

*Admiral Nimitz Historic Site
National Museum of the Pacific War*

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mrs. Helen Leverton
(Pearl Harbor Survivor)
September 28, 2002

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(Pearl Harbor Survivor - Wife of RAdm Bill Leverton & Joseph Wilson)**

This is Jim Koehn and today is September 28, 2002. I am interviewing Mrs. Helen Leverton. This interview is taking place in the Fredericksburg High School in conjunction with the program entitled "The Commanders." 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.

Mr. Koehn: Mrs. Leverton, thank you very much for taking time to relate your experiences and that of your husband during World War II. To start with, I would like to ask you when and where were you born?

Mrs. Leverton: I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1917. That makes me 85 years young now.

Mr. Koehn: What were the names of your parents?

Mrs. Leverton: I am the daughter of Walter Robinson Bell and Mattie Mae Kimbrough Bell, who were both Georgians. Dad was a pharmacist in Atlanta. He started the Marshall & Bell Pharmacies that are still running in Atlanta.

Mr. Koehn: Where was your Mother born?

Mrs. Leverton: In Talbotton, Georgia.

Mr. Koehn: I think we had previously discussed that you did not have any brothers or sisters.

Mrs. Leverton: I am an only child.

Mr. Koehn: Where did you go to school?

Mrs. Leverton: In Atlanta. I finished high school at a private school named Washington Seminary and then I went off for one year to Hollins College. That was the extent of my college education. Finances

kept me from going any further.

Mr. Koehn: That would have been when?

Mrs. Leverton: I was the class of '39, so I was only there the year of '35-'36. I went back home and got a job.

Mr. Koehn: In Atlanta?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, in Atlanta with Retail Credit Company.

Mr. Koehn: Can you tell us how you met your husband?

Mrs. Leverton: I met him the following fall, the Fall of 1936 when my cousin, Lucille McGehee, in Washington, was going to marry Odale Dabney Waters, known as "Muddy." They married in the National Cathedral Chapel, called the St Albans Chapel in Washington. I went up on a train to Washington to be in her wedding and be her Maid of Honor. I met Bill, who was one of several Groomsmen. He was the one I noticed. We had a lot of correspondence after that. The next year and a half we corresponded by mail. I saw him a total of three weeks during that eighteen months before we got married. We married in June of '38.

Mr. Koehn: Was that because you went back to Georgia?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, I went back to Georgia, and he went back to sea in Norfolk, then on out to California. He came back from duty in California for duty at Annapolis the summer we married.

Mr. Koehn: When were you married?

Mrs. Leverton: June of '38.

Mr. Koehn: Were you married in Annapolis?

Mrs. Leverton: No, in Atlanta, my home.

Mr. Koehn: Did you have a large wedding?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. A nice, big wedding in St. Mark's Methodist Church, six attendants, and this cousin Susie, who was now not Lucille McGehee, but Susie Waters, and "Muddy" were in the wedding. So they came to Georgia for that.

Mr. Koehn: After the wedding, then did you go to Annapolis?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: Did you live on the Academy grounds?

Mrs. Leverton: No, for many, many years we never had quarters. We found a little house in an area that was called Sleepy Hollow. We lived there one year while he attended post-graduate school. He played on the ball team. He was quite a softball player. Loved his sports.

Mr. Koehn: Where did he go to under-graduate?

Mrs. Leverton: He was Annapolis Class of '31.

Mr. Koehn: In 1938 he was in post-graduate school?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: Can you tell me where Bill Leverton was born?

Mrs. Leverton: In Baltimore, MD in 1909. He was the oldest of three boys. His parents were Clara and Joe Leverton. Their families were from the eastern shore of Maryland.

Mr. Koehn: What town?

Mrs. Leverton: They were from Baltimore.

Mr. Koehn: So Bill was eight years your senior?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. He taught me everything I know.

Mr. Koehn: Maybe he didn't teach you everything he knew.

Mrs. Leverton: (Laughter) No.

Mr. Koehn: This is 1938 and you are living...

Mrs. Leverton: One year in Annapolis. We had a small, two-bedroom house in Annapolis; lots of good friends, a lot of good fun.

Mr. Koehn: Do you recall what he was making a month in 1938?

Mrs. Leverton: I remember \$125. It might have gotten up to \$140-\$150 by then.

Mr. Koehn: What was his rank at that time?

Mrs. Leverton: We married when he was a JG, but he made Lieutenant that year. At the end of that year Admiral Nimitz asked him to come and serve as his First Flag Lieutenant in Washington, as his assistant because

the Admiral had just been promoted to Flag Rank. Our beloved Captain Nimitz moved to Washington and we moved to Washington to work with him.

Mr. Koehn: What was Admiral Nimitz' job in Washington at that time?

Mrs. Leverton: Chief of Bureau of Navigation. It was later called Naval Personnel.

Mr. Koehn: Was he occupying that position when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. We had left by then because I might add that he was very cognizant of the importance of various jobs for young Naval Officers. He wanted Bill on his staff, yet Bill had a chance to go to a destroyer for which he might be promoted to Skipper. The Admiral felt that was more important to his career. So, after one year as Flag Lieutenant, Bill then went out to the Pacific to join the USS Wasmuth.

Mr. Koehn: What type of ship was that?

Mrs. Leverton: It was an old ship that had been converted from a four-stacker destroyer into a mine sweeper. They had thought that they might come back to the West Coast, but he called me that summer and said, "Well, we are staying in Hawaii." (They mentioned it today in one of the lectures.) The fleet was basically moved from the West Coast to Hawaii because of what was happening in the world. They thought we should have more fleet in Hawaii.

Mr. Koehn: Did you join him immediately?

Mrs. Leverton: Almost, yes. I was still in Atlanta with my children and parents. There were twin babies by this time. Mother and Daddy had a fit – "You are going to California, with these babies! How can you do that?"

Mr. Koehn: What were the names of those two babies?

Mrs. Leverton: Joan and Joyce, born in 1940. May I go back one time. When the babies were born, that was the time that we were associated with the

Nimitzes in Washington. Mrs. Nimitz had known that I was expecting a baby. She made a darling, blue, knitted sweater.

Mr. Koehn: Do you still have that?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: Did she knit it herself?

Mrs. Leverton: Oh yes. When we had two babies, she quickly knitted the second one and came to the hospital on the third or fourth day after they were born, with the two sweaters. That is the kind of friends that they were.

Mr. Koehn: Is it blue for girls and pink for boys?

Mrs. Leverton: Well, I have two blue sweaters. It is the other way around – pink for girls and blue for boys. The other point I must add is that Bill was working for Admiral Nimitz. The Admiral came to work one Monday morning so excited – “I just had my first grandchild.” Young Frances had been born the day before to Chester and Joan Nimitz. The next day my husband came into the office and said, “I just had two babies.”

Mr. Koehn: I would like to go back to Bill before he went to Annapolis. I take it he was around Baltimore.

Mrs. Leverton: Grew up in Washington.

Mr. Koehn: Did he always know that he wanted to be a Naval Officer?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, he always did. An aunt had a house down on the Seabon River and every summer they would go down with all of his cousins and play water sports, sail, swim, etc., and they would wander around the Naval Academy grounds as boys would do. He said, “That is what I want to do.”

Mr. Koehn: When did he start at the Naval Academy?

Mrs. Leverton: I think his high school ended in 1927. Those were the days of two graduations a year, a January one and a June one. He got out in January and went to some prep school before the summer. He was

a great ball player, baseball. He was a great bugler and he loved scouting. In the Boy Scouts he learned bugling and he became the best bugler in Washington and was the one sent out for playing taps at George Washington's tomb, and for playing taps at the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. So, to the end of his days, he loved that bugle.

Mr. Koehn: What was his first duty assignment after graduation from Annapolis?

Mrs. Leverton: The first year they did a few different schools. I think he even went to Pensacola to see if he wanted to be an aviator, and he did not. His first ship assignment was to the USS Augusta. On the way out to join the ship in California, he stopped at the Chicago World's Fair in '33 and bought his first movie camera. They had just come out. I have a great movie beginning in 1933, which I am now trying to restore and take care of. It is of the next four years of his going out to the Orient and joining the Augusta. When I get that film back in good condition, I hope to give one here to the Museum.

Mr. Koehn: Yes, have copies made.

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, that is what we are doing. It is in very bad shape now.

Mr. Koehn: They don't last very long.

Mrs. Leverton: It is on video, but it can be improved and go on DVD, which will last many more years.

Mr. Koehn: How long was he on that ship?

Mrs. Leverton: Over four years.

Mr. Koehn: Was it a destroyer?

Mrs. Leverton: It was a cruiser. It went out from California. He must have joined that in 1932 and he left it in '36 in China.

Mr. Koehn: From 1932 to 1936 he was in the USS Augusta?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: Do you know anything about his experiences over there?

Can you tell us about that period?

Mrs. Leverton: There was a great rapport among the young officers. They became best friends. Lots of tennis, lots of party time together in their off duty time, lots of traveling and seeing the world. They went from several ports in China and down to Australia, to the Philippines. They played ball games in Australia with Australian teams, that kind of thing. I might add, in Japan there was a famous Japanese Admiral Togo, who died and our ship sent a delegation of young men to walk in the funeral parade. Captain (Later Admiral) Nimitz organized that.

Mr. Koehn: That was probably the Japanese Admiral who destroyed the Russian fleet in 1905.

Mrs. Leverton: That time in the Augusta is when Bill knew the Nimitz family, the girls and Chester and Mrs. Nimitz. By the time that I married Bill, he was friends with the family.

Mr. Koehn: OK. Why don't we take it back to your experiences and Bill's experiences at Pearl Harbor before the attack. Where did you live?

Mrs. Leverton: I just referred to being in Atlanta briefly the summer of 1940 when my twin babies were very young. Bill called from Honolulu and said, "We will make arrangements for you to drive out to California and sail on to Honolulu by the 1st of October." He would meet us in California and we had three weeks in a little rented apartment there. My family wanted to help, so Daddy found a very fine young man who would drive us. He worked for Daddy in his business. He would drive our Ford out west and take care of us. I found a nursemaid who would go with me and help take care of the babies. So we filled the Ford with three adults, two babies, many, many disposable diapers, and a lot of Carnation milk. We drove west; it took five days. Bill met us in Coronado. At that point we were

together three weeks, and then I got aboard a ship with the babies. By that time they were 3 ½ - 4 months old. We took the trip on out to Hawaii while Bill sailed back aboard his ship. We had a wonderful first year. We enjoyed the beautiful Hawaiian scenery that I'd never seen, the wonderful weather. It was so easy raising the children because they could be outdoors all of the time. The Navy was so organized and so well prepared. My parents came out to see us and saw how prepared Pearl Harbor looked then. They had Marine guards and ships everywhere. They said, "This place is certainly well protected." They couldn't believe it.

Mr. Koehn:

All that glitters is not gold is it?

Mrs. Leverton:

They were working themselves to death. People were working 18 hour days, 20 hour days. We lived in a place called Dewey Court. It was out very close to the beach, by Waikiki. It was right next to one of the old forts, Fort DeRussy. A lot of Navy families lived there. There were lots of little children that could play with our kids. Had a lot of fun times. We had a Japanese girl come and help me with the children. She came every day and helped me feed the babies and look after them. Sunday morning, December 7th, she and I had already fed the children at 7 or 7:30 in the morning. I had gone back in the bedroom and she came running in the house, having been outside with the little girls. She came running in saying, "There is an attack on Pearl Harbor."

Mr. Koehn:

How far was Pearl Harbor from your house?

Mrs. Leverton:

Twelve miles. We couldn't hear or see it. Bill was out of the house within four minutes with our one car. All day long we wives were disturbed, worried to death, wondering what to do next. Most of us realized that we would soon be sent back to the mainland because families would be a problem out there as far as food and care was concerned. So we began thinking in terms of packing. I

did manage to stay five more months before I had to leave. I was glad I could stay because his ship, being a small ship, came in every ten days for fuel. So about every ten days I could either hear from him or see him for an hour or two. Once in a great while he spent the night at home.

Mr. Koehn: What was his assignment at that time?

Mrs. Leverton: He was exec on the old ship, was a mine sweeper, and they were sweeping the areas outside Pearl Harbor. Occasionally they would escort ships off to another island. I have the first six months of the diary that he wrote. I am very proud of that.

Mr. Koehn: So in April you left Hawaii. Where did you and the babies go?

Mrs. Leverton: I came back with a group of ships. There must have been ten or twelve ships in the convoy, among which was the big battle ship Nevada, which had been damaged badly at Pearl Harbor, but it had been repaired enough to get underway and come out of the harbor and accompany us back to the States. You should have heard the cheers and the excitement about that resurrected battleship.

Mr. Koehn: Did you go to San Francisco?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. At that point, a nice Captain came up to me at the pier and said, "Helen, don't be in a rush to go back East." I had planned to go back to Georgia and stay with my family. He said, "Don't go back East, the ship is due to come back here for overhaul at Vallejo." So I gladly stayed, thinking I would see Bill pretty soon. I found a little family hotel in San Francisco. I stayed there six weeks with the two girls. He came in that summer for two months overhaul period at Vallejo. We had that summertime together. We had found a little house to rent in the San Rafael area. It was a beautiful place. I remember distinctly that Mrs. Nimitz was in the area. So were Chester Nimitz Jr.'s wife and two little girls. We

had a couple of little birthday parties for the children together. We did socialize a little bit. One day we had a phone call from Mrs. Nimitz saying, “My date and I would like for you to meet us for dinner at the (so and so) hotel.” So we went into town to meet her and Admiral Nimitz, who was coming for a conference. That was the time when his airplane came to a horrible landing in the harbor, flipped over, one person was killed (perhaps the pilot), the Admiral was hurt, but not badly. He extricated himself from there and it was a scary occasion. That night he was in good shape.

Mr. Koehn: So the dinner plans went on?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. We were not to tell anyone that we were seeing him because of security reasons. He was in civilian clothes.

Mr. Koehn: Do you remember that evening?

Mrs. Leverton: Oh, sure.

Mr. Koehn: Could you tell us about it?

Mrs. Leverton: To me it was very exciting. I was just a young Navy wife, very impressed with the fact that here was this “big shot” that is a friend of ours. I enjoyed the company tremendously. He was a dear, dear man. She was so smart, so sharp. In this restaurant, we saw a high school friend of mine and her husband. I remember her distinctly, Elinor Wilkinson Walker, married Owen Walker in Atlanta. They were sitting there. I went over and said hello to them, and I couldn’t even introduce them to these nice people we were with. Bill later told the story that I was embarrassed because I could not say who this was. I didn’t have the presence of mind to say, “Oh, this is Mr. & Mrs. Jones.”

Mr. Koehn: At that time Admiral Nimitz was CINCPAC wasn’t he?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: Was he a three star Admiral at the time?

Mrs. Leverton: I believe he was a four star. That advanced him to four stars.

They promoted him the week after Pearl Harbor. That is when he came out to Honolulu and Pearl Harbor, and we saw him a number of times. I was in the habit of going down to pick up Bill whenever he would be in town. I met him at the base, had the babies with us in the car, and he said, "Let's go by the office and say hello to Admiral Nimitz. He has just arrived." So Bill ran in and made his call, and the Admiral came out to see us in the car. I remember he very carefully picked up one of the girls and played with them. He was just a dear, family-oriented man.

Mr. Koehn: How long did you stay in San Francisco?

Mrs. Leverton: Two months that summer. The ship left, so I took the children and went back to Atlanta to stay out the war.

Mr. Koehn: Is that what you did? Stay for the remainder of the war?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. I got lots of letters. Bill's career went along with the destroyer duty and mine sweeper duty. That was ended by a terrific storm up in the Aleutians. His ship was ordered to duty up in the Aleutians and they were going up and down the chain of islands, doing the mine sweeping and escort duty. Right after Christmas 1942 a tremendous storm developed. In those waters they are called the Williwows. It is a storm that is just horrific. The ships had a pretty hard time in those waters.

Mr. Koehn: The storms are named Williwows?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes. They were so bad that something happened on the rear of the ship to the depth charges that are positioned at the back of the ship. One was loosened, knocked overboard, could not be retrieved, and Bill, being skipper, knew how to get all of the men away from that end. The ship was going to break up. It was exploding. This depth charge was exploding underneath the second half of the ship. All the men came forward and were saved. I believe it took four hours for the ship to sink.

Mr. Koehn: Did that depth charge cause the other depth charges to explode?

Mrs. Leverton: I am not sure whether there was one or two. The one did go off immediately and that half of the ship sank immediately. But as he always said, he was fortunate that the men had lined up for dinner and that put them in the forward part of the ship. So most of the men were not in that area anyway. Then they began the system of shoring up the ship. It took a lot of knowhow I suppose to know how to keep the ship from sinking. They closed off the compartments to keep the water out. They radioed for help. A ship named the USS Ramapo came up finally, in the storm.

Mr. Koehn: What type of ship was that?

Mrs. Leverton: It was a tanker. In this four hour period of saving half of the ship, all of the men transferred, in the storm, by high line, to this other rescuing ship. Bill was the last one. That is what the Captain has to do. Apparently, the second half of the ship sank after they all got on the Ramapo. To this day, all of those men that are still living, appreciate that ship. (I believe they had a reunion together once.) At that point, in Jan '43, all of the ship's crew and officers went back to their base in the Aleutians and were then shipped on down to Seattle, at which point all of them were going to be sent to other jobs. Bill got a message to me in Atlanta and said for me to come to Seattle. I got on a train and went out to Seattle. I think we had a week in Seattle waiting for these various orders. Orders came for Bill to go some place right away. Maybe the South Pacific at that point. Anyway, he wrote back to Washington, or wired Miss Helen Hess, who had been in Admiral Nimitz' office when Bill was in that office. He said, "Look, I've been fighting the war for a year, can't I have a week off?" So he did get a ten-day leave period and we went back to Georgia on the train. He was able to see the children

and his parents. Then he flew on back. I believe it took him 26 hours to get back from Atlanta, via Washington, out to Hawaii.

Mr. Koehn: Did you stay in Atlanta then?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: What was his next duty station?

Mrs. Leverton: He was sent back to the Aleutians on the Army/Navy staff up there. It was first with Admiral Kinkaid. He was up there for another ten month period. Then his next duty took him to a staff job with Admiral Barbee, who had known him in the Aleutians. He sent for him when they all went to Australia to the headquarters down there.

Mr. Koehn: Would that have been Brisbane?

Mrs. Leverton: I think it was. He was in the same town and building as General MacArthur.

Mr. Koehn: So he was in a staff position there?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, he was mostly involved with Logistics. He always had the censorship/publicity job too. He had a lot to do with supplies for the various operations. After they finished planning the Leyte operation, he was ordered back to Washington. We finally got to have a house in Washington together. That was just before the war was over. I remember one thing. Talking about the two different areas of the war, I lived in Atlanta where the Atlanta Constitution and the Atlanta Journal were the big newspapers. They never put the Pacific news anywhere near the front page. I used to say that I had to go to page 18 to get any news of the Pacific War. So I wrote a letter to Ralph McGill, famous newspaper man. I received a very nice letter back from him explaining what the “powers that be” had decided that we would win the war in Europe first, and then we would go to the Pacific. That was the way they ran the war.

Mr. Koehn: What did that have to do with the reporting?

Mrs. Leverton: I don't know. There were lots of families in the Pacific.

Mr. Koehn: What was Bill's rank at this time?

Mrs. Leverton: He was still a Lieutenant. I guess that he made Lt Commander during the war in 1942.

Mr. Koehn: Then, when VJ Day came, he was in Washington, D.C.?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes.

Mr. Koehn: What assignment did he have there?

Mrs. Leverton: He was in the Bureau of Ordnance, which was not his specialty. Later in his career he was always with Strategic Planning. In his later jobs in Washington he always asked for Pentagon duty. He wanted to be where things happen. Later he was with OP-03, OP-06, Operations that were having to do with Strategic Plans. He worked with Admiral Burke.

Mr. Koehn: Was he in the Navy building there on Constitution Avenue?

Mrs. Leverton: Early on. Later in the Pentagon. That was after the war.

Mr. Koehn: What about the other two children? When were they born?

Mrs. Leverton: They were born soon after World War II was over, while we were in Washington. One was born there, our Kim. Then, six years later, this lovely Debi came along. She was also born in Washington.

Mr. Koehn: A real boomer.

Mrs. Leverton: I spent quite a bit of time with my parents during the war years in Atlanta, but his parents were very loving grandparents in Washington, D.C. We saw a lot of them.

Mr. Koehn: When the end of the war came, Bill was still with the Bureau of Ordnance?

Mrs. Leverton: No, that was after the war. That was late '44, till he was ordered to the West Coast to USS New Jersey.

Mr. Koehn: When did he retire from the Navy?

Mrs. Leverton: When the heart attack took him out in 1964. The first day of '65. He spent 35 years in the Navy.

Mr. Koehn: That is a long time.

Mrs. Leverton: He wanted more. He loved it.

Mr. Koehn: What were some of his other duty assignments after the war?

Mrs. Leverton: Basically, one of the big events for him was the Cuban crisis. He was Number Three in command out there in the Atlantic Fleet. He had been ordered down to Norfolk to be Deputy Chief of Staff to Admiral Dennison . He had three days notice to get there when the Cuban Crisis was still a secret, but they knew what was going on. He was very much involved in that decision making, planning. So we lived in Norfolk for two years. From there we went back to Washington.

Mr. Koehn: Where did you live in the '50's?

Mrs. Leverton: In Washington, D.C. and in 1959 Bill was in and out of Norfolk with ship command. He had two or three various commands. In 1959 he was selected for Rear Admiral and immediately given orders to Yokosuka, Japan to be COMDESFLTONE. That is Commander Destroyer Flotilla One, based in Yokosuka.

Mr. Koehn: Did the girls get to go?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes, the two older girls were in college and came out only for the summer of '60. Debi and Kim went along and we all had great experiences, a wonderful time in Japan. We made friends with the Japanese people, which really amazed me. To become good friends with people who had been our enemies just fifteen years before, but the people that we met had been the younger officers who had done what they were told to do. To this day we are very good friends with Admiral Fukuchi, who came here for the Nimitz Garden at the Nimitz Museum and dedicated that when it was built by the Japanese for the Nimitz Museum.

Mr. Koehn: That is very nice – the Garden of Peace.

Mrs. Leverton: We added Bill's name to the plaque over there. One thing about the Fucuchi's, having been friends in 1960 in Japan, we kept up over

the years. I saw them again in 1988 when I went to Japan. We had personal visits then. Last year when September 11th happened, I got the most beautiful letter you can imagine from Mrs. Fucuchi sharing our worries and our fears and our sadness, including a beautiful book of her own paintings. When she was 80 years old she had published a beautiful book of her paintings. That is one of my treasures.

Mr. Koehn:

That is very nice. Mrs. Leverton, can you tell us stories of your husband and the Nimitz family, or Admiral Nimitz?

Mrs. Leverton:

I would like to point out that the Admiral was so kind to keep track of his friends' families. He often wrote letters to my Father in Atlanta, he wrote to Bill's Mother and Father in Washington, or on occasion would call them if he happened to be in the Capital. Also we kept in touch with each other's families. When Bill was about to leave Pearl Harbor in June of '42, after the war had been going on for six months, Bill was going to San Francisco. He wanted to stop in to see Admiral Nimitz and say, "Do you want me to take any message back, or anything back to Mrs. Nimitz?" (Mrs. Nimitz was then living in San Francisco). That is when he was shown into the inner office, "go right in, go right in." The room was filled with these officials, planners, etc. They were planning the Battle of Midway. The Admiral told him, "sit back here and listen." He sat at the back of the room and listened. Later Bill went out to sea with his job, his duties, when he was the Executive Officer of the Wasmuth and the radio started crackling with sounds, secret messages coming over, the Captain stuffed them in his pocket to read later. They were "Your Eyes Only." Finally the Exec (my husband) could stand it no longer and he said, "Has something happened at Midway?" The Captain just nearly hit the roof. "What do you mean, what do you mean, you are not supposed to

know that.” Bill thought “Well, you are not either.” It was fun for him to be in the “know” a little bit, knowing that something wonderful was happening as far as our results in getting out there and accomplishing something for the very first time.

Mr. Koehn: Yes, the first victory.

Mrs. Leverton: The first big victory we had. In later years, we had moved back to Washington, soon after the war was over. Admiral Nimitz was brought back to Washington as CNO (Chief of Naval Operations), lived at the Naval Observatory – the big, beautiful house up there, and we had some personal visits. He and Mrs. Nimitz were great at walking. Many Sunday afternoons they walked as far out as where we lived in northwest Washington, and came to see us, came to see the baby. That was great fun. We did go to their home at the Observatory to see them on a few occasions for dinner. The great story there was about Chester Nimitz Jr. interrupting his Dad when the Admiral was telling a good story. Young Chester said, “Oh Dad, you told that story last night.” The Admiral said, “Just listen, son, for technique.”

Mr. Koehn: Was he a good story-teller?

Mrs. Leverton: Oh yes.

Mr. Koehn: That is a lost art form.

Mrs. Leverton: I suppose so. I do remember a time that we had him to our house for dinner. Our little children were around and because we had such a fine guest I had invited the McGehee family over. They had a little son, Neid. Admiral Nimitz bounced these kids on his lap and played games with them. He told a joke or two and I remember they asked for autographs. He broke out a pen that he had signed the surrender with and young Neid was just so excited over this. It was the kind of thing he did all of the time. He was interested in people and how they felt. About the Admiral’s sense of humor – it

was very well known throughout the Navy. At the request of the Nimitz Museum director, Bill gathered many stories into a paper to show Admiral Nimitz' delightful personality and the way he used humor. That effort in 1975 was not published at that time for various reasons. This past year my friend, Mrs. Helen Leary, a Navy junior, helped me get the paper into print. It is now a pamphlet sold at the Museum.

Mr. Koehn: After your husband retired from the Navy where did you live?

Mrs. Leverton: We moved back to Washington from the Norfolk area for two years to be near his family. Actually he found a job that he wanted to do for a while at Holton Arms Girls School to be a Business Manager. He tried that for two years. They began giving him more and more duties, to teach Algebra. We had a daughter there in school.

Mr. Koehn: Did she make good grades?

Mrs. Leverton: Oh sure. We had very smart daughters, beautiful and smart daughters. Two years of that job got on our nerves, collectively. We couldn't stand the heavy traffic, the confusion. Washington was no fun any more. So we moved to North Carolina, retired on a golf course, began to travel and enjoy life. We relaxed finally.

Mr. Koehn: You told me Bill died in 1987?

Mrs. Leverton: Yes from a major heart attack. He had had many physical problems, but it didn't keep him from enjoying life.

Mr. Koehn: It sounds as though he led a very full life.

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