

**The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Martha Ferrell Hilliard  
Civilian Teenager**

**February 28, 2002**

Interview with  
Mrs. Martha F.Hilliard

Mr. Richard Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is February 28, 2002. I am interviewing Mrs. Martha Ferrell Hilliard at her home at 1309 Roosevelt, Alice, Texas. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Jean, I want to thank you for taking time today to do this interview.

Mrs. Martha Hilliard

No problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mrs. Hilliard

I was born in Atlanta, Troup County, Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mrs. Hilliard

October 14, 1928

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mrs. Hilliard

No sir. I had one sister who only lived 7 days, so I'm an only child.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your parents names?

Mrs. Hilliard

Walter Nathan Ferrell and Mel Robertson Ferrell. My father was born in Cusseta, Alabama. My mother was born in Duran, Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to school?

Mrs. Hilliard

Grammar school, I started in Roanoke, Alabama. Then I moved to Atlanta. Then to West Point, Georgia. Then to La Grange, Georgia. But, I finally wound up graduating from Miami High School in Miami, Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your father do?

Mrs. Hilliard

He was an insurance salesman for the National Life and Accident Insurance Company.

Mr. Misenhimer

And your travels were with him?

Mrs. Hilliard

He was in the construction business before that. But, he was selling insurance when he passed away.

Mr. Misenhimer

You graduated when, then?

Mrs. Hilliard

1946. June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember where you were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yes, I do. I was in my bedroom and I had already gone to bed. I had the fireplace in my bedroom so my father was sitting in his comfort chair and he was listening to the radio and reading his Life magazine, which he treasured. It came over the radio and that's where we were. My father just jumped right straight up and said, Oh, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about some of your experiences at the time. Of course, you grew up at the end of the Depression. What

effect did that have on you and your family?

Mrs. Hilliard

I said he was in the construction business and that went kaput. So, we traveled around, trying to find work. This lasted about 2 years. We finally moved back to my mother's family farm. They turned the 2 room milk house into a home for us. My father helped my grandfather farm. I don't know if my father, a city guy, learned to milk the cows or not, but I know he and I fed corn to the pigs that were later turned into hams and bacon that were put into the smoke house. We had lots of cornbread, as there was a grist mill down the road. There were lots of black eyed peas. My mother could mash the cooked peas, put pepper and eggs with them, make them into patties and they tasted like sausage. Mother made many of my first clothes out of her trousseau clothes. Finally, Dad got this job with the Insurance Company and we moved to Roanoke, Alabama. We had to do without a lot of things. But, we survived.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course, you were not in the military?

Mrs. Hilliard

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some of the things, after Pearl Harbor that you remember. What were your experiences during the war?

Mrs. Hilliard

We just did without. We just didn't have. But, it was fine. We didn't mind at all. I knitted 5 or 6 V neck, sleeveless sweaters for the navy. Every Thursday, a bunch of us girls would go up to the top floor of the Coca Cola Building and roll bandages. You had to remove your finger nail polish before you could roll bandages. We did that every Thursday afternoon. That was part of our war effort. We bought War Bonds like everybody else. Then, we were allowed 2 pair of shoes a year and if you bought the material to make a dress, you could only have 3 yards, which is kind of difficult to get a dress out of. I had a kind of heavy aunt and she and her mother would have to go together. My grandmother would spend her 3 yards and Aunt Betsy's 3 yards, so she could have a dress.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things?

Mrs. Hilliard

Every tin can - you cut the top and the bottom out - and you smashed them and put the tops inside. We saved our toothpaste tubes. They were made out of lead and now we just have fits if something has lead base in it. But, our tooth paste was in lead tubes and we saved those. Even the tin foil off of our chewing gum, when we could get gum. Chewing gum, chocolate those kind of things went to the service men and we didn't care.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you work on any scrap metal drives?

Mrs. Hilliard

Oh, yeah. We all picked up scrap metal. We went out to farms and got all the extra scrap metal out there. I sometimes wish that we would have one of those around here now.

Mr. Misenhimer

And rubber tires?

Mrs. Hilliard

Rubber tires and inner tubes. I also can remember, my feet grew very fast one year. I had had my limit of shoes, so I had to cut the toes out of my shoes. But, other kids did the same thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about gas rationing?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yeah. We didn't have a big car. We had a little Chevrolet Coupe, that was a 1941 - my mother's car. We had gasoline rationing. We had those little coupon books. The summer of '43, my mother moved into what we called the teachers' home. La Grange, Georgia, where I did my junior high and high school years ..... Mr. Callaway had built 7 cotton mills in that town (Troup County). Each little Cotton Mill had a little village with a barber shop, beauty shop, dime store, grocery store and drug store and then he built a school. The teachers that were not married lived in our house, plus secretaries and chemists. We had 27 women in it. It was my mother's job to feed them. We had 3 black people that lived in the back yard - Jimmy Lee and Ruth Wilkinson and Maggie something.

He was the handyman and the dish washer, and the 2 ladies were the cooks. We fed them 3 meals a day and at noon time a lot of the office personnel for Callaway Mills came and ate. We fed around 90 at noon. There was a bachelors' quarters down the street for chemists and lawyers and who ever worked for Callaway Mills. So, we fed them also. There were 11 of them down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get the food, with rationing?

Mrs. Hilliard

It was my job, as a 15 or 16 year old, to keep all of the books together and know what stamps were good and what was on sale at the grocery store, because we had to count our pennies, too. It was my job to plan menus around the canned goods that were good. One summer, we decided we'd buy some corn and cut it off and can it ourselves. The city built a cannery for the people so they could can. We cut our corn off and we went down and put it in our cans and we sealed them up. We put them in the vat. It was going to take about 3 hours, so we decided to go to the picture show. When we got back, those cans were not hot enough to have been in that vat. My mother said, "You know, I don't think that young man did them right." About 2 weeks later, on a summer afternoon, those cans began to explode on the back porch. So, we lost our corn crop. What a mess.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you had to use all these ration coupons to buy food for all the people eating there?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yes. You were only allowed 4 pounds of sugar a month and I think 2 pounds of coffee. 5 pounds of meat. We didn't get very many canned fruits because they cost more coupons than things like beans and corn.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father doing at this time?

Mrs. Hilliard

My father died March 27, 1942. That was the reason mother moved out to the teachers home and did that job.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did she do any other war work of any kind?

Mrs. Hilliard

She did work for Callaway Mills for about 3 months before she took over this, and they were making khaki colored towels at that time. One of the other mills was making cord for the tires. She was kind of in the war effort, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things?

Mrs. Hilliard

The sweaters that I knitted were made from instructions from the Red Cross. My freshman year, my high school burned to the ground. It was during the war, and we could not rebuild our high school. So, we went to school in the Methodist Church Educational Building. One pair of stairs for 500 students. Of course, all of our typewriters and everything was gone. We had to scavenge around town. People donated type writers. But, the Methodist Church was so good to us to let us use their building. We lost our chemistry department and we tried to do that down at one of the grammar schools. They put the home economics department down at one of the grammar schools. There were not even enough books to go around. We had to just do with out. We've all seemed to do pretty good though. When my father died, our front bedroom which we didn't use, we rented out to 2 men. One's last name was Bishop and he was killed on Starr Island. The other one was Frank Lowery and I don't believe he ever went over seas. I had 2 uncles that were in the Navy. One was on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific. The other stayed at Patuxsei River, Maryland the entire time. They are both deceased now. I had a real good friend that was on an LCI in the Pacific named Leon Phillips and he came home and visited with us. I thought it was very interesting, we had 2 women, Lillian Trussell and Lillian Wilson, who were roommates. Both of their husbands were Captains in the Army and went into Italy. And, lo and behold, they wound up on R & R together. The 2 women were both secretaries. I spent a lot of time serving tables. During the school days, I would come home at noon to serve the tables. We did get a little extra gasoline coupon because the Methodist Church was kind of far. It was about 2 miles. I worked most of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

These 2 Captains - they came home at the same time?

Mrs. Hilliard

No. The women were from other towns, so when their husbands were coming home, they went to their home towns. Both of their husbands survived the war. We had a teacher out there that taught tap dancing. Mr Callaway was very good to the people. He had a drama teacher and dance teacher and he did everything he could for the mill workers. Even though the city people looked down on the "mill people." This young girl, Mary Crowder, her husband flew the 'Hump' in Burma for 2 years. She was looking for him to come home and he came. He came in the front door and I hollered up, "Mary. He's here." She came flying down the stairs and stopped dead still. He had lost all his hair and she never said hello. She said, "You're bald." My daddy had a brother, but he worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad, so he never did go in the service because of troop train activity. My age group was just a little too late to get into the war. I had a couple of friends that did go in after it was over. I wrote a lot of letters to servicemen. I remember one Thanksgiving, we went to the USO and we got 3 service men to come eat Thanksgiving dinner with us. One was from Texas, one from Tennessee and one from Pennsylvania. They were such nice boys. Here's a picture. We did that quite often but I took their picture.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you keep in contact with them after that?

Mrs. Hilliard

For a little while, but I don't know what happened to them. I Leon Phillips has passed away since then, but I don't know about the others. I did spend 1 summer, having fun at a Girl Scout Camp. I played like I was a counselor and we had lots of fun. That was the summer of '44 that I spent out at Pine Mountain. The summer of '45, I spent at Chattanooga, Tennessee on top of Look Out Mountain at a hotel. My mother had given up the Teachers Home, so we moved up there for her to run the dinning room of the hotel. That summer I was at Girl Scout Camp, my best friend, Catheryn Bryant, after we put the children to bed, we could go to the dinning hall and listen to the radio. We were in there and all of a sudden, they announce D Day and she passed completely out, because she knew that here fiancée was in England. That was quite an experience for me. He came through just fine, even though he was a prisoner for quite a while.

Mr. Misenhimer



When Germany surrendered, do you remember hearing about that?

Mrs. Hilliard

I don't remember where I was. I do remember when Japan surrendered. I guess that made a bigger impression on me. I remember being glad that we weren't going to fight the Japanese any more and my uncle would be coming home.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about when Roosevelt died?

Mrs. Hilliard

He died down at Warm Springs and I had had polio when I was a child and spent some time down at Warm Springs. His train went through La Grange and we all put pennies on the track, for his train to flatten. I still have my penny. His train came through La Grange on the way to Washington, DC.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there a large crowd?

Mrs. Hilliard

Oh, yes. Everybody really loved him. Warm Springs was about 40 miles from La Grange and he was down there quite a bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

You completely recovered from your polio?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yeah. He and I spent Thanksgiving down there one year. I didn't see him. He was in the little White House.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the USO. Did you ever go to dances there?

Mrs. Hilliard

I wasn't allowed. I was too young. You had to be 18 and I was just 15 and 16. But we made a lot of sandwiches. I could take the sandwiches in and stand around and look a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there an army camp close by?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yes, Fort Benning, Georgia. The Paratrooper School. Every weekend, we had a lot of soldiers come up, because the people in the town were really good to them. They'd take them home at noon after church. The town was completely closed down on Sunday except for one drug store that stayed open 2 hours in case some body needed something.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time a day would it be open?

Mrs. Hilliard

2 to 4.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think you met your husband while he was in the service. Is that right?

Mrs. Hilliard

Yes. In October of my senior year in high school, my mother decided to move to Miami, Florida. I didn't particularly like it, but I graduated from there. I met my husband on the street corner in Miami, Florida. On the corner of Twenty-second and Flagler. I was standing on the corner catching the bus to go see my mother, who was running the dinning room of another hotel, and he was in the Air Force. He had hitchhiked a ride from Hialeah Park and the driver had let him off on that corner. He asked me what time it was and I guess I told him.

Mr. Misenhimer

His name?

Mrs. Hilliard

John Van Hilliard, Jr. He was born and raised in Taft, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it being a teenager during this time?

Mrs. Hilliard

We tried to live as normal a life as teenagers as we could. We had record players. The high school had dances.

There was a juke box and we'd all boogie and have a good time. Even though we knew - like the family that lived across the street from us - she had 3 gold stars hanging in her window. Every morning you got up, and you looked at what she had given up. We didn't mind giving up things. But, we danced and drank our soda pops. We had a good time

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get around?

Mrs. Hilliard

By bicycle or we'd walk.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the lady across the street. The gold stars meant that her sons had been killed?

Mrs. Hilliard

All three of her sons had been killed.

Transcribed by:  
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