



Charles (Chuck) Lyda (July 23, 1952 – June 12, 2010)

U.S. Wildwater Team Member – 1971-1995, 2003

U.S. National Champion (Wildwater)

1979, 1981 and 1995 (C-1)

1976 (C-2 with Andy Toro), 1991 (C-2 with Dan Schnurrenberger)

1995 (C-2 with John Pinyerd)

World Champion (Slalom)

1975 and 1977 (C-2 Mixed with Marietta Gillman)

Charles Clinton Lyda was born on July 23, 1952 in San Diego, California. He was the son of Grady Lu Lyda Jr. and Charmian Lyda. His parents also had his sister Laramie and a brother Grady.

Chuck, as he became known, was to turn out to be unlike most people. He was an athlete and honorable person in every way. At a very early age around 14 or so he was exposed to paddling kayaks at Newport Harbor and was a Sea Scout, similar to a Boy Scout, in Newport Beach. He was exposed to sailing and paddling and soon fell under the influence of Tom Johnson, a LA Fireman who was already heavily involved with canoes and kayaks. Chuck through Tom and others soon was running rivers and, throughout school in Newport Beach, was steadily getting better. Even during high school he did not do other sports with his classmates but instead was paddling. When Tom Johnson moved to Kernville, along came Chuck. With the move, Kernville soon became a Mecca for folks wanting to train for whitewater slalom and wildwater racing. Tom also helped make Newport Harbor, then called the Sea Base, a site for flatwater training.

Chuck moved very quickly to being a slalom and wildwater paddler who, to a person seeing his potential gave up their spot on the team, and Chuck at about 16 years old was already racing for the US Team in World Championships. In 1969 he competed for the U.S. in Wildwater at Bourg St. Maurice in France.

During this time, Chuck was already riding motorcycles and testing his ability for endurance. Being a Boy Scout as well, he really got into being self sufficient. He actually had his dad drop him off out in the desert of Southern California with no real supplies and spent 3 days on his own. He was also racing bicycles during this time and had a job at Sea Schwinn Bicycles in the LA area. He was a member of the Orange County Wheelmen and raced regularly. He also was doing scuba and he and his best friend, Murray, were already diving in the ocean with lights at night to find lobsters and other food. They took many motorcycle trips. One was to San Francisco and when Murray's bike broke in Santa Barbara they doubled up to SF. It got crazy when well after dark while doing Highway 1 through Big Sur Murray fell asleep on the bike and started falling off. Chuck, sensing something was wrong, kept control of the bike and some how kept Murray from losing his face on the road. During another night on motorcycles Wendy and Chuck returned to Costa Mesa to see what appeared to be a fireplace burning in another apartment. They soon realized that it was actually a fire and Chuck used his helmet to break out the glass, go inside and alert the people inside.

Spending all his time doing training and paddling as well as all his other activities meant that Chuck was constantly looking for quick jobs that he always left for more training, racing or road trips. Yet he often had some very nice motorcycles and bikes. In those days kayaks were typically made from molds. One of the first kayaks that Chuck ever paddled on a river was borrowed and he broke it in half. So he was quick to learn how to make new ones and do repairs as well.

Many of the folks that I talked to about this bio said that Chuck never got into trouble. He would do the usual practical jokes but was not ever criminal or bad in his actions and life. He did some crazy stuff like riding a motorcycle to Flagstaff for Christmas break and being poorly dressed and covered with ice. Another was while making some money he delivered some kayaks out east. Having seen the movie Deliverance, he put on the Chattooga River with a small group during a full moon and did Section 4. Once while paddling at Newport he came near a boat that in the harbor and was invited aboard by the owner. The boat was the "Wild Goose" and the owner was John Wayne. John gave him a t-shirt with the boats name on it. Their group of young paddlers at Newport was known as the "Flying Toads".

One of the stories that Chuck's brother Grady recalled was that one day Chuck called and said "We are going Sky Diving tomorrow". Grady was taken out to Perris where they took a quick class and were then taken up to do 3 jumps. On the first all Grady could think about was how to land safely. Unknowingly, he landed right on the drop zone target. Chuck was nowhere to be found. After a while and just before they took off to jump the second time Chuck showed up. He was pissed that his brother had hit the target and he was way off. After the 3rd jump Chuck kept getting closer to the target and Grady was always further away. It was then that Chuck revealed that he had hit an object other than ground and broken his ankle on his first jump. Not wanting to miss the other jumps, he soldiered on in pain and still did 3 jumps.

With paddling now as his biggest passion he spent time both at Newport as well as Kernville and continued along with many others to train under the tutelage of Tom Johnson. He was very focused and spent time doing all the options available - flatwater, slalom, wildwater and just river running and both in canoe and kayak. Quickly his list of national teams grew and he became a regular on the racing circuit in the U.S. and Europe. I know only of teams that I have heard about and it is impressive. First France, then 1973 in Switzerland in C-2 Mixed Wildwater, then 1975 when he and Marietta Gilman took their first World Championship in C-2 Mixed Slalom in Yugoslavia. Switching boats and partners he competed with Andy Toro in C-2 Sprint at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canada. He was back again with Marietta in 1977 in C-2 Mixed for a second World Championship in Austria. 1979 found him with Johnny Evans as well as Kent Ford earning a Silver Medal in C-1 Wildwater Team. In 1980 he qualified for his second Olympics in K-2 Sprint with Bill Leach. Unfortunately due to global politics the US boycotted the Moscow Olympics. Right back to rivers, Chuck was racing at the World Championships in Wildwater C-1. You can bet there was plenty more racing in that period of time. Chuck kept meticulous records of all his races including finishes and times. He also listed all the rivers he had ever paddled and that tally was 179 rivers in his career.

While out running at Tahoe one time with Carl Toppner, they got to where Carl decided to hitchhike back to Truckee and the person who picked him up was the current Biathlon Team Coach who was doing a camp at Squaw Valley. When Carl told him about their run that day, he told Carl to grab Chuck and be at Squaw the next day. That led to them both training to compete in Biathlon. Chuck was an excellent shooter but was slower on skis, but none the less made several biathlon teams. Chuck did compete on a world cup level for the Biathlon Team for several years. He was in the California National Guard and was allowed to compete as an athlete while fulfilling his service to the Guard. His great passion for training and endurance had now led him to being offered the job of coach for the WCAP Biathlon Team. Under a program called WCAP, World Class Athletic Program, Chuck moved to Vermont with Carol and from 1996 to 2002 was the coach for the athletes that were attempting to be on the US and Olympic Teams. They also spent much of their time in Vermont racing Marathon Canoes and Outrigger Canoes in all the big long distance races. They had very good results from all the races they did there. After the games in Nagano, he once again was their coach until the Salt Lake Olympics. Chuck and Carol again hit the road buying a home in the Salt Lake area, again being the head coach for the WCAP Biathlon Team. As in Nagano, many of the athletes that Chuck coached made the Salt Lake Olympic Games. After the Salt Lake Games funding for WCAP was cut and with his coaching over he and Carol returned to the California National Guard and living in the Lake Natomas area.

Back to his personal and athletic life. Early on Chuck was exposed to Outrigger paddling. Probably the best known Outrigger Race is in Hawaii and called the Molokai. It is over 40 miles of open ocean typically with large swells and unrelenting heat it at best takes around 4 hours. Teams number 9 paddlers and switches of 3 paddlers take place about every 20 minutes. Switches involve steering towards 3 paddlers who have been dropped off by an escort boat. Just as the outrigger comes to the 3 swimmers, 3 others bail out and the swimmers grab the gunnels and swing in. All this happens hopefully without missing a stroke often in big seas. With this program one can be expected to paddle very hard for 40 minutes before you get a rest. Some rest actually... you have to be picked up by the escort boat then you can eat or drink before you have to be placed in front of the outrigger again. The team which Chuck was a member was the first non Hawaiian team to ever take first place. The team was known as "Blazing Paddles". The Hawaiians were very upset. That was 1978 and they won it in 1980 and 1982 as well. So they won 3 times and finished 2nd 3 times in 7 years.

After Bruce Jenner won the Olympics in Decathlon he and NBC created a program called "Fittest of them all". Chuck entered and was the first place winner. Another competition in the Sacramento area was the "Eppie's Great Race". It was the first triathlon and had bike, run and paddle legs. Chuck was the first person to do it as a Triathlete and win. Over the years, Chuck also competed on teams that did very well. I also remember that they used to have a survival event around the Stanislaus River called the "Survival of the Fittest". I might have it confuse with the "Fittest of them all" but I thought Chuck won it 3 times, however others have disputed that.

Talking with Dan Schnurrenberger revealed that when Marathon Racing first had its ICF debut, Chuck and Dan went to Europe to race. Both were in great shape to race a Sprint K-2 but Dan woke up that day sick. Chuck and Dan tried to hang with the lead pack but eventually Dan weakened and cramped up. Chuck still tried very hard to finish the grueling race. They finished long after the others and after the race Chuck, exhausted slept while Dan recovered to enjoy the after race party. The next day Dan was again very sick from having run out of water in the race and using lake water that was polluted.

As for Skiing, Chuck excelled in all forms of it. He coached cross country, skate skiing, ski jumping and was a very accomplished downhill and back country skier. When he competed in Biathlon he was regularly the best sharpshooter on the team. His skills on skis were considerable but he was slower than some of the others. But if you are a great shooter you spend less time doing penalty laps and make up for being slower. As mentioned before, Chuck was the Director for the Auburn Ski Club on Donner Summit for many years. He and Carol did much of the grooming for the trails.

Chuck and Carol spent many days running on mountain trails as well as orienteering with clubs and in races as well. When we were competing in Wildwater C-,2 we made a side trip to what was left of Sherwood Forest so they could do an orienteering course. They both did very well in these events, placing at several Nationals.

Chuck did many crazy things. Carl and Chuck did a lap of Lake Tahoe once in a marathon canoe in 10 hours. Tahoe has about 70 miles of shoreline of which they made two small shortcuts. They once drove from California to Texas, non stop, slept for 1 hour, entered the Texas Water Safari Race (about 225 miles long) and finished 2nd. They barely slept before driving non stop back to California. He and others did many full moon paddles on Tahoe over the years. While Chuck was coaching the Biathlon Team in Vermont, he earned a university degree on the side from Liberty University.

I heard of Chuck long before I met him. He was already a legend in the sport of kayak and canoe. I met him in the early 1980's and do not remember where. We did some paddling and since I was a duffer canoe and kayak racer in many forms of racing we became friends. (It helped to also be a good a very good friend of Carol's.) They exposed me to marathon canoes and outriggers. I was already a slalom C-1 and C-2 racer and Chuck actually enjoyed paddling with me. That led to doing some races and a lot of traveling

together. We trained regularly in one of Reno's pools in winter and hit the roads to Colorado for Mid American and Champion Series races. We also spent time at Slalom team trials as well as Wildwater team trials. With Chuck, I started my quest to always be the first C-2 to not make the team in slalom...now up to 5 times. We did several trips to be on Wildwater teams alone and together. We actually made it once and raced at the Bala Worlds in 1995. Carol also competed in K-1 that year. I will always remember paddling the Team Race and being passed by the Czech Team in the last eddy, having 6 C-2s charge off the last falls all in a row. Together we raced at 3 Olympic Sports Festival Team Trials and raced at two in San Antonio as well as Denver. Placing in Denver allowed Chuck to be the only male to have gotten both a sprint and slalom medal at a sports festival. He had competed before our two at other sports festivals.

Another big event for both of us was the 1998 Nike World Masters Championships. Carol and Chuck met me at the slalom and Wildwater events in Bend, Oregon as well as the sprint events at Lake Vancouver in Washington. With all the classes we could race, we cleaned up. My only problem was that Chuck was in my age group for many of the singles events. We did share 2 gold medals and he was the cause of 3 silvers I got. He had at least 5 Gold medals. Carol and he also did marathon C-2 Mixed. I am sure that he was the most medaled competitor there. There is just so much more to say about Chuck.

John Pinyerd, who competed with and against Chuck for many years on the US Wildwater Teams, had this to say:

"My recollection of Chuck Lyda is that he was no-nonsense, a very practical kind of guy with a dry humor, and an amazing athlete. On the practical side, he loved his gear the way it was, and refused to swap it out for the latest fad. Chuck used the same helmet throughout his racing career because "it works fine". He was one of the most gifted athletes on the planet, a "Bo Jackson" of alpine sports that was amazing at skiing, biathlon and paddling.

I first met Chuck at the 1987 U.S. Nationals on the Savage where he had arranged to borrow a C-1 to race. Unfortunately the boat had no outfitting. But that did not stop Chuck. He simply rolled up a spare life jacket to use as a pedestal and did practice runs. In 1995 I had a similar experience firsthand with Chuck's amazing athleticism when I had the opportunity to race C-2 with him at U.S. Nationals on the very demanding Dryway section of the Deerfield. I asked him, "Would you like to take a practice run in C-2?" He looked at me momentarily with a thoughtful look in his eyes and then replied "No, you know what you are doing". During our one C-2 run, our race run, I followed his lead through all of the rapids and we turned out a blistering C-2 time."

John mentioned that Chuck had been on 13 World Championship teams and competed in over 100 World Cup races in just Wildwater racing alone. Prior to when USACK took control of paddlesports in the US, the ACA was the governing body for canoe and kayak racing. They had something called the "Triple Crown" which was a combination of Wildwater, Sprint and Marathon. According to John, Chuck won it twice.

Marietta Gliman reminded us of two "isms" that she learned from Chuck:

1. The equipment isn't what winds the race.
2. Whenever possible, put more pleasure in what you're doing, by doing it naked.

Bill Endicott, the "Guru" of all US Slalom Team Coaches, called Chuck a "great intuitive athlete". He was also praised by many as being not just a really good athlete but for being an athlete that was always analyzing racing, courses, gates, eddies - all the pieces he had to deal with - in a very rational manner and then getting as much as he could out of himself and his partners. Bill also called Chuck "a great patriot" for several times when he displayed a flag. In 1975, in an athletes parade, the team was displaying a Bicentennial Flag in the former Yugoslavia. Local communist supporters took the flag and later where the US Team had a tent Chuck displayed a flag and banner that said "USA Home of the Brave". Chuck was the first along with Marietta of many Gold Medal winners that Bill coached and has many great memories of Chuck from the years.

Chuck enlisted in the Army in January of 1983 and achieved a ranking of Lieutenant Colonel. As stated before he was heavily involved with being an athlete as well as a coach for much of his military career. His title was as a combat engineer. He had done one tour in Iraq and was scheduled to leave on another tour this past March. After suffering from what appeared to acid reflux last year around Thanksgiving he was discovered to have esophageal cancer and stomach cancer. Being a true positive thinker, an incredible athlete and a fighter, he battled cancer for almost 8 months before passing away this last June 12th.

He leaves behind his Mother Charmian, Sister Laramee and his brother Grady as well as his very loving wife Carol Schick-Lyda who was by his side constantly since his diagnosis. The man walked through a lot of people's lives and affected them all positively. He will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full honors October 8th, 2010.

As Bill Endicott was quoted as saying, (in Latin), "May he rest in peace, the victor of the games!"

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Slalom C-2 at Durango



Wildwater C-2 at the Arkansas River



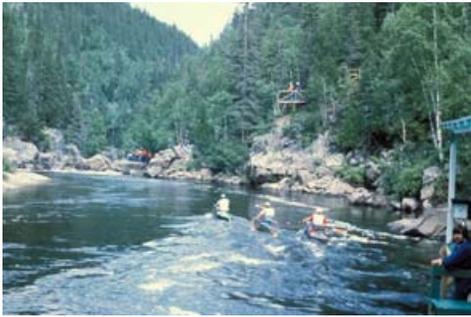
1975 Truckee River, Near Lake Tahoe, Ca.



1977 on the Potomac, one month before the Worlds, learning how to paddle our first center cockpit boat!!



1977 Spittal, Austria before second run.



1979 Wildwater Worlds Team Race
(John Evans, Kent Ford and Chuck Lyda)



1979 Wildwater Worlds Team Race Silver Medal
(John Evans, Kent Ford and Chuck Lyda)



2003 Wildwater World Cup
(Kern River)
Chuck's last international race