, and—" Now, as the war went on, and as after the war anybody who served on a Liberty ship was kind of seen as special, because they were tough ships to be on, and it was a tough duty, and now I'm very proud that I was a Liberty ship sailor. A lot of them didn't survive the war; we were up at the Aleutian Islands, and my first ship entirely in Alaska and the Aleutians, and waves were very—especially when you got to the Bering Sea, there were twelve, fourteen, sixteen foot waves. Some of the Liberty ships just cracked apart and sank because the welding was—made the steel so brittle—I remember one time, I think it was a Coast Guard ship came by and signaled over to our ship and said, "Have you seen the stern half of a Liberty ship floatin' by?" and said, "What's that all about?" So I signaled back and they said, "Well, a Liberty ship broke in half. We think the bow went down but we think the stern had enough buoyancy in it that it floated. We think there are probably part of the crew that were able to save themselves, so we're out looking for that part of the ship to rescue the guys."

Brooks: Wow.

Lizon: So I'm glad our ship held together.

Brooks: Yeah. Do you know what happened to that ship?

Lizon: No, and of course the ship went, they just wanted to know if we had seen anything, and we, of course, didn't.

Brooks: So on that first ship, where were you guys headed and what were you doing?

Lizon: We left Seattle and we made the entire coastline of Alaska and the entire chain of the Aleutian Islands. The ship was a combination of cargo and transport. We transported some soldiers in what were called doghouses, built out on the boat decks where the soldiers went, and then when we got ready to come back from the Aleutians we brought back soldiers that were up there pre-Pearl Harbor, who were really goofy; they were up there for a couple of years and it was just terrible living up there, and they were part of the group that Roosevelt set up to kind of guard Alaska and the Aleutian Islands before Pearl Harbor; I really felt sorry for those guys, 'cause they just had terrible duty up there. It was just very desolate, there were no trees on the Aleutians, the winters were extremely bad—I spent one winter up there, in the Bering Sea, and in the North Pacific, and the ship didn't ride very good, so a lot of times we almost had to strap ourselves in our bunks because the ship would roll so violently; you had trouble eating 'cause food wouldn't stay on your plate, and coffee wouldn't stay in your cup. It was just an unpleasant part of the world to be in. But the Japanese were still there, were still on Adak, and Attu, and Chitka, and I got in on just the tail end of when the Japanese were chased off.

Brooks: Okay. So if you wanna kind of go through the different ships you were on, and like, kind of—the assignments that you had—

Lizon: Okay.

Brooks: —and then I'll probably interrupt you with questions, and—

Lizon: Sure.

Brooks: —we can kind of go back and fill in some holes.

Lizon: I think I spent about fourteen months on that first ship and I was so glad to be able to cycle off and I was ordered to report back to San Francisco from Seattle, but they gave me something like twenty days to report. So I said, "Jeez, I got twenty days to report I think I can make a side trip to Wisconsin." So I didn't even tell my mother I was coming home, because I wasn't too sure about the travel, so I came home on a twenty-day leave, and she was working at some kind of a dairy plant, and my uncle took me to the dairy plant, and I think my mother was about to ready to faint when she saw me walk in. I spent twenty days at home, and then I went back to San Francisco. I got assigned to a tanker, and I just loved it. It was my favorite ship, and it was a ship that just constantly was on the move. Tankers just—they never stopped, and as I mentioned before, we thought that U.S.S. stood for "Underway on Saturday and Sunday" instead of a U.S. ship, so I was alone, the only signalman on there for about four months, and then they assigned one more to us, and then we made trips way into the South Pacific, as far as the fleet went, and refueled Navy tankers and Navy ships and Navy bases. And got to Funafuti, and New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal, Tulagi. And then we were redeployed back through the Panama Canal to pick up petroleum at the Dutch West Indies and to service Navy bases, submarine bases on the east coast. We went into Key West and we went--there was a submarine base at Virgin Islands, at Charlotte Amalie and we serviced there. Went over to Aruba, and then our ship got redeployed to New York, and we loaded up with hundred-octane aviation fuel to carry to England for the bombing of Germany, and I think we carried six and a half million gallons of high-octane, traveled in tanker convoys in the North Pacific which was probably the most dangerous time of my Navy career.

Brooks: So what's the difference between life on a Liberty ship and life on a tanker?

Lizon: Uh, I was older and I was the senior signalman instead of the junior, so I had a little more authority and a little more power. The tanker rode better because on a Liberty ship when you were empty you were empty; I remember one time we brought back fifty-five gallon drums from the Aleutian Islands and we just loaded them in the holds of the Liberty ship, and of course there was no weight, so the thing rode like a cork all the way back to Seattle and I—we rolled so violently that I just sometimes thought it was going to tip over. But the tanker, if we didn't have petroleum in our tanks we loaded up with sea water so the tanker always drew about thirty feet of water, so it sat very deep in the water. The other advantage for me as a signalman was the bridge on the Liberty ship was very crowded and there were a lot of booms for handling cargo and a lot of masts. They had for signaling—they had what was called a triadic stay, where it was a long halyard stretched from the number two mast to

the mast on the bridge, and then you ran signals up in a vertical formation, where on the tanker you actually had a mast with yardarms, and you had yardarms where you could display signals on both sides. Plus the top bridge of the tanker was totally clear, there were no booms, there was no obstruction, so I could get out a signal light and signal with not having to worry about changing positions or having the signal blocked, so--it was just a good rider, it was a good feeder. I met some of my best friends, some of whom I keep in contact today seventy years later, the friendship was so bonded and so deep and it just was my most memorable ship.

Brooks: Yeah. How'd you guys entertain yourselves when you didn't have to be working on the ship?

Lizon: Uh, well, you didn't need much time for entertainment, because you stood watches, and then at sea, you always have general quarters, you have—the most dangerous time for submarine attack is early morning or just before sunset, so the general quarters were sounded. I think you had to go to your battle station, so you were busy being up all the time, sleep was interrupted a lot. Games we played—we did play sheep head, Uh, not sheep head, we played pinochle. Sheep head was a Wisconsin game and when I said "any sheep head players" they didn't know what I was talking about. That was a Wisconsin game. But we played a lot of pinochle, played a lot of cribbage—cribbage was a very happy game on the ship, and we listened a lot to Armed Forces Radio, and I controlled some of the radio. When I was on watch I would be up in the chart house up on the bridge and that's where the controls were for Armed Forces Radio, so the guys would have me dial in the Armed Forces Radio, because they'd get good music. Then we'd get music from Tokyo Rose from Tokyo, to see if our ship would be mentioned, and Tokyo Rose would always talk about the ships that were sunk, and, "You American boys, all your girls back home, all the old guys in town are romancing your girls, and when you get home there won't be any virgins left." And it was—we tuned her in because we thought it was hilarious and she had some of the best music. Actually her music was better even than Armed Forces Radio. She played a lot of Glenn Miller stuff and big band stuff, so that was a source of recreation.

Brooks: And do you remember the name of the tanker, I don't think you mentioned--?

Lizon: Of the tanker? It was the *Mesa Verde*. The name of the Liberty Ship was the *Delazon Smith*. And then my last ship was the *Linfield Victory*. Those were my three World War II ships.

Brooks: And you said that transporting the aviation oil, was it?

Lizon: It was a hundred-octane gas for the bombing raids in Germany. We loaded up in Perth Amboy in New Jersey, which is a refinery, and we'd go to New York harbor and anchor until there was enough tankers to make a convoy, and then we'd travel—we had a carrier in the middle of the convoy, which I never saw a plane take off from or land on, because the North Atlantic was so rough that I don't think they ever launched airplanes. When we got closer to England, they

would launch the airplanes and then they'd fly to England and land, and not come back to the carrier. But we had destroyers, destroyer escorts. We had Canadian corvettes as our escorts, we had some Coast Guard escorts, and they were the ones with the depth charges, and whenever there was a submarine alert, they would—the escort would form and fight the submarines.

Brooks: And on the way over, was there any torpedoes, did you see any?

Lizon: There were ships that were torpedoed. We had what was called a convoy conference every night at sunset after general quarters, and there was one guy in charge of the convoy. He called the convoy commodore. He was—in World War II it was just the rank below Admiral. He wore a two-inch gold stripe on his sleeve and they would require signalmen and radiomen and gunnery officers to gather around the TBY to hear the convoy conference summary of the day. And it reminded me of being in a high school locker room and listening to a football coach, because the ships were all numbered. They were like, if you were in row one on the second ship, you were ship number one-two. They didn't use any of the ships' names. And then the convoy commodore would say, "One-two, you were slow in getting those signals up. Get your ass in gear and get goin', and I don't want to see any more slowness on those signals tomorrow," and "Ship number four-three, we noticed you were belching some smoke. You can't belch any damn smoke because that'll show on the horizon. You talk to your engineers and get those guys to get those burners working right so we don't—" and then he would say, "Well, we lost ship six-four, got pinged on the end of the convoy today, and then ship number two-five had engine trouble, and couldn't keep up the convoy speed, so she dropped out, and we wish her well. We hope she can make it on her own to England, but we can't stop the convoy for one ship and we'll just keep going." And then every day, he said, now convoy speed tomorrow would be fourteen knots, and the next day it would be fourteen five, then up to fifteen, and each day he'd pump it up a little more, and I know the engineers were just livid with, you know, "How we gonna get that kind of speed out of our engine because we got 'em going full blast right now?" but they wanted to keep the convoy moving. So then, sometimes he had some good things to say, but mostly it was chewing people out, "Some ship showed a porthole open at night, and the next time we see that we're not gonna tell you to close it, we'll machine gun it out." So it was really kind of a rough high school coach speech that we got. But it was interesting to listen to it. I don't think our ship ever got criticism. I don't remember that we did, so that's good.

Brooks: Any close calls for your ship?

Lizon: Uh, well we had—as I have a smooth log of *Mesa Verde*; I was surprised at the number of torpedoings which I must have forgotten. When I went back through the smooth log I was surprised at the number of times that the convoy had to disperse, and we were on one time when a periscope was sighted. A periscope would come up and you could see, if the ocean was fairly smooth, the wake that was left by the periscope, and I don't remember that happening, but it's in the ship's log. We didn't have any air attacks, just mostly submarines, and as the war wound down, it got worse. There were wolf packs

that came out of—they were part of Ireland, I think the Irish Free State that didn't like the Allies, and was kind of partial to Germany, and we knew that the submarine pens were allowed in the Irish Free State, so they had access to convoys that—as the war ended, the Germans got together in wolf packs and sent, you know, whatever submarines they had available to attack convoys, and make their last stand. The German Navy, by the way, the submarines were the absolute worst suffering of any military force. I don't think you hardly ever got back—if you were a German submariner, it was almost impossible to expect to get back alive; almost every German submarine got sunk. It was rough duty.

Brooks: So how long did it take you, that trip, to England?

Lizon: We—it would take about, close to two weeks, and I remember when we first started, the *Queen Mary* was converted to a troop ship, and they wanted to have her escorted, but she could do close to thirty-five knots. And escorts would go in front of her, and would crisscross and have sonar sounds for submarines, and the *Queen Mary* was so fast that she almost knifed into those destroyers, so they finally agreed that the *Queen Mary* would go unescorted because she was so fast, so we would sometimes leave New York, and the *Queen Mary* would pass the convoy, and about five days later we'd be out in the middle of the North Atlantic and the *Queen Mary* would be coming back from England, and then before we got to Europe, again, we'd see the *Queen Mary* come by, so she probably had about three times the speed. Convoy speed started at about twelve knots to be sure, all the ships could keep up and then, by the time we got to Europe, it increased to about sixteen, but I think the *Queen Mary* did a steady thirty-five all the time.

Brooks: Wow. That's impressive.

Lizon: Yup.

Brooks: And how long did you spend on the *Mesa Verde*?

Lizon: I was on the *Mesa Verde* from the fall of '43 to fall of '44 to—I was in England when VE Day happened. I remember Churchill—we had Churchill on the Armed Forces Radio, and we also had the broadcast of General Eisenhower on the Armed Forces Radio, and we were anchored in—just between England and Scotland, and I was duty signalman on the bridge when we got the word that the war had ended, and so then we went back to New York unescorted. We were able to show lights at night; I had never seen lights at sea before, and that was unusual, and the war in Europe was over, and it was time to go and fight the Japanese.

Brooks: So what was the mood on the ship when VE Day—?

Lizon: Oh, ecstatic. My very good buddy Freddy Rosen from Houston—the one who I've kept contact with—he said "Let's go to London and celebrate," and I said, "We're restricted to a fifteen mile radius from the ship," and he said, "Well, I think, you know, who's gonna know?" So we did kind of take off, and spend a little time. And it just was excitement, happiness, joy, and I didn't even mind it

so much because when our ship came in to Avonmouth, England, which was the seaport for Bristol, England, I had just done my laundry and I had hung up some brand-new dungarees that I'd bought in New York, and hang up in the fiddly—the fiddly was the part of the ship where it encases the stack and it's always hot in there, so always like a drying room—so I hung up my dungarees, and when I went on liberty when I came back the dungarees were gone; the English workmen that came aboard ship to unload the oil and do some things aboard ship stole them. The guys said, "Well don't worry about them, these people hardly have any clothing." I remember Freddy and I also went to a English restaurant, 'cause we wanted to get a good meal, and not knowing that England suffered terribly and most of the food in England and in restaurants was, you know, fake food made out of bread and potatoes and it just wasn't very edible, so we only tried one time to eat at a English restaurant, and appreciated the ship's good food after that.

Brooks: Great. So you went back to New York after VE day?

Lizon: I went back to New York, to Brooklyn, to Brooklyn Navy Yard, and I was detached from the ship and I was given thirty days leave, to report to another ship assignment in San Francisco and went home for my sister's graduation from high school, my sister Lois. I spent time with the family, and just had a great visit, and just enjoyed it, and then left to go back to San Francisco—incidentally, the travel in World War II was all by train, and it was fabulous! The trains ran precision on the second, and the railroads were constantly filled, and it was some of the best railroad system I think we had in the world, and I just really miss that. When I first was sent from Great Lakes to San Diego for signalman school, we actually were assigned to a Pullman, and we had a porter actually make up our beds at night. I couldn't believe that, you know, a couple of recruit seamen, you know, got Pullman service, and then we got served in the dining room, the dining car, and it took about six days to get to San Diego. But we weren't just loafing, we were given a deck of cards that had the Morse code and the signal flags on there, and had sound signals. Then you were paired up with one person, and by the time we got to San Diego we were required to learn the Morse code. We were required—if they say, "What's—" We had to learn the phonetic alphabet. "What's the Baker flag?" You had to describe it, and the colors in it, and then you had to tick off the sound signals, and you had to have that all learned before you started signalman school, so the six days on the train, you just spent all day just with your partner learning the signalman trade.

Brooks: So you couldn't just relax and enjoy the luxury?

Lizon: Couldn't relax and enjoy the scenery, but it was well-organized, by the military, by the Navy.

Brooks: So I'm curious about your homecoming, when you were home for your sister's graduation and you mentioned that your mom had you take a picture and stuff. I'm wondering what that thirty days—you know, you're excited, Europe's over but—

Lizon: It was just great! In fact, I was trying to remember if that was separate. I did have one leave in between, where my dad was—I forgot where. He might have been in Norfolk then, and I—we kept writing to each other during the war, and I mentioned I was getting a leave and then he arranged the leave too, so we both got home at the same time, and we spent time working with the newspapers and we got interviewed, father and son, you know, both in the Navy. We talked to Kiwanis, and I think we talked to the Elks club, and gave speeches. He described what he was doing and I told about my World War II stuff, so I was very proud to have my dad home, and even though I wasn't of age he took me to taverns in town, and we enjoyed some cold beers together with my mother and went to some of our favorite Kaukauna taverns, and there was no question about me being served, even though I wasn't old enough—'Course I was with my dad. I think in Wisconsin it's legal if you're with your guardian or parent. So that was a very memorable liberty, leave with my dad being home.

Brooks: And then when you had to—after thirty days?

Lizon: That second leave, that was just—that was called a delay en route. I left Brooklyn and I went to Kaukauna and I spent—I probably had about twenty days in Kaukauna, and then went back to the west coast and got reassigned to my worst ship, my worst duty in World War II. I got assigned to an ammunition ship, which was loaded with ten thousand tons of ammunition. And it was a very scary ship because there were all kinds of restrictions on lights, on your shoes, you couldn't have any nails. You had to have special shoes, smoking was very restricted to all-enclosed quarters. We had a special crew of about—I think it might have been as many as fifty guys that were trained in munition handling, and we carried all the way from pyrotechnics to small-arms ammunition for rifles and all the way up to sixteen-inch guns for battleships, that had huge powder bags that were loaded in the holds. Then all of those had to be constantly inspected, the temperature had to be maintained, and the ship was—it was very scary to be on, and very restricted. And it was a Victory ship, which had a terrible signal bridge. I just hated it. I was the leading signalman and by that time I had about six signalmen assigned to the ship because we were preparing for the invasion of Japan and our job was to supply the gun line. I went to some conferences on the invasion of Japan. I got material in my book about the invasion. It was planned for, like, I think October of '45, and our job was to maintain a supply of ammunition and shells and small arms for the ships on the line. Their job was to go on the line and twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, do nothing but bombard Japan. Just keep firing and firing and firing until it was time for an invasion, which I think was scheduled for the fall of '45. So when Harry decided to drop the bomb, there couldn't have been more euphoria in the whole fleet than—we were actually in Tacloban in the Philippines when we got the word that the bomb was dropped, and I was so glad that we didn't have to ride that ship with ten thousand tons of ammo up to the gun line and, you know, think of all the poor guys that were on the gun line, and I'm sure there would still be some Japanese resistance and airplanes, a lot of kamikaze attacks that were occurring. And our ship got kamikaze'd with ten thousand tons of ammunition. I don't think there would have been anything left, so it was very scary. It was a

very unhappy ship. I just—I didn't like the captain, and I didn't like the gunnery officer, and a couple guys that worked for me were kind of slovenly and just didn't know the rate very well, and I just didn't like it. And then what made it worse—well first of all, on our way to the Philippines, with all this ammunition, we were unescorted. We had no protection at all, so we zigzagged all the way over, which took about three times as long to get there 'cause you changed course about every thirty minutes, in case you were being observed by a submarine, where they couldn't get a bearing on you because you would change courses. And after we got to Tacloban, the *Indianapolis* followed us, and they dropped the atomic bombs off at Tinian or somewhere for bombing Japan, and then decided to meet up with the fleet in Tacloban. The bay was so filled with ships that when we anchored, we had to have an anchor watch on the stern, because as the tide changed and the ships all swung on their anchor chains, there was dangers of the ships banging into each other, and some did because they were so close, so that's where the *Indianapolis* was coming. I don't know if you know the story of the *Indianapolis*, but she decided not to zigzag, guess that Captain McVey thought that he could go without zigzagging because he was fast enough, and sure enough got popped by a submarine at night. The ship was so badly torpedoed that it sunk immediately and they never got a radio message off that they were hit, and so these guys, floated about eleven or twelve hundred on the ship, and about nine hundred or so made it off. About three hundred were killed with the torpedoing, and then for five days nobody knew about the *Indianapolis*. I kept a scat board up on the bridge on ships that arrived and departed. We knew the *Indianapolis* was due in, but we thought, "Oh well, she's just probably slow in getting here, zigzagging or something." Not knowing that she had been torpedoed and some patrol plane just on a scouting mission noticed the guys in the water and landed and then rescued it, but the story of the *Indianapolis* was just one of World War II's terrible mishaps, and the Navy really screwed up by not keeping better tabs. But I think it was near the end of the war, and their surveillance wasn't quite as strong, but then I thought of our ship going through that very same course, that same area that the *Indianapolis* went through, knowing there were Japanese submarines out there, and so glad that we didn't get popped, because I think one hit on our ship and we would have been gone.

Brooks: Yeah, carrying that much ammunition. And, well, I had a question about, you said there were restrictions and something about shoes and nails?

Lizon: Yeah, you had a—your shoes were inspected so you couldn't—if there was any plates or nails that were coming through that might cause a spark, that was prohibited, and then there were restrictions on smoking, and we had special light bulbs on the ship that were encased, and just all kinds of precautions against any kind of danger of setting off the munitions, 'cause they were so volatile and so explosive.

Brooks: And so, while you're preparing for the invasion of Japan, did you on the ship have any knowledge of the possibility of the bombs being dropped?

Lizon: Not a bit. We absolutely didn't. We just didn't even know it was being

prepared, and we heard it over Armed Forces Radio that an atomic bomb was dropped and we actually had a swimming party that day. I can remember that day vividly, 'cause it was such good news, and so we had a swimming party, so the guys were saying, "Hey, Flags"—my nickname was Flags, being the signalman—"You're a high school graduate, you must have had some chemistry or something. What's an atom? What's an atomic bomb?" so I think I made up some stories about what an atomic bomb would do and how dangerous it was, but it was brand new news to me and then of course, three days later we heard about the second dropping on Nagasaki, and then of course that brought the Japanese to the surrender table and the war was over. We were so excited that that night every ship in the harbor that had—you had pyrotechnics on board in case your ship is in danger, you can fire rockets to show that you're in trouble. So we fired all of our pyrotechnics, we asked if we could fire the twenty-millimeter guns with just tracer ammunition so you didn't have any live shells, you shot that up in the air so we shot tracer bullets. I think every ship in the harbor, that harbor, was absolutely packed with the fleet, it was just loaded, and signal lights were being blinked and running lights were being turned on and off and it was just euphoria. It was just the happiest day that we could imagine, to hear that the atomic bomb had been dropped and the war was over.

Brooks: Well, and this is going to be a tough question to answer, I think because I'm sure it depended on the assignment and the ship, but I'm kind of curious about how often you got to get off the ship and—

Lison: It was very seldom, because our ship was so dangerous. There was about five ammunition ships that were in the bay. We were anchored five miles out in the roadstead, in the channel. They would not even allow our ship to come into a dock. There were some terrible ammunition ship explosions. There was one in Port Chicago that blew up. I think there was one up in Canada, in Halifax that killed hundreds and hundreds of people. So ammunition ships were kind of the tail end of the fleet. So in order to get into Tacloban, we had to take a liberty boat, and then you had to ride for five miles into Tacloban and I went in a couple of times and Tacloban was just a terrible, terrible place in the Philippines. It was dirty, and smelly, and there was really nothing to do. We always said that if the Philippines needed an enema, they'd put the probe in in Tacloban, 'cause it was the worst part of the Philippine islands, so I spent most of my time just on board ship. But then the worst part of my Navy career happened because each day we would watch as the fleet begin to depart. Most of them took off for Tokyo, for the battleships all went out there, the cruisers and destroyers, they all went out for the surrender with MacArthur, and so each day ships would leave and so pretty soon—this was in August when they dropped the bombs—by about Labor Day, there were only about less than half of the bay was filled. By Halloween, there were only a third of the ships, and by Thanksgiving there were only ammunition ships left. There were only the five of us. So each day we would say, "Can't we go home? The war's over. Can't we?" And the irony was, the *Mesa Verde*, the tanker that I was on, pulled in and I recognized the ship so I signaled over, and said, "Jeez, I'm stuck on this ammunition ship, could you guys use another signalman?" I was a second class by then. "Oh," they said, "Jeez, we'd love to have you back," so

I went to my communication officer, and he said "Nah, I need you on here. You're my lead signalman, and I'm not gonna let you go." But the *Mesa Verde* got up to Tokyo, and the *Linfield Victory* sat in the roadstead at Tacloban, and so I was very unhappy with the communication officer, and I had nothing to do with them after that. And then we sat and sat and finally, we got orders to leave in December, so we sat in Tacloban from August until December, just waiting to go home, and just frustrated as heck, and the food was running low. And then we got powdered eggs and the bread had bugs in 'em, you know, and first you'd pick out the bugs and then after a while you figured it was a little source of protein, so you ate the--as long as they were baked in and dead you ate the bugs.

Brooks: Uh-huh.

Lizon: And the food was just getting to be awful. So they finally allowed us to go home, but they said, "When you come home, here's a list of the ammunition that you no longer can have on board, and we have no place to store it in the United States." We were going to go to San Francisco. "There's no place to store it because our bunkers are full and there's no place to put ammunition, so when you come into San Francisco, we expect that that ammunition that are on these lists will no longer be on board your ship." That's all they said, but you know, the message was, "Get rid of it, and we don't care how you do it, but your ship will not be allowed to enter San Francisco if you have this stuff on board." So for days, we would be in the Pacific, and we would just have enough steerage, enough so we could control the course of the ship at maybe four or five knots, and then we'd reach down in the hold and lift out these bags of black powder for the battleships, and all of these brass casings that were in the shells. Then we asked the gunnery officer if we could fire our guns, so he said we could, and the captain said we could even shoot off all the pyrotechnics as long as it wasn't at night 'cause he didn't want some other ship to think we were in trouble. So we spent days just firing guns. The guns got so hot they--the gun barrels almost melted because we fired them so much. It took us, oh, I think weeks to just unload that stuff, and think of all the millions of dollars of ammunition that was dumped in the Pacific and all that pollution that must have occurred. And so by the time we got back to San Francisco, which was just before Christmas, we had rid the ship of what we weren't supposed to have on board. No questions were asked.

Brooks: No problems getting in, then?

Lizon: No problems getting in. We were still welcomed home after—even though the war was over for months, we still got a nice welcome with a Navy band, and people at the pier, and at the dock. It was just good to be home.

Brooks: Yeah. So what, you know, what happened next? Did you have to go through—get processed?

Lizon: Well, I went to—I stayed on the ship for a couple days 'cause we were closing things down, and they were gonna decommission it, and probably send it back for merchant vessel. I got over to the Navy Base at Treasure Island at San

Francisco, and I bumped into my old buddy from Houston, Freddy Rosen, and he didn't have enough points to go home, so they put him in charge of the outgoing unit, where he mustered guys that had enough points, and could be discharged. So he said to one, "You have—you got a lot of sea time," I had twenty-seven months of sea duty by then, so he said, "You can get home. However, do you have any money?" I said, "Yeah, jeez, we were stuck in the Philippines for all that time, I just paid off with about eight hundred dollars of sea pay." He said, "Jeez, eight hundred bucks. Man, that would be a good time for us. I'm in charge of the OGU, so I'll pull your service jacket and I'll put it in the hospital file, and the Navy will think that you're in the hospital, and I'll get you a bunk in the Shore Patrol barracks. They don't have any musters there or reveilles. Shore Patrol works twenty-four hours a day so they don't bother Shore Patrol. I'll get you a pass for the mess hall." The mess hall, incidentally, was run by German prisoners of war. All of our food service was done by German POW's, which I always thought was interesting. First I wasn't sure if I should eat the food, but it was very well done, and when those guys would march back to their barracks at night, there'd be one guy reading a comic book out of step and that entire German group that was in the mess hall preparing the food would be in perfect step, and were in perfect step and they'd be singing German songs, and they just looked very military, but that's just aside.

Brooks: Um-hm.

Lizon: So Freddy put me in the Shore Patrol barracks, and the Navy thought I was in the hospital, and we went out and bought a used 1927 Cadillac for my first two hundred dollars, so we had wheels to get around San Francisco. We spent until March, and finally Freddy said, "Well, jeez," he said, "things are getting a little bit tight, people are wondering where some of the records are, and I've now got enough points to get back to Texas, I'm going home. So I'm pulling your record. I'm putting it back in the outgoing file. You'll be getting a call in a couple of days. I'll get you a bunk in the regular barracks," I got called and some lieutenant looked at me, he said, "Jeez. Where in the hell have you been here? Your ship got back in December, it's now March!" and I said, "God, Lieutenant, I don't know. Boy, I got stuck in some barracks and I couldn't wait to get home, and I never got called, and nobody ever called my name, and I just had to sweat it out here, and I'm so lonesome for my family." He gave me a rather strange look and I think he was a little skeptical of my story, but he said, "Well, I just won't ask any more questions. You're going to Great Lakes to get discharged." So that was my discharge experience. But those three months in San Francisco were just fabulous.

Brooks: So then, did you take the train back?

Lizon: Took the train back. It took about three days to get to Great Lakes and I spent three days getting—I spent several days getting processed. I can't remember. I know there was a lot of pressure to stay in the Navy. I was a signalman and they still had a lot of ships that were operating and they needed a lot of signalmen, and I didn't want that, and the counselor I had, he said, "Well, if you don't wanna go on a ship, what would you like to do in the Navy?" And I said, "You know, I've always looked at tugboats when I came into harbors and

the Navy tugs would come and help us dock and undock, and they were run by CPO's and I think that'd be a fun job," and he said, "You're a first class now, we'll send you to craft master school," I think it was in Norfolk, Virginia, "It's about a three-month training program, we'll give you a tug, we'll teach you how to run it, you'll have a crew. We'll promote you to chief, and you'll be in charge of the boat, and you can run the boat." And I said, "Boy, that sounds like a dream, and I think I really would like to do that, but you know, I've been reading about this thing called the GI Bill, and it looks like you can go to school, and you get tuition paid, and you get a monthly stipend, and books are covered, and you can choose anything you want, and I'm not sure if craft master school would compete with the GI Bill." The other thing that happened when I was in signalman school, they were asking to have people apply for officer training, so I applied and I knew that Lawrence College in Appleton had a V6 program, a V12 program. They trained officers. So I applied to go to Lawrence College, so I went before an interviewing board and they had my—I had to send for my high school transcript and had to go through an interview and they said, "Oh jeez, you know, things look good; you had some pretty good grades in high school, and you know, you look like you were a pretty good student, and you might be a candidate for officer's training. However, you're just completing your twelfth week of signalman training. The Navy has invested all this time and money into you, and we think that you're better used as a signalman, but we'll keep your application for officer training on file." I said, "Yeah, of course you will," and when I got to Great Lakes would you believe they pulled that out of the file? They said, "Well, we saw that you applied officer's training at San Diego, and would you be interested in doing that? We've got some spots at the University of Pennsylvania and we'll send you to officer's training." And I said, "Well, if I go to officer's training, I'm pretty much restricted on what I have to train in; I couldn't be a veterinarian or I couldn't be a basket weaver or whatever I want to do. GI Bill I could do anything I want to do," so I said, "I think I'll turn down the—" But I was amazed that the Navy kept—you know, those were all hand-filed records. That was before the days of computers. Can you imagine that kind of process with sixteen million guys in uniform and yet having that kind of record maintained for all that time. I was shocked when they pulled that out of the file.

Brooks: Yeah, they must have really wanted you, just to keep that around.

Lizon: Right.

Brooks: Yeah. So then you decided that you would take advantage of the GI Bill?

Lizon: I definitely decided that right away, right away. I knew I was gonna go to school on the GI Bill, and I knew when I got out I would apply for college and go to school.

Brooks: And I should have asked this before, when you were doing your, um, three month little vacation in San Francisco did you tell your family where you were? Did they know?

Lizon: Oh yeah. In fact, my dad encouraged me to stay. He said, "Boy, with the

Wisconsin winter is a terrible one. We're havin' snow drifts and snow piles. If you can spend a little more time in the warm California sun, just do it, don't come home 'till spring, so—we'd like to have you home, but—" But my mother wanted me home.

Brooks: Yeah.

Lizon: She said the war was over and I should come home, but—

Brooks: I can see that.

Lizon: That eight hundred dollars of sea pay bought a lot of good times.

Brooks: Yeah.

Lizon: And a 1927 Cadillac, which I wish I still had.

Brooks: I was gonna say, did you end up keeping that or did you have to leave that?

Lizon: No, I sold—there's a kind of an O. Henry ending to that story too. I sold—Freddy and I bought it a hundred bucks apiece so we paid two hundred dollars for it. I sold it to a cook in the chow hall. I sold it for two hundred ten dollars, so we made ten bucks. I found out later when I got home, I got a letter from the California Highway Department that the car was a stolen car and they were tracing—it was stolen off some car lot, and they were tracing all of the owners, and they wanted to know who we bought it from, 'cause they were trying to figure out, you know, that they could get down to who the thief was. I assured them that we didn't steal it, and all we had was just a kind of a tattered piece of paper. There was no title; it was kind of a bill of sale that identified the car with the VIN number and the price, and that we got stopped sometimes by the cops, and then we used that for proof of ownership. In fact one time we were running short on money, Freddy and I, and so guys to get back to the base would take a cab and it would cost like about five dollars, and this was a big old Cadillac that seated actually about eight people in jump seats, so we said, "Well, we'll take anybody back to the base for four bucks," so we loaded guys in, and it make about thirty bucks a trip, and one night we loaded an officer, and he sat in the front seat. I was driving and he sat in the front seat and he said, "Where's your taxicab license?" And I said, "Uh, I left it at the barracks. I forgot to bring it tonight." He said, "Where's your proof of insurance?" I said, "Oh, jeez, it's in my sea bag, and I got that locked up in my locker." He said, "This is a bunch of bull crap." He said, "If I see you guys on the corner anymore, soliciting for taxicab rides, and charging people to go back to the base in an unlicensed cab with no insurance, I'm calling the first cop I see and you're going to jail." So that ended up our picking-up of sailors to take back to the base for four bucks.

Brooks: Yeah. But you tried!

Lizon: Ah, we tried. And we made some money, too.

Brooks: Yeah. That’s a good little thing.

Lizon: And the car was safe. It didn’t have any second gear. We had—we started out in third gear. We started out in first gear and shifted into third, ‘cause second gear didn’t work, the gear teeth were all broken, so it was a bad car.

Brooks: Yeah. So you had to leave that.

Lizon: Right.

Brooks: So all that for ten dollars. Nice. So then you—so tell me a little bit about using the GI Bill. Where did you go to school?

Lizon: I wanted to go—First of all I wanted to go to Lawrence College ‘cause it was right in town, I could live at home, and so I went to Lawrence, and they said, “Oh jeez, we’re full of enrollment, and we can’t take you.” So a bunch of us from Kaukauna, there were about four of us, drove down to the campus here in Madison, ‘cause UW was our next choice, and god, we looked at the campus, and it was packed. You know, they just couldn’t handle the influx of all the World War II veterans, so they were starting a program at Menasha High School called the University of Wisconsin Extension Program. The university rented some classrooms from the high school, and sent teachers up from Madison to teach at the extension. And the university told us if we could go to the extension, we’re actually better off because the class size is very small and you get top-notch instructors. You get even some full professors that would come up and teach, so I went there. I actually, I went there for two years. Dorothy and I got married that second year. I was thinking of transferring to Madison but we couldn’t find any housing in—down here, everything was packed, and so I did two years at the extension and it was fantastic, I just loved it. Best instruction, best teachers, it was just top-notch.

Brooks: And where is that?

Lizon: Right now, they—long time ago they left Menasha High School, and now they have their own separate campus called the Fox River Valley Extension. It’s in the Appleton area, and well-thought-of, and members of our family go there, and it’s called the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley.

Brooks: Okay, and what did you study while you were there?

Lizon: When I was on that ammunition ship, and we were docked out in the roadstead, the Navy sent out a meteorologist, graduate of the University of San Francisco, who came out to do balloons and barometer and wind speeds and temperatures, and he’d give me his findings and I’d signal it back into the base, and, god, I just got fascinated with what he was doing with the balloons. I worked with him for about September to December, and I really got acquainted with the guy, and he was really very impressive, so when I enrolled I thought I’d be a meteorologist. And I started out in school was not too good, and I wasn’t too happy and my mother always said when it came time to wash clothes, you ought to hang out, I was going to be a meteorologist, so I was

supposed to tell her if it was gonna rain or not. I couldn't do that, so I couldn't understand why things weren't going well, so I went back to the VA, and I ran a series of tests. I was there for about two days of tests and counseling and, uh, met with a counselor. In fact, the guy that ran the place was the former principal of Kaukauna High School, Olin Drier, so when four of us that came up from Kaukauna, he gave us really a red-carpet treatment. So I got a hold of a counselor after I did all the written and tests of the interviews, and the first question was, "Why in the hell are you in meteorology? You don't have the intelligence, you don't have the sense, you don't have the interest, you don't have the desire. Who in the world got you into that field!? That's the worst place to be," so I told him the story and then he listed about five fields that I would score well in. The top of the field was social work. So I had never heard of social work before, so I had a long talk with him about that. The second field was a teacher; third was a lawyer, law school—[phone rings]

Brooks: Should we pause it?

Lizon: Yeah, just—

[Break in recording][1:22:11]

Lizon: There were five fields—

Brooks: Whoop, whoop—we're okay.

Lizon: There were five fields; I think accountant was in there, so I looked them all over, and then I spent a lot of time studying about social work and talking to the counselors about it, and it seemed like a fascinating field. Seemed like a field where you get to know about yourself, and you have very diverse studies, and all the way from political science to nutrition to interviewing to—it was unfortunately a two-year master's program, but I figured I'd have enough time to stretch my GI Bill to cover six years of college, so I ended up in social work, to the great disappointment of my father, who thought I was gonna be pulling a little red coaster wagon around the neighborhood and handing out free apples to the poor. That was his concept; he said, "Jeez, you got a chance to be an engineer or a physician or a lawyer. Why don't you get a good education?" and I said, "No," I said, "I think this is what I want to do." I was kinda close to thinking about teaching, but social work just seemed to be the more exciting, the more expansive field, and went to do it, spent thirty-five years at it.

Brooks: Wow. So can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like trying to readjust to civilian life, and then also how you met your wife, and—

Lizon: Very, very easy. Adjustment was very easy, Kaukauna was an extremely welcoming town. I wore a uniform for a couple of weeks 'till finally my dad says, "Don't you think you ought a get some civilian clothes and get rid of that damn uniform?" And so it was—all of my high school buddies were back. Well, there was several that unfortunately were killed, one of whom, his body was—he was killed at Anzio and we had a funeral for him and they brought his

body back. That was the only sad thing about coming home, but Kaukauna put on a parade for all returning World War II veterans that could still get into a uniform. They wanted you to wear it and we'd march through the town, and all the taverns were open. There were no limits on the closing hours of the taverns, and just a great welcome in the city and by all the families and it was just a very easy readjustment.

Brooks. Okay.

Lizon: Dorothy and I met at a local dance hall, the Nightingale Ballroom. When I was waiting to go to school, I was kind of dogging it at the house, and my dad, who was a former CPO, a chief in the Navy, he didn't like that I slept in in the morning and just loafed around during the day, so he gave me what he called the POD in the Navy. That's called a Plan of the Day. So before he left for the paper mill, he would have a POD list for me to do, and that particular day we had an old cistern in the back, in the house before they had running water they had cistern water and that was all rotted. He told me to knock that cistern down, and fill in the ground, so I was out there and I was working kinda late, I think even after supper, and a couple of my buddies came over and they said, "Jeez, what are you doing out in all that mud," and he said, "We're goin' out to the Nightingale Ballroom; why don't you come along?" I said, "I'm all messed up," and they said "They won't care!" I had dungarees on with mud, I had a T-shirt on with holes in it, so we go to the Nightingale Ballroom with three or four of the guys, and I spotted a blonde sitting at the table. In those days if you were eighteen you could drink, and, uh, she was drinking Miller High Life, and smoking Lucky Strike cigarettes, and looked pretty attractive, so I asked her if she would dance and even though I had my crummy old clothes on, she did and I had holes in the back of my shirt and as my buddies danced by us they would put their fingers in my holes. Finally the deputy who ran the place, a guy by the name of Henny, came up and said, "God, you look so crummy," he said, "I think I gotta kick you outta here! You got a, just a terrible-looking outfit on." So that's that—I asked her for a phone number and a date and she agreed to do that, and we started dating, and we've been together ever since. We'll be celebrating our sixty-seventh anniversary this summer, so—

Brooks: That's exciting.

Lizon: It was a—it was a love affair from the beginning.

Brooks: Great. A great story. And so, then, did you keep in touch with other friends from service, like Freddy Rosen, and—

Lizon: Very much so. Kept in touch with a lot of friends, as the years went by, even wrote letters, I would get letters back saying that, "Yeah, well, Armand died last week" They would pass by. Others, I just lost addresses. But Freddy is one I kept in touch with all the years. But we also had ship reunions that Dorothy and I went to for many, many years as many as a couple hundred would show up at the reunions, and so we'd have an annual get-together. San Francisco and Seattle, went to Washington DC; went to Norfolk, Virginia, Chicago, Illinois. We had big reunions. Two years ago we had our very last one, thirteen people

showed up. I was the only one that was ambulatory, the rest were either wheelchairs or canes or crutches and so we decided that that was gonna be our last one. That was 2012, was it? Yeah, we had it in Kenosha. So I think the World War II crowd, the reunions are over with.

Brooks: So were those reunions—was that pretty much anyone who'd served on those ships could get together?

Lizon: On those ships, yep. That was strictly the Armed Guard and, uh, we just had fabulous reunion speakers, dances, just sharing memories, just wonderful. They would go for about three days and they were just superb times, and just good to see all the guys again and just keep up the friendships throughout the years.

Brooks: What about any other organizations or benefits that—?

Lizon: Well, I did go on an Honor Flight for the World War II veterans, which was a fabulous experience; That was Armed Forces Day two years ago, and that was great. I stayed active with the Navy League, and I did, I did some work for Governor Thompson with the *U. S. S. Wisconsin*, I was on the Governor's commission and, uh, something to do with the Legion which I forgot, but something to do with that. I'm still active with the Navy League, and still active with the battleship *Wisconsin*, and so I keep my touch with the Navy.

Brooks: Can you tell me a little about your experience on the Honor Flight?

Lizon: Uh, fabulous. Started out early in the morning, just a very warm welcome, got treated royally, got entertained at Truax before we left, got outstanding seats on the airplane, and the plane was totally decorated for World War II vets. The crew of the airplane were just fabulous, the way they treated us. We got to Washington DC, got welcomed by an Air Force band. Thousands of people in the area that I couldn't believe the size of the crowd. As I was walking along, a cute little girl came out of the crowd and put a string of beads around me and said, "My name is Dawn, and I'm gonna be your guide. I'm gonna be with you for the remainder of the day, and you will see me until you board the plane and go back to Madison." And so she kept tab on me, and she said, "How's your walking?" and I said, "Oh, it's just terrible; I have trouble limping, I feel very weak, so when we get to a curb you gotta hold on to me and really give me a hug to get me up and down the curb and--" So I got a lot of hugs from Dawn, and we just went to all the monuments and got fed and got treated and we had a police escort with the buses, so we went through red lights and--it just was--it turned out to be Armed Forces Day, so there was just a special treatment in Washington DC with all the festivities. It turned out to be the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the playing of "Taps" so at Arlington they had something like sixty buglers stationed throughout the Arlington cemetery, and they would be playing "Taps" throughout the course of the day. It just was an unforgettable experience, I'll remember forever. Got mail on the plane from the whole family that wrote me letters, you know, nieces and nephews, sons and daughters. Then I had that welcome home with a great big banner at the airport, and it turned out to be my grandson's graduation that day and I told

him that I wouldn't make his graduation, because of the honor flight, and that had priority, which he understood, but all the people that went to his graduation stayed and met me at Truax Field, so I had a specially large welcoming group to welcome me home, which I appreciated from Dave and Dan.

Brooks: And so did someone go with you? Usually someone—?

Lizon: Uh, I was paired with Charlie Smith, who was the former Treasurer of the State of Wisconsin, he was a Marine. He had some pretty bad experience on Guadalcanal, and he was my seat partner on the airplane.

Brooks: But no family members or anything?

Lizon: No, they were not allowed.

Brooks: Okay.

Lizon: Uh, if you needed to have a family member because you couldn't walk, then they had to pay to go. Otherwise you were met by a guide in Washington. I had Dawn. She called me on Armed Forces Day—no, on Veterans' Day that fall when—to see how I was doing, and see how things were going, so I really appreciated that. She is just a sweet lady.

Brooks: Hm, great! Um, so I have a few questions to wrap up, but—

Lizon: Sure!

Brooks: Just to go back before I do that—

Lizon: Okay—

Brooks: I just wanted to know a little more about besides when you're on the ammunitions ship, your other ships, were you able to get off the ship a lot? Were you able to explore and, like, meet locals?

Lizon: Uh, there was—yeah, you were able to get off the ship any time you were in port, even if you were docked out, you could ride the either the—we called it the nickel-snatcher, that would be a guy that would run a boat, and he'd come alongside, and, you know, for a buck he'd take you into the dock. Or, we had the ship's boat that didn't have any regular running time, so it was hard to get in and out, but if you were docked, you could always—if you didn't have duty, you could always get off, so I got off, and all the places and—uh, when I was in Adak, I saw a Japanese transport that was up on the rocks, so I worked my way all the way over to the ship, and it was called the *Nozima Maru*, and I got aboard the ship and it was very difficult getting on because there was no gangway or anything, but I was able to climb up the side and then I toured the ship, got to the officers' quarters that had bathtubs—I was surprised. And then I went to the crew's quarters where the Japanese soldiers slept, and some slept on floor mats. They just slept on the deck, and others slept in, like, uh,

hammocks that were made out of straw. They—it must have been very bad living for the enlisted, but—and it looked like they had concubines aboard ship, because there were signs of some feminine apparel that was left. And then, not too long ago, I get a magazine called *Sea Classics*, and they had stories about the Aleutians, and in there was a picture of the *Nozima Maru*, the ship I got on in 1943, so that was really a interesting time. Almost everywhere—I had liberty in England. We had liberty in Funafuti, which was a small emergency base for the Army Air Corps, where the natives were topless, and some missionary came, and decided that he thought that was inappropriate, especially for the military stationed there, that would be a detraction. So he issued white Navy t-shirts to all the ladies, who promptly went home and cut out that part of the t-shirt that covered their breasts. So when they came wearing white t-shirts, it was more accentuated than had they not been covered. So I think the missionary gave up. That was a place called Funafuti, which was not too far from the Hawaiian Islands. So we had liberty. That was one of my most memorable liberties, to see the native ladies.

Brooks: And that—that Japanese ship, had that just been abandoned?

Lizon: Uh, they, uh—it had either been bombed or torpedoed, so it was not able to get underway, so that what the captain did was to run it aground. Run it on the shore as much as he could get, so the guys, I think, they all got off and departed. The Japanese left without us even knowing. We were all expecting more engagements and more battles, and when we checked with Attu and Adak and Amchitka, the Japanese were all gone. They all left in the dark of the night, got out to transports, and went back to Japan. And so the Aleutian was a fairly bloody campaign, especially Attu. A place called Massacre Bay, where the Japanese had shown a surrender flag, and then when our troops were going to take them prisoners, they opened fire and the bay is called Massacre Bay. After that there were no Japanese prisoners taken after that, because of the—the soldiers were just so overwhelmed with that terrible tragedy of being fired on when there was a white flag.

Brooks: Uh, so aside from the Hawaiian women—or, not Hawaiian--

Lizon: Funafuti.

Brooks: Uh, there we go. Did you have any other memorable liberties? I'm just asking because, you know, I bet a kid from Wisconsin, everything's probably pretty new to you.

Lizon: No, most of the liberties were pretty ordinary. Foreign ports. Tacloban was bad because there was nothing to do and we were so far out, so I spent most of my time aboard ship. We went ashore in England a lot. Bristol was a nice place, and the English were very, very warm to Americans. You were American in England during the war, you were just, uh, they appreciated what we did, and I'm sure we saved that country, and then—we had a lot of Army Air Corps stationed there for the bombing, so the American GI's were very well-known, and of course they converged there before the—before Normandy. That's where the troops left for D-Day, so England was pretty loaded with Americans.

So liberties were usually pretty good. Just get off the ship and enjoy stable ground for a while was good.

Brooks: Yeah. So when did your dad retire from the Navy?

Lizon: I stayed—Even though I didn't stay active, I stayed Reserves. I did get a recall for Korea, but then they allowed me—I was finishing up my last three or four weeks of grad school, so I asked to have a—just a delay in activation, and so they said, "Well, finish school and then report to the Reserve Center," so I went down and they said, "Well, we got a lot of signalmen, in fact we're not too sure what we'll do. We're making some of them master-at-arms in charge of sea-bags and barracks, or mustering in the barracks, and there's really no shipboard assignments but you know, you're welcome to come back," and so I said, "Would you say that again? That that's my decision?" and they said, "Yep, you wanna come back, you can," and I said, "Well, I just made my decision, I'm not comin' back." They said, "Well, you can't get out of the Reserves, we're gonna keep you reserve and you might be recalled again," and so I said, "That's fine." So I had the happy news that I didn't have to go into Korea because some of the guys stayed for about a year. It was not a pleasant war. And then the only other activation I was—I got luckily—not luckily, after a lot of hard work I got the top civil service job in the department. I got hired by the director, and so—just then the Cuban Missile Crisis came. So I was in the Naval Reserve, and they were activating reservists, and a couple of my buddies did get activated, fortunately I never got a call. But the Reserve Center said you had to, if you left home, you had to call the Reserve Center and let them know where you could be reached by telephone, so you had to be available. Within twenty-four hours you had to report to the Reserve Center, so I called Madison, I said, "Jeez, I got this nice promotion, I sure want the job, but I gotta let you know that I might get called to active duty, and will that make a difference on me getting hired?" and they said, "No, the state law is that you just proceed with your state job, and if you get hired and you're activated, when you come back, your job is available, and that's protected by state law. Just move your family down here, and we'll put you into the job." So the Cuban Missile came and went, and fortunately I never got activated, which I was happy about. All during Vietnam, the principle of President Johnson was, we could have a butter and gun war, we can treat the civilians and civilian life isn't going to be disrupted, and yet we'll fight this Vietnam War, and we'll win it. But every time we went to drill, the very first thing that happened at drill while we were at muster was a letter from the Commander-in-Chief, who said, "Your presence is dearly needed in Vietnam. Would any of you guys be willing to volunteer to go to Vietnam, and let's win this damn war. Signed, LBJ." And a few guys did; a few guys volunteered, but the system in Vietnam was not to activate the reserves. So he did some selective activating, but not any wholesale activation, which probably he should have done. But, you know, I think he wanted to keep peace with the country, to say, "This is a war that we can fight without disrupting civilian life," and we didn't.

Brooks: Right. So you said you got this top civil service job in the department? Which department was that?

Lizon: I was with the Department of Public Welfare, and I was in the Division for Children and Youth, and I was selected to be the assistant director of the division. That was the last civil service job, the director was board-appointed through the governor.

Brooks: And how long did your father stay in the Navy?

Lizon: Uh, he stayed reserve after the war, but in spite of all my insistence on having him go to drills, which he could have done at Green Bay, he said, "I want to stay in the reserves, but I just don't want to go to any drills," and as a result he missed out on retirement. So in order to get reserve retirement, you had to be active, you had to attend drills, you had to do advancement, you had to do correspondence courses; and if you didn't you got washed out of the reserves. He just didn't want to make that extra effort. He wanted to stay reserve, and then—but not go to drills. So I think he stayed until in the '50s. Once he got to be sixty, I think he was discharged.

Brooks: So what—anything, any general big thoughts about your service? Any type of, kind of, closing statements you'd like to share about your whole experience, maybe?

Lizon: I was just proud to be in the Navy, in spite of some of the unhappy time and of course, everything in life, there's unhappiness with happy. The happy outweighed the unhappy, and it was just, uh, just very proud and I still am. I wear my uniform once in a while. I appear in local parades and I give speeches once in a while. I've addressed some high school groups and I wore a uniform, and I can still get in it, and I'm proud of that. Approaching age ninety, I can still get into the uniform, so that's pretty good, but it was just a service that I dearly loved, and I stayed until I was fifty-nine and retired.

Brooks: And what was your, uhm—what was it like when you retired? Was there a ceremony?

Lizon: Oh, it was a fabulous ceremony! They took the whole afternoon off to just do the ceremony. They had speeches, they had ceremonies. I got all kinds of gifts, and, uh, accolades; and then I hired the enlisted, uh, bar room at Truax Field that the Air Force has, for a party and I underwrote the party for the whole—I was a master chief of the command, so I was in charge of the whole unit. I reported directly to the commanding officer, so I knew everybody in the unit. We must have had about ninety people in the unit, and we were activation unit for a guided missile destroyer for the *USS Dale*, and that was our—had we been activated, we would have gone on a guided missile cruiser. So I was master chief of the command for about seven years, and just felt very close to the guys, and I hope they felt close to me. I think they did 'cause I felt very good about my retirement. It was just a very special day. The commanding officer just bent over backwards to—Commander Benander, his name was, and he just—he just rolled out the red carpet. I got piped over the side by boson's pipe, and it was just a very special event. I felt very honored, and very privileged.

Brooks: So why did you agree to do this interview with me for the Veterans' Museum?

Lizon: I think it's important for all of the World War II guys—in fact I'm talking it up with all the World War II guys I see to get in touch with the Vets' Museum, so there could be an archive of what is a very personal experience, and you gotta also remember, in World War II, all I knew that was going on was what I saw aboard ship, and what little information we got on Armed Forces Radio. And Armed Forces Radio would be the big blanket. It would not give very specific stuff because of, I suppose, military intelligence. You'd know about invasions, or you'd know about campaigns, so you had just a very restricted view of what was going on, and I think that's good to get those restricted views captured, and archived, and there might be some tidbits that come out of those interviews that some historian or some book writer or some research analyst might find useful.

Brooks: Great. Well, thank you very much.

Lizon: It was my pleasure, Ellen.

Brooks: Is there anything you think I forgot to ask? Or anything you want to cover?

Lizon: I think you did very well. I think it was very well done.

Brooks: Okay.

Lizon: Thank you so much.

Brooks: Great. Thanks. I'm going to turn this off now.

Lizon: All right.

[End of interview]