



Iron Mackfee Locklear Oral History Interview

Ashley Minner Jones

May 28, 2024

Glen Burnie, Maryland

This oral history was produced as part of the Beyond Baltimore Street: Living Lumbee Legacies Project by Ashley Minner Art, LLC with funding from a 2024 Library of Congress American Folklife Center Community Collections Grant.

Field Notes

Interviewee: Iron Mackfee Locklear [IML]

Age: 98

Sex: Male

Occupation: Former Navy, Painter, Contractor

Residence: Glen Burnie, Maryland

Tribal Affiliation: Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Interviewer: Ashley Minner Jones [AMJ]

Other Participants:

Bob Engh [BE], Mack's friend

Valerie Fox [VF], Mack's granddaughter

Jeanette Jones [JJ], Mack's sister-in-law

Jill Fannon Prevas [JFP], photographer

Location of Interview: Mack's back yard in Glen Burnie, Maryland

Date of Interview: May 28, 2024

Time of Interview: 1:00 PM ET

Transcriber: Ashley Minner Jones

Key Words

Pembroke, Indians, Navy, Glen Burnie, Baltimore, World War II, destroyer, helmsman, granddaughter, checkers

Abstract

Iron Mackfee Locklear (Lumbee) is a 98-year-old Navy veteran who resides in Glen Burnie, Maryland. He remembers his youth in Pembroke, North Carolina, joining the Navy at age 16, his experiences traveling the world and serving as a helmsman on a destroyer escort during WWII, meeting his first wife, Bonnie, and moving to Baltimore to work. For fun, Mack likes to watch airplanes land near Baltimore Washington International airport and to visit the Pascal Senior Center to listen to music and talk to ladies. He still enjoys playing checkers and has only ever encountered one person who could beat him. Though Mack is proud of all that he's gone through

in life, he says if he had the opportunity to live his life again, he would change some things. He advises young people to treat others the way they want to be treated.

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- [1:19] Mack recalls some of his experiences growing up in Pembroke, North Carolina.
- [3:36] Mack talks about joining the Navy and his experiences in service.
- [7:57] Mack's granddaughter, Valerie, enters the conversation.
- [9:28] Mack talks about life and work after the Navy.
- [10:13] Mack talks about what he likes to do for fun at age 98.
- [11:44] Mack's sister-in-law, Jeanette Jones, introduces herself. She and Mack talk about the early years of his marriage to Jeanette's sister, Bonnie, and Mack's work in Baltimore.
- [13:20] Mack reflects on his life and offers advice for young people.
- [15:18] A game of checkers begins.

Transcript

Iron Mackfee Locklear: [00:00:02] My name is Iron Mackfee Locklear. They named me after my uncle from South Carolina. He was a reverend, Preacher Iron Locklear, at the First Baptist Church at Burnt Swamp, at that time.

Ashley Minner Jones: [00:00:18] When were you born?

IML: When was who born? I don't want to tell you... [laughter] 1926.

AMJ: And where were you born?

IML: Uh, Pembroke, North Carolina. [00:00:34] You ever heard of that?

AMJ: What was it like when you were growing up?

IML: It was rough. That was back when President Hoover was the president. Hoover's Days!

AMJ: How old are you now, Mr. Mack? [00:00:49]

IML: How old am I now? I don't want to tell you. [laughter] How old am I? 98.

AMJ: Do you feel like you're 98?

IML: No. [00:01:04] I feel like I'm 16 sometimes, but it don't do me no good. Just feel good. Oh boy. What else can I say?

AMJ: What was Pembroke like when you were growing up?

IML: Well, the... [00:01:19] the passengers trains went through there then, but they don't go through there now. Back in them days... They'd stop there in Pembroke. You had the Pennsylvania Railroad going right through town. [00:01:34] And I—I got one whippin' I never will forget. That was when I's a little boy. The train had stopped and the traffic would stop, both ways on both sides, so the train'd get by. And I was a little small [00:01:49] little boy. I just can remember it...this is something years... a long time ago. And me—my mother seen me. And I waited. When the train went by, the traffic started moving, and I moved too. I went across [00:02:04] the road in front of the... I got a whipping for that... crossed the road in front of all them cars. I can remember that, too. That's years ago. I mean that *was* years ago. I was a little fella. Miss Molly Oxendine [00:02:20] run a store across the street. That's where we used to go down there and get penny Mary Janes. That's when they's a penny. But now they have what, five cent? Get two for a dime or something. But back in them days you'd get... get one little old Mary Jane about that long, a penny a piece. And now you can't even... can't... a penny ain't nothin'. [00:02:35] You might could take a penny and do it that way. Just flip it and let it go.

AMJ: Did your parents farm? [00:02:50]

IML: They used to, yeah, years ago. They had a farm right from Pembroke there.

AMJ: What church did you go to?

IML: What—what'd they call it back then, Teat? [nickname for Jeanette Jones] Burnt Swamp? Burnt Swamp [00:03:05] Baptist Church. But they didn't...don't call it that now. What they call it?

JJ: Oh, they still do.

IML: Say they still call it Burnt Swamp Baptist Church.

AMJ: Where did you go to school?

IML: Pembroke.

AMJ: All Indian [00:03:20] kids?

IML: Yeah, they had three races—Black, white, and Indian. Indians was the last ones on the list. [laughter]

AMJ: How old were you when you came to Baltimore?

IML: [00:03:36] Gosh, I'd—I'd been all over the world when I come to Baltimore. I went in the Navy.

AMJ: How old were you when you went to the Navy?

IML: I had my mother to sign for me. I went in when I... before I was [00:03:51] 16 years ago...15.

AMJ: Why did you do it?

IML: Get away from home. And I did, too. I got away from home. I served in both theaters [00:04:06], in Europe and the Pacific. Both of 'em.

AMJ: What was it like being far away from home when you were so young?

IML: Oh, I loved it. Young and boy, I was free as a bird. [laughter] Young and free.

AMJ: What was your favorite place that you got to see?

IML: My favorite place? Well, let me think a minute. Naples, Italy.

AMJ: [00:04:37] What was it like there?

IML: It was nice! Had French women, Chinese, Japanese, any kind of girlfriend you wanted [laughter]. That was my favorite place.

AMJ: [00:04:53] How long did you get to stay there?

IML: I was on a ship, we was in and out a few times. I went through the Straits of Gibraltar five times. I was on a destroyer escort, escorting [00:05:08] convoys. I was young and foolish and ready to roll [laughter]. He knows what I mean.

Bob Engh: He was in combat while he was there in the Mediterranean. [00:05:23] He also was a gunner on... and is known as a... The destroyer escorts famously were called "tin cans sailors" because they were small ships. And they were real important because they escorted the [00:05:38] larger ships and they normally kept the men out of harm's way, particularly from submarines. And in that case, in the Mediterranean, would have been German submarines, and in the Pacific where he was at, it would have been the Japanese submarines [00:05:53]. And he was also a gunner, and I think it was a 20 millimeter, or was it 40?

IML: 20 millimeter.

BE: 20 millimeter gun, which was a rapid fire. And he shot at German [00:06:08] airplanes and Japanese airplanes, so he saw real combat.

AMJ Combat. Will you introduce yourself, Sir?

BE: Yes, I'm Bob Engh. I'm a retired commander from the U.S. Navy and a member of the Fleet Reserve [00:06:23], as is Mack. I was also enlisted. We had some things in common. And I love the Navy. My dad was in the Navy. My grandfather was a merchant seaman during the first World War and a victim of the submarines [00:06:39] that Mack was one of those guys that made sure didn't happen.

AMJ: Wow, thank you for being here.

BE: You're welcome. It's my pleasure. Mack has turned out to be a darn good friend and I appreciate it.

IML: [00:06:54] My main job was during... not during battle, but during shift watches, was the helmsman. Tell her what a helmsman is.

BE: Helmsman is the guy that steers the ship. He's listening to the [00:07:09] commands of the officers or the captain who are on watch up on the bridge and the helmsman is the guy who actually steers the ship. So he answers the calls and if you got to make a starboard turn or a port turn, [00:07:24] you got to know what all of those commands mean and it's very important many times because you're in harm's way, and harm's way can either be from the enemy or for the kind of sea you're working with [00:07:39]

IML: It was something. I did a little bit of everything on the ship.

AMJ: How long were you in, total?

IML: Total? 7 years. I'm gonna buy her some shoes [laughter].

Valerie Fox: He's lookin' at my...[laughter]

AMJ: [00:07:57] Whose jeans are you looking at?

VF: Who am I, Pop Pop?

IML: That's my granddaughter. That's Valerie.

VF: Valerie Fox.

AMJ: Valerie, will you introduce yourself?

VF: Yes, I'm Valerie Fox. I'm Iron's granddaughter and I help take care of him [00:08:12], so I'm with him a lot.

AMJ: She's your favorite? [laughter]

IML: That's my favorite.

VF: Look, you have other grandkids...

IML: I don't tell none of the rest of them that. That's my favorite.

AMJ: Okay, we'll edit that part out. [laughter] Probably.

IML: [00:08:27] If I need anything, man... And if she's anywhere in the neighborhood or at home, and don't make no difference where she is, if I need it, it won't be long. She'll be here. So that's why I say she's [00:08:42] my favorite. I don't tell the rest of 'em all that stuff. [laughter] I'll tell you and you can put it on broadcast if you want to [laughter].

AMJ: Tell me, why did you leave the Navy?

IML: [00:08:58] I was... They stationed me in Norfolk Virginia, at the Naval Air Station, after I'd done already served. I was there two years trying to get a transfer out of there on a ship and I couldn't get one. So I just...heck with the Navy. [00:09:13] I got out. I was plannin' on going back, but nah, it never did hit me to get back in [laughter].

AMJ: How old were you then?

IML: [00:09:28] Oh, I don't know. 19... I can't tell you how old I was then.

AMJ: What did you do when you got out?

IML: Uh, what did I do? Went into uh... just uh... contracting, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. Heavy equipment, put it that way. [00:09:43] I could run anything from a bicycle to a backhoe. Any kind of heavy equipment, bulldozers... You name it, I could run it. [sigh] This is gettin' to me. I gotta catch [00:09:58] my breath.

AMJ: Okay.

VF: Do you want a drink, Pop Pop?

IML: Hm?

VF: Do you want your water?

IML: She tried to pass me the water, I said "gimme!" [laughter] That was the wrong word.

Ashley Minner Jones: Well, what do you like [00:10:13] to do these days?

Iron Mack Locklear: Huh?

AMJ: What do you like to do for fun now?

IML: For fun? They ain't much I can do! [laughter]

VF: He loves going to the airport and watching... They [00:10:28] have a park there where you can watch the airplanes come in, so I'll take him there and just watch the airplanes come in. It's right up the street.

IML: The pool room and shoot pool. I shoot pool...not anymore. I don't do that either.

VF: What about checkers, Pop Pop? Tell [00:10:43] her about how good you are at checkers.

IML: I ain't run across anybody yet that could beat me except Avance, Avance Jones. Now he was good.

VF: I asked him where he learned how to play checkers and he told me that's all they did on the ships [00:10:58], was play checkers and he became a champ. And he is undefeated even at his age now. I can't beat him.

JJ: You can't beat him?

VF: Nope.

IML: I ain't found where nobody can play checkers. They can play, but they can't beat me.

VF: It's amazing how good he is at checkers.

AMJ: Valerie, [00:11:13] do you have a checkerboard?

VF: Yes.

AMJ: Here?

VF: Yep.

AMJ: Will you two play a game?

VF: Yep!

AMJ: YES!

Jill Fannon Prevas: Oh, that's awesome!

BE: He goes to the senior center here in Glen Burnie, which is called the Pascal Senior Center and listens to the music. And [00:11:28] uh, that's how I met Mack.

JJ: Try to dance?

BE: No, he hustles all the ladies. He's still... he's still a good sailor.

AMJ: Ma'am, will you introduce yourself? What's your name?

JJ: [00:11:44] Jeanette Jones.

AMJ: And how come you're here today?

JJ: I came with my niece over to visit Mack.

AMJ: And who is Mack to you?

JJ: He's my brother-in-law. He was married to my older sister [00:11:59] and they had two girls and two boys. And when I come to Baltimore in '59, I came here to babysit for them. And Mack was painting houses, bridges, and everything else. Didn't you work [00:12:14] for Baltimore Paint Company back in [the] 50s?

IML: Yeah, I liked that job.

AMJ: Why did you decide to come to Baltimore?

IML: Decide? I—I don't know. Tell you the truth, I really don't know. Why did I decide to come to Baltimore?

JJ: [00:12:29] For work.

IML: To work, to work. Yeah.

JJ: You didn't want to farm?

AMJ: Were are you and Ms. Bonnie married when you came?

IML: Yeah.

AMJ: How did you meet Ms. Bonnie?

IML: [00:12:46] She was in high school at the time me and her got married. I think she's... she was young... 15, 16...

JJ: 16

IML: 16 when me and her got married. [00:13:01] I would leave work and go over the high school to meet her [laughter], sit around over there with all them girls in a... What did they call it? Entertainment room. [00:13:17] Room full of girls. That's where I met her at.

AMJ: What do you think is the greatest thing you've done in your life? The thing you're the most proud of.

IML: The best thing I ever did? [00:13:32] Ah that's—that's a hard question. The best thing I ever did... I'm trying to think.

VF: Well, what are you most proud of in your life, Pop Pop? Something you're very proud of.

IML: To tell you the truth, I'm proud of everything I went [00:13:47] through. I've been through a lot. Uh... I wouldn't want to go through it again. Some of it, I wouldn't want to go through again. If I ever had to and I come to that, I'll probably change my mind and do something different. [00:14:02] How's that? [laughter]

AMJ: That's a great answer.

IML: I would, too. If I had to go through it again, I'd change my mind about a lot of things.

VF: Anything particular?

IML: Huh?

VF: Anything particular that you would change?

IML: [00:14:18] Uh... particular... I'd be more particular about the company I kept at that time.

VF: Ok, that's a good answer.

IML: That's the best way I can put it. I'd be more particular about the company I'd keep, the people I associated with.

AMJ: Do you have any advice for younger people?

IML: Advice for younger people?

AMJ: Uh huh.

IML: Well, the best advice I could give you for young people [00:14:48] is to treat other people the way you wantin' them to treat you. That's what I would do. I'd change a whole lot of my life. If I had to go through it again, I would change it. [00:15:03] But that's something you can't do.

AMJ: You give a good interview, Mr. Mack.

IML: Huh?

AMJ: You give a good interview. Thank you!

IML: I do the best I know how. [laughter]

AMJ: You did great. [00:15:18] Are you gonna whoop up on Valerie, now? Are we about to see...?

IML: She wants to get beat! [laughter] You, you watch this!

VF: He knows, I can't beat... Are you good at checkers, Bob?

BE: No, I haven't played checkers forever.

VF: [sigh]

IML: Go ahead.

BE: You're good! You—

VF: Alright...

BE: You go after...

VF: I'm not good.

IML: I'll let them move first. Go ahead.