



Fall 2010

MS-117: Papers of George H. Sweet Jr. '42

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MS-117: Papers of George H. Sweet Jr. '42

Description

This collection gives insight into the pre- and inter-wartime life of George H. Sweet Jr. '42 as a member and captain of L.S.T. 358 in the Mediterranean. It also provides general information about World War II in the Mediterranean and L.S.T.s. It further gives a glimpse of the experiences of Donald Sweet '49 as an aircrewman in the Pacific theater, specifically about life and important happenings during the invasion of Okinawa in 1945.

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Keywords

World War II, WWII, Second World War, War Correspondence, LST 358, Light Ship-Tank 358, Sailor Aviators, Navy Patrol Bombing Squadron, Okinawa, Pacific Theater, Mediterranean Theater, Gettysburg College, Phi Delta Theta

Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | Oral History | Public History | United States History

**Guide to the
Papers of George H. Sweet Jr. '42**



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library

Special Collections & College Archives

Processed by Elizabeth Ungemach

October-December 2010

MS – 117: Papers of George H. Sweet Jr. '42

(3 boxes, 0.81 cubic feet)

Inclusive Dates: 1941-2004

Bulk Dates: 1941-1945

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Provenance:

Special Collections received the papers and materials of George H. Sweet Jr. '42 and the recollections of Donald H. Sweet '49 from George Sweet in 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2008.

Biography:

George H. Sweet Jr. '42 was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity while at Gettysburg. He enlisted in the Navy in February 1942 and, after graduating in May with a B.A. in Economics, he was called to active duty in August of that year. He went to basic training at Notre Dame and then Midshipman's School at Columbia University, graduating in December 1942. Sweet was commissioned as an ensign and assigned to L.S.T. (Light Ship-Tank) 358, part of the amphibious forces in the Mediterranean. He was given command of L.S.T. 358 as a lieutenant j.g. at the age of 24 (he believes he was the youngest commander of an L.S.T.) until December of 1944 and participated in the invasions of Sicily and Anzio. Mr. Sweet wrote a book, entitled *Lightning Strikes: A Story of Amphibious Actions during World War II: The Adventures of LST 358 in the Mediterranean Sea during World War II*, about his experiences in the Mediterranean during the war that was published in 2000. He also came to speak to Professor Michael Birkner's Senior Seminar on World War II (Hist 421) in March 2004.

Donald H. Sweet '49 attended Mercersburg Academy after graduating from high school. He completed his military training in aviation ordinance at the naval Aviation Technical Training Corps Station in Jacksonville, Florida. Sweet served as a combat aircrewman in the Pacific theater at Okinawa and trained new crews after he returned home in late 1945. After the war, Donald Sweet attended Gettysburg, followed his brother's footsteps by pledging Phi Delta Theta, and graduated in 1949, also with a B.A. in Economics. He wrote several books about his experiences in the war, including *The Sailor Aviators: A Tale of the Men of Navy Patrol Bombing Squadron 21 in World War II*, published in 1997, and *Seaplanes at War: A Treasury of Words and Pictures*, published in 1999. Donald Sweet also recorded some of his wartime recollections on two CDs. He joined his brother George when the latter came to speak to Professor Birkner's class in 2004 (a photo of them during their visit is on this aid's cover).

Scope and Content Notes:

This collection gives insight into the pre- and inter-wartime life of George H. Sweet Jr. '42 as a member and captain of L.S.T. 358 in the Mediterranean. It also provides general information about World War II in the Mediterranean and L.S.T.s. It further gives a glimpse of the experiences of Donald Sweet '49 as an aircrewman in the Pacific theater, specifically about life and important happenings during the invasion of Okinawa in 1945.

Series Description:

The collection is divided into seven different series: I. Gettysburg; II. Wartime Artifacts; III. Wartime Photographs ; IV. Newspaper Articles; V. Campus Visit; VI. Background Information on L.S.Ts, the Navy in WWII, the Fleet in the Mediterranean, and the War in General; and VII. Multimedia: Twelve films about L.S.T.s, the campaign in the Mediterranean, and the war at sea and a recording of Donald Sweet discussing his part in the invasion of Okinawa.

Box 1:

1-1 Finding Aid and Biographical Information

Series I – Gettysburg

1-2 Gettysburg Memorabilia, 1941-1942

Series II – Wartime Artifacts

- 1-3 Photocopy of Scrapbook
- 1-4 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 11
- 1-5 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 12
- 1-6 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 13
- 1-7 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 14
- 1-8 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 15
- 1-9 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 16
- 1-10 Scrapbook Artifacts, page 17
- 1-11 WWII Menus
- 1-12 Miscellaneous Artifacts

Series III – Wartime Photographs

1-13 Photographs

Series IV – Newspaper Articles

1-14 Newspaper articles, George H. Sweet Sr., Jr. '42, and Donald Sweet '49-wartime and George Sweet Jr. '42-2000

Series V – Campus Visit

1-15 Materials from Sweet's Talk to Professor Birkner's History 421, March 2004 and Photographs from the Talk

Box 2:

Series VI – Background Information on L.S.Ts, the Navy in WWII, the Fleet in the Mediterranean, and the War in General

- 2-1 Willson, Russell, Captain-United States Navy. *Watch Officer's Guide: United States Navy*. Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1941.
- 2-2 Information on Navy in the Mediterranean and the Invasion of Sicily
- 2-3 Stoddard, Brooke C. Editor. *WWII History*, January 2002 and Witter, Robert E. *Small Boats*

and Large Slow Targets: Oral Histories of United States' Amphibious Forces Personnel in WWII. Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co. Inc., 1998.

2-4 The Carolinas Chapter – United States L.S.T. Association. *Bulletin*. 1998, The Carolinas Chapter – United States L.S.T. Association. *Bulletin*, and The L.S.T. Brothers' Library and Museum. *World War II L.S.T. Survivors Calendar 2001*, Costa Mesa, California, 2001.

Box 3:

Series VII – Multimedia: Twelve films about L.S.T.s, the campaign in the Mediterranean, and the war at sea and a recording of Donald Sweet discussing his part in the invasion of Okinawa

3-1 United States Navy. *The L.S.T. – Description and Employment*. 1944. VHS. Vintage Video.

3-2 United States Navy. *LCI/LST Operation in World War II*. 1944. VHS. Traditions Military History Videos.

3-3 *Marvelous LSTs*. VHS. Produced by George H. Sweet Jr. 1999.

3-4 *Amphibious Landings '43*. VHS.

3-5 Department of War. *The Battle of San Pietro*. 1945. VHS. Quebec: Mandacy Music Group Inc., 1994.

3-6 Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force. *Thunderbolt*. 1946. VHS. Quebec: Mandacy Music Group Inc., 1994.

3-7 The National Broadcasting Company and the United States Navy. *Victory at Sea, Volume 14 Roman Renaissance: Sicily and the Italian Campaign*. Directed by M. Clay Adams. Embassy Home Entertainment, 1952.

3-8 The National Broadcasting Company and the United States Navy. *Victory at Sea Volume 20: Return of the Allies, Volume 21: Full Fathom Five, Volume 22: The Fate of Europe, Volume 2: The Pacific Boils Over, and Volume 24: The Road to Mandalay*. Directed by M. Clay Adams. Embassy Home Entertainment, 1952.

3-9 Sweet, Donald. Recording of reminiscences. 2 CDs.

Movies:

- 1) *The L.S.T. – Description and Employment*: A Navy training video for newly commissioned officers from 1944 that (according to the label on the VHS case) was filmed in the Chesapeake Bay 1942 aboard one of the first LSTs built. Gives the specs of LSTs and explains the layout of the vessel (including guns) and the ship's officers. Elucidates the different kinds of cargo the LSTs can hold, including tanks, tractors, diggers, bulldozers, trucks, jeeps, ducks, LVTs, an LCT, and pontoons. The second part of the video shows how the LST is loaded, deployed, and unloaded.
- 2) *LCI/LST Operation in World War II* (From Hard-to-find Navy Films): Another Navy training video from 1944. LCI (L)s are primarily used for combat but would also spend their time ferrying cargo. Demonstrates docking, getting underway, and coming alongside. LCVPs are meant to land troops and equipment quickly on beachheads before the enemy has a chance to mount an attack. This section covers the issues of boat handling onboard the transport, in the move from ship to shore, and on the way back to the transport. LSTs are meant to land artillery and tanks on a beachhead. They also

unload transports and cargo ships when there are no harbors. Video explains how the LST is beached and unloaded.

- 3) *Marvelous LSTs*: Idea for amphibious landing ships was Winston Churchill's; British had a model but it was too small. First LST completed by 1942; average build time was 2 months. Gives their specs and speaks specifically about LST 358 - its commissioning, arrival in North Africa, and role in the invasion in Sicily. Then describes generally the invasion of Salerno, the Allied capture of Naples, and the 123-day fight and eventual German capitulation at Anzio. Finally describes LST 358's deployment to southern France to help efforts there. Film was produced by George Sweet in 1999.
- 4) *Amphibious Landings '43*: Much of the footage and voice-over at the outset is the same as that of *Marvelous LSTs*. There is some new footage at the very beginning about amphibious operations out of New Guinea. Later on the video covers part of Anzio before ending abruptly.
- 5) *The Battle of San Pietro* and *Thunderbolt*: *San Pietro*, presented by the Department of War and made in 1945, shows "modern warfare from the soldiers point of view and stresses the number of men killed in taking one military objective. It shows how the people and children of San Pietro were too stunned to realize that they had been liberated during World War II." (VHS case) *Thunderbolt*, presented by the Departments of Defense and Air Force in 1946, "tells the story of the 57th Fighter Group's participation in 'Operation Strangle' in 1944 Italy. It discusses the use of the P-47 Thunderbolt Fighter-Bomber in the operation, which denied German troops badly needed supplies." (VHS case)
- 6) *Victory at Sea, Volume 14 Roman Renaissance: Sicily and the Italian Campaign*: created by The National Broadcasting Company and the U.S. Navy in 1952. The series features footage from both Allied and Axis archives. Hitler and Mussolini meet in Rome while Allied commanders in North Africa plan the invasion of Sicily in July 1943. Some of the footage is the same as seen in previous films. After Sicily falls, the Italian navy surrenders at Malta in September 1943. Mussolini falls and Italy joins the Allied forces. The Germans reinforce Italy while the Allies make for Salerno. After they take the beach, the Allies reach Naples. They manage to clear the harbor of vessels sunk by the Germans so they can receive supplies. The Allied fleet then makes for Anzio in 1944 to break the stalemate. They take Anzio in May and march on Rome; capture the capital June 4, 1944.
- 7) *Victory at Sea, Volume 20: Return of the Allies, Volume 21: Full Fathom Five, Volume 22: The Fate of Europe, Volume 2: The Pacific Boils Over, and Volume 24: The Road to Mandalay*: The beginning of the tape features part of a movie and then cuts to the *Return of the Allies* recording. The Japanese conquered the Philippines in 1941. After Pearl Harbor, U.S. naval forces planned to free the Philippines and sent a massive fleet in October 1944. They landed on the archipelago and contested the Japanese for the islands while the air force watched the skies for stray Japanese planes and attacked Japanese bases all the way to China. They begin the fight for the main island, where Manila lies, in January 1945. They take the beachhead and start the march towards Manila, surrounding the Japanese forces there. The Japanese are finally defeated. *Full Fathom Five* talks about the war's submarines. They're commissioned in New England and named after fish. Discusses the importance of control of the Panama Canal. The submarines arrive in Pearl Harbor and the types of missions and possibility of death are discussed. The importance of the Japanese merchant marine is stressed and the subs attack them to stop their supply

lines and trade. The Japanese destroyers strike back, sometimes with fatal consequences. 52 submarines never return to Pearl Harbor. In *The Fate of Europe*, its 1944 and the navy of the USSR is preparing to bring troops in for an offensive against the German forces entrenched around the ports of Odessa and Sevastopol. The Russians bomb Sevastopol from the air before the navy attacks. The German's are captured or evacuate and the city is liberated May 9, 1944. Ships and men gather in the ports of Italy and North Africa to attack southern France in Operation Anvil in order to oust the Germans. The plan is to seize Marseilles and Toulon to support the invading armies and reconnoiter with the troops from Normandy. Both ports are retaken and Paris falls in August. Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin meet in February 1945 at Yalta. The Russians agree to enter the war against Japan and the date for the first meeting of the United Nations is set, as well as plans for the end of Germany. The Rhine is crossed in March 1945 and the Germans begin to surrender. Discusses the creation of the People's Army, made up of very young and very old men, as a last ditch effort. They are soon taken captive. Hitler kills himself and the nation surrenders in May 1945. In *The Pacific Boils Over*, Oahu is juxtaposed with Tokyo before Pearl Harbor. The beginning of the war in Asia is explained as the Japanese conquer Manchuria and China. The Japanese, knowing that they need access to the oil in Southeast Asia and that the fleet in Pearl Harbor is the only one standing in their way, plan to attack the harbor. Footage from Japan is shown to explain the planning process. The fleet sets sail for Hawaii and the statistics of the attack plans are given. The planes make for Pearl Harbor and confusion in Washington is shown, as is life on Oahu before the attack. The Japanese sink or destroy eight battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, one hundred eighty eight planes and their hangars. The Japanese lose twenty nine planes, sixty eight pilots and sailors, and nine miniature submarines. Tokyo announces the victory at home while some the ships from Pearl Harbor are successfully raised and sail again. In *The Road to Mandalay*, Japan attacks China in 1937. Refugees flee to Chungking and the Burma Road is built to supply the people through Rangoon, Mandalay, and Lashio. The Japanese absorb Siam in order to cut China off completely and then invade Burma. In May 1942, Mandalay is taken by the Japanese, China is cut off, and the British evacuate. A meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is held in Quebec to plan the recapture of Mandalay and the opening of China. Mountbatten takes control of operations there and takes control of the Indian Ocean. Details the role of the Indian Navy and the arrival of supplies to Calcutta. The supplies are taken north by rail from Calcutta to Ledo and a connection to the Burma Road at Lashio is planned. They wait out the monsoon and the mixed Allied army works its way through the Burmese jungle. The pipeline for oil and the road follows the army. Mandalay is retaken and the first supplies are taken into China in January 1945.

Donald Sweet CDs

Disk 1:

SB Associates; Story of VPB 21, which was based in Okinawa, Japan; hearing rather than reading will make listener feel as though they are on a mission with the crew; March- August, 1945

Sweet describes the location, geography, and weather of Okinawa and surrounding islands. Describes size of US invading fleet as second greatest, smaller only than D-Day with huge

casualties; “longest, costliest, and most bitterly fought campaign of the Pacific war”; lasted four and a half months; it was too far away from the base at the Marianas Islands for land-based planes and air-craft carriers were deployed elsewhere, so a floating sea-plane base was created; describes arriving at Kerama Retto and flying patrols before the invasion fleet arrived. Sweet describes the arrival of new crews and technology, impact of kamikaze attacks, submarine antics, the move of the Japanese fleet against the base and the sinking of the Japanese ship *Yamato* on April 7, and patrols conducted from the base throughout April, including ones that bombed weather stations. Sweet explains what life was like for officers onboard the floating base—playing cards, divvying up duties, rivalry between plane and navy crews, and maintenance required to keep the seaplanes in working order. There were over 100 planes at the base and a number of tenders (like the USS *Chandeleur*) and pontoon repair bridges, which were necessary for repairs to the planes. If a plane was damaged badly enough, it would return to Saipan (Mariana Islands). The base only ever missed one patrol due to maintenance issues; as a result of their stellar record, they were often sent to aid other bases with their patrols when their planes were grounded due to maintenance issues. At the end of April, relief crews arrived, so some veterans returned home while the new men were trained. As May rolled around, Sweet explains that crews would return to base from patrols only to find that an air raid drill was underway, meaning they had to stand buoy watches; no one was getting enough sleep. May was a stressful month; the Japanese mounted several air raid and kamikaze attacks. Sweet (part of crew 4) and several other plane crews were sent on torpedo-bomb runs against enemy shipping.

Disk 2:

Sweet continues to detail patrols and small battles. He discusses the several awards ceremonies that were held. June was another difficult month: the plane crews saw a lot of action and faced maintenance issues, a plane shortage, and the outright loss of two planes. It was also the last month of continuous fighting. At the beginning of June, one of the base’s planes sank and five of the crewmen died. One of the crews attacked a light house. On the fourth of July, the last of the original crews left the base after serving for exactly a year. One crew was sent into the eye of a typhoon to gather information about its strength and course! By July, the squad had a full complement of planes but a combination of structural damage, battle damage, and engine failures meant that some days, only four planes were able to fly. The squad was moved on July 15 from Kerama Retto to Chimu Wan, Okinawa. August was also busy but it soon became evident that the war in the Pacific was coming to a close. The invasion of Japan became the main topic of discussion and the squad would participate. The number of enemy attacks decreased. The approach of a typhoon meant all planes had to evacuate the area and go to Saipan. Then the crews began to prepare the planes for the invasion of Japan. They received news on August 15, 1945 that the Japanese had surrendered. Sweet then details VPB 21’s final statistics in the time period it was active, from March 1944-August 1945.