

FEATURED

Longview WWII veteran focus of new book

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• Courtesy of Lilly Robbins Brock

Lilly Robbins Brock and World War II veteran Maury Hooper stand together on a PT boat earlier this year.

• Courtesy photo

'Wooden Boats & Iron Men' by Lilly Robbins Brock of Cathlamet is available for purchase on Amazon.com in ebook and paperback.

While unpacking boxes from a move last year that relocated her from Olympia to Cathlamet, Lilly Robbins Brock made an unexpected discovery.

Two letters, written by her now deceased father, told of life on the battlefield during World War II.

"It really inspired me," said Brock, a former interior designer turned author. "I'm really attached to veterans."

That fascination led her to learn about Longview WWII veteran Maury Hooper.

Brock has just released her latest book: "Wooden Boats & Iron Men: A World War II Sailor's Life Story and His Passion to Help Save One of the Last Surviving PT Boats." The 148-page book chronicles Hooper's life and how his "love of the motor torpedo boat" has lasted over 70 years.

Though he originally wanted to become a fighter pilot, Hooper joined the Navy and was assigned to PT Boat 238 as a motor machinist, or "motor mach," from 1944 to 1946.

"They were made of wood because they were saving metal for warships," Brock explained. "That made them very repairable — just pull it up on the beach and you could plug the holes."

But the boat's wooden construction also made them vulnerable and hard to preserve. "At the end of the war, they piled them all up on the beach and burned them because they didn't want the enemies to get a hold of them," Brock said.

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After the purchase, PT-658 was transferred to Portland, where thousands of dollars and volunteer hours went into the restoration. In June 2004, 10 years after the boat was rediscovered, it was introduced, fully restored, to the public during an antique and classic wooden boat show at the Tomahawk Island Moorage in Portland.

The group, Save the PT Boat Inc., takes PT-658 on a yearly cruise through the Pacific Northwest, including stops in St. Helens and at the Portland Rose Festival Fleet Week.

It's stories like these, Brock said, that Hooper's family has wanted him to write down for years. She recorded her interviews with him.

"The tapes are wonderful in that way," Brock said. She plans on giving Hooper's family a copy of her interviews with Hooper along with copies of the book. [REDACTED]

“He was as sharp as a tack when I interviewed him, Brock said. The book covers Hooper’s time in the Navy as well as his childhood in Oklahoma.

“Younger people these days have no idea what people born in the 1930s have gone through,” Brock said. Hooper was born in Tipton, Okla., and grew up during the Dust Bowl.

“His family withstood everything. They were tough,” Brock said. Hooper started picking cotton on his family’s farm when he was 6 years old. “One day, they loaded up their wagon of cotton to go into town to sell it and it was all quiet. And there was no money.”

Brock spent about nine months researching and writing. She learned all about the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression and World War II.

“I tried to put the reader there, to understand what it was like to live during that time,” Brock said.

Brock presented Hooper with the book during a special ceremony at the Canterbury Park assisted living facilities in Longview on Sept. 20 with friends and family members present.

“The fact that I was able to capture his life and get it on the tapes and put it in this book is a godsend for the family,” Brock said.

“Wooden Boats & Iron Men” is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) as an eBook for \$3.99 or in paperback for \$9.99. A portion of the proceeds from each sale will be donated to the PT-658 project.

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