

1945 September 24-30

First to the Beach

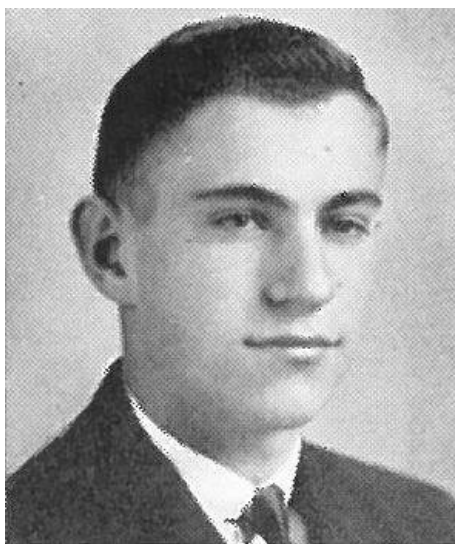
Fredrickson In Pre-Invasion Work On Borneo, Navy Reports

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 September 27, page 15)

Just four years out of high school, **Arthur J. Fredrickson Jr. of La Crosse** was performing some of the most dangerous missions of World War II in a unit that was the precursor to the Navy SEALs---the UDTs.

Arthur Joseph Fredrickson, Jr. was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, on March 28, 1923.¹ His parents were Arthur Fredrickson, Sr. and Ruth (Harter) Fredrickson, and they lived at 1732 Farwell Street. He was an only child.² His father worked at the La Crosse Rubber Mills in 1930³ and 1940.⁴ In 1958, Arthur Sr. was working at Electric Auto-Lite.⁵

Arthur Jr. grew up to be an athletic six-feet-one-inches tall and weighing 175 pounds.⁶ He played football and basketball all four years at La Crosse Central High School, as well as participating in track his senior year. His ambition was to be a football coach.⁷ Fredrickson was an honorable mention selection for the All-City Basketball team for 1940-1941.⁸



Arthur Fredrickson, Jr.
(The Booster, La Crosse Central High School, 1941, page 32)



(La Crosse Tribune, 1941 January 23, page 18)

After graduating from high school, Fredrickson worked at the Trane Company.⁹ He then enrolled at [St. Olaf College](#) in Northfield, Minnesota. Until March 1943, he was also a member of "the marine unit" at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota.¹⁰

Arthur Fredrickson enlisted in the United States Navy on July 1, 1943.¹¹ In 1944, he spent four months in a midshipman's school at Northwestern University in Chicago. At the conclusion of this training in September, he was commissioned as an ensign in the Naval Reserve.¹²

The same month that Arthur Fredrickson became an ensign, a group of volunteers was gathered as "Company C" at the [Amphibious Training Base](#) in Fort Pierce, Florida.¹³

Fort Pierce is where naval officer [Draper Kauffman](#) had developed the concept of underwater demolition teams in July 1943. Kauffman established a challenging training course that emphasized swimming, handling small boats, and explosives. Training culminated with seven days of 24-hours a day challenges that would become known as "Hell Week."¹⁴

Underwater demolition teams saw their first action in the Pacific in January 1944. In preparation for landings on beaches, their job was to record water depth, scout enemy defenses, detect possible obstacles for landing craft, and mark landing lanes with fishing line and buoys. They would also blow up underwater and beachfront obstacles that had been placed to stall landing craft. They did all of this clad in just swimming trunks, armed with a knife, and in daylight under the eyes of the enemy.¹⁵

By the end of World War II, there were 34 Underwater Demolition Teams. Twenty-one of them experienced combat.¹⁶

On November 18, 1944, Company C at Fort Pierce became Underwater Demolition Team 18. Among its 87 enlisted men and 12 officers¹⁷ was Ensign Arthur J. Fredrickson, Jr. of La Crosse.¹⁸



Underwater Demolitions Team 18
(Navy SEAL Museum)

[Arthur Fredrickson might be the third man from the left in the front row.]



(Navy SEAL Museum)

On November 20, 1944, UDT 18 transported by train to San Pedro, California, and boarded an [Attack Transport ship \(APA\)](#) that sailed for Maui, Hawaii, on November 27. Their training on the western side of Maui included coral and lava blasting. When their initial training was completed by the middle of January 1945, they remained in reserve until receiving orders on May 25, 1945, to head for the Southwest Pacific.¹⁹

After a stop at Pearl Harbor, UDT 18 sailed west with stops at Eniwetok, Ulithi, Leyte, and Morotai. At the latter, they learned their mission was preparation for the invasion of [Balikpapan](#) on east coast of Borneo.²⁰



(oldprints.com)

Borneo is the third largest island in the world. Sarawak and North Borneo (pink in the map above) were British colonies. The rest of the island was ruled by the Dutch as part of the Netherlands East Indies. Borneo was strategic because of its location on major sea lanes and being just 300 miles north of Australia. It also had oilfields. The Japanese swept through this region in December 1941 and early 1942 against weak resistance from British and Dutch forces. There were 31,000 Japanese soldiers occupying Borneo.²¹

The re-conquest of Borneo was accomplished by Australian troops who made landings on various parts of the island on May 1, June 10, June 20, and July 1, 1945.²² UDT 18 was in support of the July 1 operation.

Starting on June 25, 1945, and for four days after through the landings on July 1, UDT 18 performed reconnaissance of the Manggar-Ketjil and Klandasan beaches near Balikpapan, created hydrographic charts, blew up underwater obstacles, rescued survivors of a ship that had been sunk by a mine, and guided landing craft through the gaps in beach obstacles during the landing. They did all of this under "moderate to heavy" enemy fire but suffered no casualties even though some of their boats were hit. Commanders wrote that Balikpapan was a difficult operation that was carried out with proficiency by UDT 18 (along with UDT 11) in their first combat mission.²³ Fredrickson was awarded the [Bronze Star](#) for meritorious service.²⁴



A UDT team at Borneo
(Naval History and Heritage Command)
[The rubber boat was used to deploy and recover UDT swimmers.]



Swimmer being picked up near a Balikpapan beach
(Naval History and Heritage Command)

After the Borneo operation, UDT 18 returned to the United States for additional training. They would have been involved in the invasion of Japan itself had not the war ended after the dropping of the two atomic bombs. UDT 18 flew back to the Pacific to lead the first landing of occupation troops in Tokyo Bay. They checked the beaches and piers for mines and booby traps. Their next mission was to disarm Japanese naval vessels in Yokosuka and Nagaura Bay by throwing small arms and vital parts from larger guns into the sea.²⁵

Fredrickson returned to the United States in late 1945. On December 8, 1945, he married Donna Silver, who had attended [Gustavus Adolphus College](#) and was then a student at the Swedish Hospital School of Medical Technology in Minneapolis. The marriage took place at the Norwegian Lutheran Church in [Clarkfield, Minnesota](#).²⁶

Lt. Arthur Fredrickson was discharged from the Navy on June 15, 1946, at the Great Lakes Naval Station in Chicago.²⁷

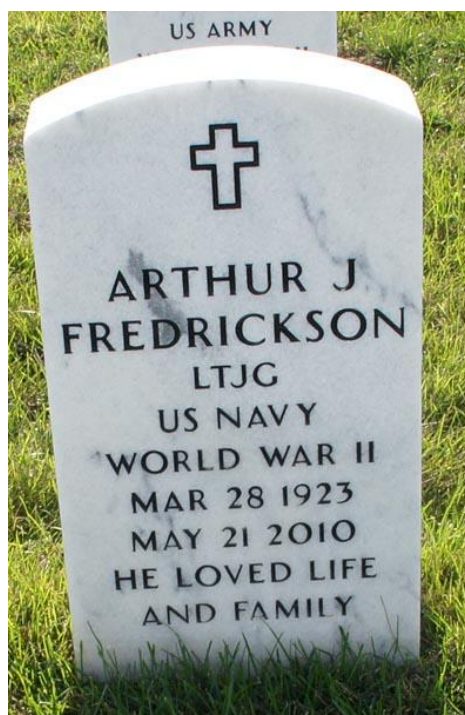
After getting out of the Navy, he finished his college education at St. Olaf College, graduating in 1948. Fredrickson was a teacher in Kenyon (MN), Waseca (MN), and Minneapolis Southwest. He also coached football, girls basketball, and boys and girls golf. He and his wife, Donna, had two sons.²⁸



Art Fredrickson

(*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 2010 May 23)

Art Fredrickson was 87 years old when he died on May 21, 2010, in Minneapolis. He was survived by his wife, two sons, and three grandchildren. He was buried in the [Fort Snelling National Cemetery](#) in Minneapolis.²⁹



(Findagrave.com)

During World War II, it was said that the underwater demolition teams were famous for "getting there first with the least, and doing the most."³⁰

Arthur Fredrickson of La Crosse was among those who got there first, and he did much.

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Sources & Notes:

¹ The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System*, 147; Box: 205; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 October 2).

² "Ruth H. Fredrickson," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1951 October 31, page 19.

³ 1930 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 12A, dwelling 273, family 297, Arthur J. and Ruth Fredrickson; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 2); citing NARA microfilm publication T626, roll 2667.

⁴ 1940 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 14A, dwelling 1732, family 163, Art and Ruth Fredrickson; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 2); citing NARA microfilm publication M627, roll 4491.

⁵ "Workers Collect," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1958 December 16, page 9.

⁶ *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin*.

⁷ *The Booster 1941* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: La Crosse Central High School, 1941), 32.

⁸ "1940-41 All-City High School Basketball Team," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 March 16, page 12. The basketball star in La Crosse that season was Steve "Blond Bomber" Pavela of La Crosse Aquinas, who was the top scorer in La Crosse basketball history at the time.

⁹ *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin*. This was as of June 30, 1942.

¹⁰ "Fredrickson In Pre-Invasion Work On Borneo, Navy Reports," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 September 27, page 15.

¹¹ U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs, *Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) Death File*, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 2).

¹² "Our Men in Service," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 September 28, page 13. Edgar A Kroner, 21, of 1710 Cass Street, La Crosse, was in the same graduating class of midshipmen.

¹³ Robert Allan King, "Underwater Demolition Team Histories: WWII UDT Team Eighteen," *View of the Rockies*, accessed 2020 October 4, <http://www.viewoftherockies.com/UDT18.html>.

¹⁴ Blasting the Way to the Beachhead: US Navy Underwater Demolition Teams in the Pacific," *The National WWII Museum*, 2020 April 19, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/us-navy-underwater-demolition-teams>.

¹⁵ *The National WWII Museum*.

¹⁶ *The National WWII Museum*.

¹⁷ King.

¹⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 27.

¹⁹ King.

²⁰ King.

²¹ I.C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot, ed. *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), 163.

²² Brigadier Peter Young, ed. *The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopedia of World War II, Volume 9* (Freeport, New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1985), 2493. The Borneo campaign receives scant attention in World War II

histories because it was a primarily Australian operation in an area that was considered a side-show theater by 1945 when American forces were closing in on the Japanese homeland.

²³ Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Intelligence Division, Office of Naval Records and Library, (1922 - 10/10/1945). UNDERWATER DEMOLITION TEAM 18 - Rep of reconnaissance, demolition and assault ops at Balikpapan, Borneo, 6/25/45 - 7/1/45. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://catalog.archives.gov/id/101737430>. (Accessed 2020 October 5.)

²⁴ "Arthur J. Fredrickson, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 2020 May 23, <https://www.startribune.com/obituaries/detail/12563350/>.

²⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 27.

²⁶ "At the Norwegian Lutheran church," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 December 28, page 4.

²⁷ "Dischargees," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1946 June 17, page 8.

²⁸ *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 2020 May 23.

²⁹ *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 2020 May 23.

³⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 27.