

**National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

Interview with Evelyn Meehan

This is Edna Woodard. Today is December 6, 2001. I am interviewing Evelyn Meehan-Young. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas and this interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. As we go along, if you need to stop and catch your breath, I can stop this anytime.

Ms. Woodard: Tell me a little about yourself prior to war years.

Ms. Meehan: Well, I was reared on a farm. I was the only girl and I had eight brothers.

Ms. Woodard: Oh my goodness.

Ms. Meehan: Seven of them I remember. One died when I was eleven months old. Six of them were in the service during World War II and all but one came back. A sister-in-law was in the Army Nurse Corps and my husband was in the Navy.

Ms. Woodard: Where was this that you lived when you were a child?

Ms. Meehan: In Calahan County at Cottonwood, Texas.

Ms. Woodard: Where were you on December the 7th 1941?

Ms. Meehan: Believe it or not, I was still in bed asleep. It was 8 o'clock in the morning and I heard the noises and I jumped up and put some clothes on and ran outside and the bombs were falling. I had some Navy

Officers living above me and some across the alley from the apartment house that I was living in, and one of them hit the back steps and says, “This is the real thing, this isn’t practice.” We thought it was maneuvers. I went outside and watched the bombs drop on Pearl Harbor and I watched the planes come over with rising sun underneath the wings. One house, about two blocks from me, was hit by anti-aircraft, no not anti-aircraft, but the front of it was damaged. I always considered it a bomb, but it wasn’t a bomb, it wasn’t big enough for a bomb. It was fire of some kind. The front of that house was damaged. I lived on the side of the Punch Bowl.

Ms. Woodard: How did you happen to be Hawaii then?

Ms. Meehan: My husband was in the Navy and he was stationed at Hawaii, in Pearl Harbor.

Ms. Woodard: Was he at home when

Ms. Meehan: No. His ship was at sea with the Enterprise. They had run into a storm at sea and that had delayed them coming into port a whole day. If they had not run into that storm, they would have been docking at 8 o’clock that morning and the Enterprise and all of its support ships might have been lost.

Ms. Woodard: How long had you been married at that point?

Ms. Meehan: About a year and a half. A little over a year.

Ms. Woodard: Had you lived there most of your married life?

Ms. Meehan: I had been there six months.

Ms. Woodard: And you didn't have a child yet then?

Ms. Meehan: No.

Ms. Woodard: Tell me more about your husband and his service.

Ms. Meehan: Well, he was from... I had gone to school with his cousins and his uncles and I had not known him until I graduated from high school. We only had eleven grades then. He lived in a neighboring town and I met him, I guess it was a "pick-up" date. You know. We started going together and he joined the Navy about a year and a half or two years after I met him. He had been in the Navy for four years, and he came back home, and we got married. We went to San Diego and lived a while and then his ship was sent to Pearl Harbor for base. I joined him out there.

Ms. Woodard: And you had, you said you had how many brothers serving?

Ms. Meehan: I had six brothers in the service.

Ms. Woodard: And where did they serve?

Ms. Meehan: Well, one of them was in the Marine Corps and he was in the Marshall Island. One was in the Navy and he was injured in the Iwo Jima invasion. He said he went in the day after it started and was carried out one day later. One brother was, let's see that was Richard and Golden, and Hugh was in the Army and he had an injured leg. He was stationed at a prisoner of war camp in Scotts Bluff, Nebraska. That is where he was. John was in the Army. He was with the group that took over after the war ended in Europe. He was with the group

that came in and saw the death chambers, etc. Another brother was in
the Air Force, and he is the one that did not come home. He was lost
over the Adriatic Sea. His plane went down over the sea and nobody
ever heard from him again.

Ms. Woodard: How long were you in Hawaii then after Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Ms. Meehan: I was trying to remember the other day. I think I came home in July
after Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Ms. Woodard: Now did you still have parents here in the States then?

Ms. Meehan: My Father still lived at Cottonwood.

Ms. Woodard: And how long was it after the bombing that he found out you were
OK?

Ms. Meehan: I guess when I wrote him a letter and told him I was all right. You
know we didn't call each other then. We didn't fly around all over
the country. That was a little too far for me to swim.

Ms. Woodard: But you were able to get a letter off to him relatively soon?

Ms. Meehan: Yes.

Ms. Woodard: Were these brothers already in the military at that time?

Ms. Meehan: No, they were not. They joined after the war started.

Ms. Woodard: And where did your husband go then?

Ms. Meehan: He stayed on the ship for a long time and about six months later he
was transferred to an aircraft carrier that was in San Francisco, the San
Jacinto. I came back and landed in San Francisco and there was his
ship right there on the dock. The signal waved to him telling that I was

on the ship and he was waiting for me when I got off the ship. I lived in San Francisco a while. Then he was transferred to the construction of a mine sweeper being built in Portland, Oregon. So we moved to Portland, Oregon, and that is where my son was born.

Ms. Woodard: How long were you there?

Ms. Meehan: Goodness me! I guess about nine months, and then he had an injury and he went to the hospital and he never regained his health after that and I moved back to Los Angeles and then I came home. So things went on.

Ms. Woodard: Did you work during this time?

Ms. Meehan: After the war started I went to work at the Office of Censorship in Honolulu. I worked there until I came back to the States.

Ms. Woodard: After you were back in the States did you work?

Ms. Meehan: Not until I became a single woman and then I worked.

Ms. Woodard: And what did you do then?

Ms. Meehan: Office work of some kind and I went to work for an oil company in Midland, Texas. A year or so later I came to San Marcos and went to work for San Marcos Baptist Academy and I stayed there twenty-seven years.

Ms. Woodard: You had a nice, long tenure there.

Ms. Meehan: Yes.

Ms. Woodard: Going back to the war years, did you buy war bonds?

Ms. Meehan: No, didn't have any money.

Ms. Woodard: You didn't have any money to buy them. What, that we consider modern necessities today, did you have during those years?

Ms. Meehan: Did I have, or did I not have?

Ms. Woodard: Did you have.

Ms. Meehan: Well, during the war years, we had electricity, we had running water, we had gas heating in the house and I had a car, and when I lived in Portland I could take a streetcar where I wanted to go. When I lived in Los Angeles there were streetcars there and then I had a car a little later.

Ms. Woodard: What kind of a car did you have when you lived in Portland?

Ms. Meehan: I didn't have a car in Portland.

Ms. Woodard: Oh, you didn't have a car in Portland. OK.

Ms. Meehan: In Los Angeles I had a Plymouth, but to tell you what it was, I have no idea. It was just a Plymouth.

Ms. Woodard: And it ran?

Ms. Meehan: It ran.

Ms. Woodard: How much did gasoline cost?

Ms. Meehan: Probably less than 20 cents a gallon. I had to get ration coupons, of course, for gas. Had to get ration coupons for meat, and I still have some of those blue chips that we got for meat, and for sugar. I drove my car back to see Dad and I had to get special issue of gas so that I'd have enough money to come home on.

Ms. Woodard: Where did you get those ration stamps and tokens and things? Did

you have to apply for those?

Ms. Meehan: We had to apply for them. I don't know where. I don't remember.

Ms. Woodard: You didn't have to go pick them up some place?

Ms. Meehan: We had to go pick them up, but I don't remember where. The Control Board, anyway, whatever it was.

Ms. Woodard: What about tires? Were you able to get tires for your car?

Ms. Meehan: You had to have them recapped.

Ms. Woodard: What are your most vivid memories of World War II?

Ms. Meehan: I guess it was talking with my friends after the attack on Pearl Harbor. I lived in an apartment complex and almost all of the people were connected with the Navy and we talked about it and whenever we went to town. We had been issued a gas mask and we had to carry our gas mask with us everywhere we went. Every time we went downtown the protection officers were on the street. Hawaiian looking, you know. Not white like I am, but tanned with a gun strapped to their back. They were protecting us, but I kind of felt threatened.

Ms. Woodard: So you were, in some way, restricted to where you could go?

Ms. Meehan: Yes. I remember seeing some of those Japanese mothers out there carrying their babies on their back, carrying a United States Flag in their hand. That happened.

Ms. Woodard: Have you been back to Hawaii since then?

Ms. Meehan: I've been back twice. I took my Granddaughter out there one day and she didn't want to go. Her Mother and Dad made her go. She was

glad that she went.

Ms. Woodard: What were your reactions when you went to see the Arizona Memorial?

Ms. Meehan: Well, I don't know what I was expecting. I had seen the Arizona when it was still partially submerged, and I saw all the other ships that were there and I felt, Oh God don't ever let this happen again. I could understand that. They were fighting a war. I can't understand this twin towers in New York deal. That was against people, not against a nation.

Ms. Woodard: That's right. Where were you when the atomic bomb was dropped? Were you back here in Texas then?

Ms. Meehan: Yes, I think so. I don't remember when it was dropped. I think that was a good thing. I think it was. I know it killed and maimed and destroyed a lot of people and a lot of things, but if the war had continued I think it might have been even more so.

Ms. Woodard: Do you remember when President Roosevelt died?

Ms. Meehan: I remember when he died, but to say when it was, I don't remember the date, but I remember his death and President Truman took over. He did a good job. I voted for President Roosevelt all four times he ran for President, and I guess I would still be voting for him if he was still alive and running. Not that he couldn't be replaced. We all can be replaced. None of us are necessary for life in this country, but we fill our place. God is good to us.

Ms. Woodard: He is. When you lived in Hawaii previous to Pearl Harbor, did you work then?

Ms. Meehan: Well I worked for a little while at a drug store, but I had to sell liquor and I wouldn't do it, so I quit my job and my boss said, "You should have told me, I would have worked something out for you," but I didn't. You know, I was young and foolish. I don't think I really wanted to work any way.

Ms. Woodard: How old were you then?

Ms. Meehan: I was 23 when I got married. I was 24 when I went out there, or nearly 24, so I was old enough so that I should have been able to make a good decision, but I didn't have any sense at 24.

Ms. Woodard: What did your father think when you were married and you went off way out there to Hawaii?

Ms. Meehan: Well, my Father objected to my marriage. He really objected to it, but he said, "now that you are married I hope you do good." He was for me being with my husband.

Ms. Woodard: Were you older or younger than your brothers?

Ms. Meehan: I had three brothers younger than I. That makes five older than me, but one of the oldest ones I don't remember.

Ms. Woodard: And you didn't have any sisters.

Ms. Meehan: No.

Ms. Woodard: You had to do a lot of work, helping and cooking, and

Ms. Meehan: Well my Mother died when I was 9 and so by the time I was 12 I was

the cook and the housekeeper. And I raised my little brothers.

Ms. Woodard: How do you think the war affected your family?

Ms. Meehan: You don't want to think about anything being good about that war.

Ms. Woodard: How do you think that war changed the whole world that we live in?

Ms. Meehan: Well, I think maybe it made the United States look at the situation all over the world knowing that we were a part of the world and could not be isolated from it. This latest bombing of the planes running into the twin towers has really brought that home. We have to all live in this world together or we just don't make it. God is good to those that love him. Not everything is good, but the Bible says that all things work together for good.

Ms. Woodard: Do you have some more things that you want to tell me about your experiences?

Ms. Meehan: No, I don't think so. I want you to see these. This is barbed wire on Wakiki Beach. This was some of the planes that we had. This is the miniature sub that was at Pearl Harbor for a long time.

Ms. Woodard: This was a U.S. Sub?

Ms. Meehan: No, that the Japanese Sub.

Ms. Woodard: A Japanese Sub.

Ms. Meehan: That is the one that is here. This is the water reservoir where I stood and watched them bomb Pearl Harbor. I could see it. That is the modern goose, a sea plane, and I have brought these for you to make copies of to put in your museum.

Ms. Woodard: Well they will be very, very happy to get these pictures. They are happy for every picture.

Ms. Meehan: I doubt that any of them have a picture of the barbed wire.

Ms. Woodard: Would you please, with this pencil, lightly write your name on the back of each one of those.

Ms. Meehan: I've got a better idea. I have address labels.

Ms. Woodard: That's wonderful, wonderful. I certainly wouldn't want those to get lost and not identified.

Ms. Meehan: I have some more at home very similar to that, but those are the best ones that I have. I believe I lied.

Ms. Woodard: OK, well why don't you just very lightly, so that it doesn't affect the picture, write your name on that back of each one of them. I know they have made arrangements to have things like this copied and the originals returned, but that is not my thing. I don't know exactly how they are doing that.

Ms. Meehan: Some of these pictures were bought pictures. That doesn't make them any less precious..

Ms. Woodard: No.

Ms. Meehan: I have a big album full of these and I started to bring all of it up, and I didn't want to be burdened with it all day, so I picked these five out to bring.

Ms. Woodard: Well we are very happy you did. Where were you when the war ended and what do you remember about the end of the war?

Ms. Meehan: I don't remember where I was. I guess I was living in Los Angeles and that is where I was when I found out my brother was lost in war. Then soon after that there was, this was in May, and my brother was lost on his last flight. He would have been coming home after that flight. I don't remember where I was, what I was doing when I had heard that the Japanese had surrendered.

Ms. Woodard: Do you remember celebrations?

Ms. Meehan: I remember celebrations, but I don't remember anything about them. **Ms. Woodard:** Must have been a big sigh of relief.

Ms. Meehan: Yeah.

Ms. Woodard: Anything else at all that you want to tell me?

Ms. Meehan: Honey, I don't think so. I can't think of anything.

Ms. Woodard: OK. Well we are certainly glad that you came and shared this with us and brought these pictures along.

Ms. Meehan: Was there anything in here that you had never heard before? I am just wondering.

Ms. Woodard: Well, I was six years old. (Pause in tape) OK, tell us about the blackouts.

Ms. Meehan: Well, I had forgotten about the blackouts. We could not have a light shining out of the house after sundown. We either had to turn all lights out, or we had to get something and cover the windows. I can't remember what I got. Black paper probably and covered the windows, but I lived downstairs and there was a great big wall next to me where

the lights from my windows wouldn't have shined out. There were steps going up to the street level, but we had to black our windows out and during the Battle of Midway, I was working at the Office of Censorship then, and they advised us that if we had friends that lived up in the mountains, back of Honolulu, to go up and spend the night with them. I spent one night away from my house because of the battle that was raging. When I was working at the Office of Censorship they had brought in a number of mailbags that came off of a ship that had been torpedoed and you could smell the fire in the letters that they spread out to dry to see what could be salvaged to send on to the people whom they were addressed to. They brought in videos, movies, of the volcanos erupting and we could all go and see that.

[The pictures mentioned are included as an attachment].

Transcribed by:
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