

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

**Center for Pacific War Studies  
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Olive E. White**

**July 12, 2004**

Mrs. Olive E. (Sally) White

Oral History

Date: July 12, 2004

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004. I am interviewing Mrs. Olive White at her home at 13262 West 100 North, Medaryville, Indiana 47957. Her phone number is area code 219-843-1331. This interview is to support The National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies for the Preservation of Historical Information related to World War II,

Mr. Misenhimer

Mrs. White, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. And, Thank You for your service to our country. Let me start by asking, when was your birth date?

Mrs. White

How come everybody has to ask when your birthday is?

Mr. Misenhimer

Well now, Ladies, we shouldn't do that should we?

Mrs. White

No! Ok, my birthday is October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1920.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK and where were you born?

Mrs. White

East Chicago, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, and did you have brothers and sisters?

Mrs. White

I have five brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of those in World War II?

Mrs. White

Yes, a couple of them. All of them have been in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, and two of them were in World War II.

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they come home from the war?

Mrs. White

Yes. And, my Dad was a World War I veteran.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. So you have quite a history of service in the military.

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK and what was your father's occupation?

Mrs. White

Farmer.

Mr. Misenhimer

In East Chicago?

Mrs. White

No, he moved to Medaryville. After World War I, the steel mills in Northern Indiana were really doing well but then came a time that the Depression was going to start. So, he moved to Medaryville because he said you could get a farm and grow your own food and so he wanted to do that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mrs. White

Awful! Not much money! One car and it was broken half the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, they were tough times.

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mrs. White

Medaryville.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what year did you finish there?

Mrs. White

I graduated from Medaryville in 1938.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, and what did you do when you finished high school?

Mrs. White

I worked in a garment factory in Medaryville because I didn't have enough money to go to school. And, I didn't want to wash dishes or work like several of my friends did so I worked a year and then I went into Gary Methodist Hospital as a student nurse because I felt I wanted to be a nurse. My mother was a teacher and she wanted me to be a teacher but I thought teachers were kind of square. But, I finally went and finally got around to being a teacher. I went three years to Gary Methodist and I graduated from Gary Methodist in September of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got your nursing degree?

Mrs. White

Yes. I became an RN. And I went to Indianapolis to take my State Boards and there were four services represented – the Army, the Navy, the Marines and the Coast Guard. So, my brother had already said he was

going to sign up for the Navy and I thought the Navy sounded good and I might get on a hospital ship. I was looking for adventure. So, in March, March the 29<sup>th</sup>, I got a letter to report to Great Lakes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's '43?

Mrs. White

'44. . . I reported to Chicago. My roommate and I were both going to join the Navy, but when we got there to have our physicals, she had several teeth missing and they wouldn't let her go to the Navy. And, I never knew that the Navy wanted you to have teeth before. So, I said, "Well I've signed up and I am going." I hated to go by myself but I did and she then went to the Army because the Army took rejects.

Mr. Misenhimer

Navy rejects went into the Army, huh?

Mrs. White

Yes, but she got to go more places than I did and I had to stay in the United States all the time and she got to go to Europe and Africa and all of those big places where they had real fighting going on and I just had broken bones to repair mostly.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, now in 1943 was when you went to take your State Boards? And the Navy was there? But, you didn't join at that time then?

Mrs. White

Well, I said I'm interested. And, so Red Cross sent me a letter and said as soon as I passed my State Boards, I should let them know so they could give me an assignment. And, my assignment came in February to go in March to Great Lakes which is not too far down the road.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the north of Chicago on the North side?

Mrs. White

Yes, you take the South Shore to Chicago and catch the North Shore and you're there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, right. And, what all did you do there?

Mrs. White

Everything! I worked on a ward where there was a lot of brain injuries. A lot of these fellows would land these planes on boats have a bone cracked in their skull. And what we did was take those out and my job in the

operating room was to take those bones out and put in kind of a metal so that you wouldn't have what they called Jacksonian Epilepsy or a kind of epilepsy that isn't the regular kind.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, caused by trauma?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, when you first got to Great Lakes, did you go through any kind of basic training?

Mrs. White

Yes, we had a Marine Sergeant who marched us around. And, they didn't have any place for us because there was a whole group of us. I've got a picture of us showing the group. And, we lived in a, what they called BOQ, Bachelor Head Quarters. And there was guys on one side and girls on the other. And then finally they got the other building ready and we got to go there. But, we didn't have basic training as such. We went swimming every so often and we marched and we had gas masks drills.

Mr. Misenhimer

In this picture you are standing here dress . right dress.

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the formation there?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, when you went in, did you go in as an Ensign?

Mrs. White

Yes. I received the commission when I went to Chicago to have this physical exam. They said, "Well, now you are an Ensign."

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. But

Mrs. White

Oh, well! Chicago was a wonderful town and it was, they were so nice to service people. I can't believe the Chicago now is like the Chicago then. Because everybody was just so nice and they just couldn't do enough for you. They rented a golf course and they had swimming pools and they had all kinds of recreation. And all the greats in the music world came there. They would come to Chicago, put on a program and come out to the hospital and have a program for our fellows in the hospital side. There were two sides at Great Lakes, a hospital side and the main gate side where you would go if you were joining the Navy. And, we had Bob Hope, of course we had \_\_\_\_\_, we had everybody in the music world. And then I worked on a watch ward next after the brain surgery ward where I worked on a psychiatric ward and the patients couldn't go any place and they never could adjust to the Navy. And this is the thing that bothers me is that 19 year old kids having to go to service. They don't know what hardly anything is, only what high school was. In those days it wasn't anything and here I am getting to do what I wanted to do but the 19 year old fellows, they had to do what the Navy's telling them to do and they just couldn't adjust and they were on locked wards.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, these were not people who had been in combat or shell-shocked or anything like that?

Mrs. White

No, they are just ordinary people like you and me sitting here and we were just thrown in with all these people and we just couldn't adjust to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

They just couldn't adapt to it?

Mrs. White

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the brain injuries, had these people been in combat?

Mrs. White

Some of them had. Yes, if you lived in the 9<sup>th</sup> Naval District, you would be sent to Great Lakes and I was there for over a year then they transferred me to an air base in Norman, Oklahoma which is no water coast not even a hydrant. The armadillos looked for water there. But, we had a lot of burn patients there. They were just learning to fly – it was a V-12 Program or V some other kind of program. We had a couple and hey, one of them was a Texan and he was older than the normal guy that was there. And he said that he wanted to get out but the Captain said, "We need you here! We need fresh vegetables!" So, they built this air base they had a farm and they put him on it and give him watermelon seed and he raised 80-pound watermelons for our whole eating area. He raised all kinds of vegetables, they were really good. And, his wife came and that was a really good captain that let that fellow adjust and stay there and we benefited from it all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, at Norman, this was a Naval installation, right?

Mrs. White

Yes. And it is real close to Tinker Field. Norman isn't that far away. We got to go to football games at the University of Oklahoma. The only trouble was Oklahoma was the ... my roommate says you really have to love a guy if you want to marry him and live here. But, she married an Oklahoma fellow. She died last year; they moved to California from Oklahoma. But, the weather was awful, it was so hot! We even had a fan going on Christmas Day! It was hot. It is like Texas is hot. And probably Alice is hot, too. And, the thing I liked most was the pecan trees grew wild there and my roommate's brother was on board a ship with a fellow from Oklahoma City. And those two guys got together and they told us about their relatives living in Oklahoma City. And they had a car and they also had gas and, so we got to go to Texas several times. And on the Texas and Oklahoma line, was a lot of pecan trees or pecans, however they say it.

Mr. Misenhimer

We call them pecans.

Mrs. White

So, we went on Armistice Day and picked up pecans. And, then, for recreation, they taught us, these girls taught us how to shoot mistletoe out of the tree because mistletoe grows in the top of the trees. The best kind is in the highest part and you have to shoot it unless you climb the tree and I didn't want to climb the tree. I felt I was a better shot and I had learned to shoot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you shoot it out with? What did you have?

Mrs. White

A revolver. And the tree had all kinds of bugs in it so all of us Hoosiers and New Yorkers, we'd get boxes and we'd put the mistletoe in the box and they would come out at night and our room was full of bugs! And, of course, the next day was inspection – if you've been through inspection, you know how crazy they are. The captain said, "What ever those girls are doing, tell them to stop! This place is contaminated!" So, we got it in the mail as fast as we could but we thought finding that mistletoe was the best thing that ever was. Well, then from Norman to Oklahoma City was a little ride and they just threw down some tracks in a field got this Toonerville Trolley out and put it on the tracks and that's how you would go to Oklahoma City because Norman is a university town and it was nice and they had nice stores but Oklahoma City was better. Now, we wanted to go to Oklahoma City but the enlisted guys didn't like it because they didn't even have liquor or beer – the state was dry – the officers got all the liquor. So, that's what the nurses did, give their liquor allotment to the enlisted guys that worked on their ward because there were certain things they had to do and they know if those guys would get that. One Saturday we went to Oklahoma City and the sides of the bank are moving – its gray color – it looks like cement but here it these Cicada things and a guy in a white sailor outfit got off of the trolley, goes out and all those things just got on him and he looked like a moving something or other and so we decided we're not getting off with all those things coming in there. So, we just stayed on and went back home because, wow, I never saw so many in my life and they went right through houses and ate the rugs right off the



floors. It was a bad bug year. I thought maybe we'd have some here this year but they said this year was the year for them but we haven't had any. Southern Indiana has more than we do.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, Indianapolis and south down there, right?

Mrs. White

I know when I was getting my Master's at Bloomington, it was a Cicada year and there were a couple of woods that I would go through and, oh, those things really make a noise. You just can't believe it until you hear it. And, they had German prisoners there at Fort Sheridan and we had to go there when we got orders to transfer to Norman. Hey, we even went on the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe from Chicago to Oklahoma. And, we had to get a trunk, a footlocker, and that's what those prisoners did. They rejuvenated all the footlockers in the United States. They came to Fort Sheridan and we bought them cheap and the Navy painted them and it is still upstairs in the house. We had to put our clothes and so many things in them. Those poor German guys, I felt sorry for them. They didn't make much money but they did get something to eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they had a place to stay.

Mrs. White

Yeah, and they had a job. That's better than some people who didn't have jobs. Fort Sheridan is close to the wealthiest town in Illinois which is Lake Forest. That's where all the Swifts and the Armours and the Marshall Fields and big houses up there. We got to go to a couple of parties there. Lake Michigan was always there for swimming. And, they had unusual stores – they sold chocolate covered grasshoppers and ants for all those people.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever eat those, did you?

Mrs. White

Yes, I tried it. Now, there is a professor from Purdue who is having the kids eat that stuff all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back to your time at Great Lakes. This Marine Sergeant, I suppose it was, who was in charge of you all. You were all officers but he was a Sergeant – did he treat you all pretty rough?

Mrs. White

Oh, no, he was nice because we were nice to him. I liked Marines but they spent so much time polishing their belts and their shoes and their belt buckles. But, ah, he said, then when we got in step, he said, "If I had the money I'd buy you roses." I said, "I can remember that as well as anything I had in the Navy!" was that Marine Sergeant who spent all his time polishing his belt buckle and his shoes. They really do look neat when they get ready to go out on leave. And, it's no wonder why everybody likes them so well. They spend a lot of time on it, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there at Great Lakes?

Mrs. White

At Bachelor Office Quarters it was good but at BOQ it was – we had Navy beans for breakfast that rattled on the plate. When you put them on a plate they rattled and for food, they had stewed figs. Well, I had never had stewed figs in my life – I have since when I went to Williamsburg and there were trees with figs growing on them and I said, “That’s where they got all those figs!” They were the worst tasting things I had ever tasted in my life and so we were glad to go to Nurse’s Corps because it was better food. But, see, there would be an order come in with a bunch of new nurses, they had to put them some place cause they didn’t have room on the regular floors. Then, when they all got orders to go someplace else, then we got to move and we got good food. And, we had tablecloths and napkins and they were nice, really nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall what your pay was as Ensign when you went in?

Mrs. White

I can’t. Isn’t it funny, I can’t remember the wages at all but I know it was more than an Assistant Night Supervisor, well it was 3 to 11. When I graduated, I got the best job because I had good grades and a good attitude. And attitude is what gets you places in this world in my opinion. Attitude and a sense of humor, we’ve got to have that or you’re not going to get along in this world. And, as somebody said to me, “Would you advocate anybody going to the Navy?” and I said, “Yes, if you’ve got sense of humor!” You’ve got to have a sense of humor though. So, the second week, I go to this one patient’s room and the door does not want to open and I think, “What’s the matter with this door – it opened right yesterday?” And here the man had hung himself by a belt on the door. He put it around his neck and put it up here and he was leaning against the door. I was ready to quit. I said nothing is worth committing suicide over but it was such an awful – it was so sad. And I thought, what had I gotten myself into this time. Well, this too shall pass so it did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he one of the patients?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

One of the patients in the psychiatric ward?

Mrs. White

Yes. It was the saddest thing that happened but we had a – every Friday night we had a broadcast from Mainside. We had a chorus, beautiful voices, all those male voices. And we had a wonderful football team. That’s how I got so crazy about football. We had winning teams there. And we had sailboat classes in the summer. It was really pretty nice. It was just like being at a State Park. Really, it was nice but you weren’t

supposed to walk on the grass. You walked on the sidewalks, that's the Admiral's grass and you don't walk there. And Admiral Nimitz came and, when he visited, we really were spit shining everything. And the Navy has a vocabulary like nobody else. Everything is different in the Navy. Even a bathroom is called a head.

Mr. Misenhimer

And the floor is a deck.

Mrs. White

Yes, and everything is different. CHIT is a piece of paper, just about like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

They've got their own language.

Mrs. White

Yes. And skivvies for underwear. I don't what all. I used to have a whole list of it. But, it still didn't floor me. I liked it! Oh, another thing I wanted to talk about was the money angle was the thing I liked the most was you'd go to the paymaster and you'd look and see how much money you have coming and he pays you in cash. You don't have any check and I think I like that. And, then you didn't have to take all of the money, you could just leave it stand there and pick it up the next time or the next time.

Mr. Misenhimer

You could draw what you wanted to?

Mrs. White

Yes. But, officers had to buy all their own things, they never issued you anything, even your uniform you had to buy. And, they gave you something like \$700 to go to the tailor to have your outfit made like that. But, the thing cost \$1,000 before you were through with it. You thought you were getting a lot of money but you're not, you're not getting enough and they had two places in the next town where you would go to the tailor and you could choose whichever one you liked. Some people liked one better than the other, but, it was competition and those stores would raise prices every bunch that came in and the price went up a little more.

Mr. Misenhimer

This uniform here you have a blue uniform. The other one you had white.

Mrs. White

You had a blue, a white and then like a gray dress and then your uniforms that you wear like a regular nurse wears in the hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to buy those, too?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had to buy everything?

Mrs. White

You had to buy everything. And, you think, wow, I'm getting a lot of money but you're not because it was about half of it, the finances. And then, Great Lakes that first winter was really bad because the snow got about 30 inches deep out there and we had to buy special boots like you have in a ski lodge, it really went up to your knees it was so deep. And you had to walk and there was a bus but you can't depend on buses and besides, if you were an officer, the enlisted guy would get on before the officer would. At least that's what we thought.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on your uniform did you have any slacks or pants?

Mrs. White

No! Strictly skirts. And a lot of people were amazed. The Army had lots of pants but not Navy. In fact, they bought a, they had an order of hose come in when we were supposed to march down Michigan Avenue in Chicago and they had to get the same color of hose for everybody that was going to be in that parade because they didn't that to be off-color. But, then they said, well you've got to wear black hose. So, then, we wore black hose.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's all right. This is all history and that's interesting. And what was your schedule there? At Great Lakes, what happened? What hours did you work?

Mrs. White

You worked for a while 8 to 3. And then, you went on to 3 to 11. And then you had a night shift 11 to 7. We practically had to take turns on all of those.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how many days a week did you work?

Mrs. White

We worked five for a while and then we worked six. And then, if a contingent was coming in, like there was a whole bunch of people that were hurt, say like the South Pacific, and they'd bring all those fellows in and none of them had one broken bones, they all had four broken bones. And, you had to stay until midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock, however much time it took to get those patients all organized and in a bed and in a place. They tried to do as much as they can beforehand but there's a certain amount of stuff you have to know what to give

them even though you do have a report you want to read it yourself. The ward medical officer had a lot of control over that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did these people come in? By airplane or by boat?

Mrs. White

All different ways. Mostly by train to Chicago and then a bus would pick them up.

Mr. Misenhimer

And these guys had been injured in combat somewhere?

Mrs. White

Yeah. And they were in the 9th Naval District and be closer to their homes. And the same way in Norman, we had a lot of Texas patients that were in Norman with broken backs and broken knees and broken everything. Orthopedic wards were terrible! I worked on orthopedic wards for a while in Norman and they put these weights on them because some of them complained of back problems and as well as kidney problems and those fellows during the night would take those off and get up and go out side and then do worse damage than they had then because they said, "I'm sick of laying in this bed!" and there was only one corpsman for the whole hospital in Norman and they couldn't be every place. And so the guys would take off and usually there was and Indian girl would come by and pick them up because there were millions of Indians there and they loved those service guys. Lots of times they would leave and get them food there. And, we also had in Norman a dependents care, you could have a baby in Norman. Some of the girls didn't want to work there, they never told their parents they were taking care of women having babies because they don't think women have babies in a Naval hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, how long were you at Norman?

Mrs. White

Thirteen months. But I got, I said I've got to have a leave. These people are getting to me so I had a five day leave and came home and sent a telegram that I wanted five more days so, I got five more days. Well, so then, I'm a little older so I got enough points to get out. And, they sent me to New Orleans to be discharged. Again, why? They could have sent me back to Great Lakes. I would have been happy. But there were tow others from New York State and two from Indiana and we got discharged, we were sent to New Orleans. It was probably the best five days in the Navy! It was fun. It was fun time and we got into trouble, we all did because we had to go from New Orleans on a boat over to what is called Algiers, which was the Navy base. Well, there wasn't any seats, now how is this? The wasn't any seats and so we went to the back and sat down, and boy, the guy stopped the boat and made us all come up front and sit closer together because that was for Black people back there and that's the first time I knew that we had race relations yet in the United States. I didn't know that. And, neither did the two girls from New York! The other girl was from New Castle, we never heard of it before. Race relations!

Mr. Misenhimer

Segregation, huh?

Mrs. White

You just can't do it here. So, then I stopped to see my friend that was already out and she had married a Marine and they lived in Birmingham. So, I stopped at their house on the way home and told them about my story. I got along fine, the only problem I had was giving too much food at Great Lakes. Every day, I was in charge of the food cart. Now, I had to go to the mess officer and get more food because he's not giving me enough food and those guys wanted more food. So, he said, "Miss, there's something you are doing wrong because I send enough food for your ward." I had thirty fellows. So I told him to come and watch how I served it so he came and he said that I'm giving 5 too many ounces. In a spoon you're supposed to have it a level spoonful, not a heaping and I am giving heaping teaspoons. And I said, "The fellows are hungry and that's all there is left in this world is something good to eat and if they want it, I'm going to give it to them!" And he said, "You're not going to get any more food from me if you have to come back!" And he said, "You know that this will.....be level." So, that's the only trouble I ever had.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what rank was he?

Mrs. White

Well, he was one of those Chiefs.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was an enlisted man though?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you couldn't pull your rank on him?

Mrs. White

No. It wouldn't do anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, he was in charge of that and had years of service.

Mrs. White

Yes, that was his thing and he was going to do it. That was so funny. Really, that's why I say you have to have a sense of humor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, right! So, how long were you at Great Lakes?

Mrs. White

I guess I was there, I was there til January of the next year. Thirteen months.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, January of 1945?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went down to Norman? And you were there until, probably January of '46 or some such?

Mrs. White

May of '46.

Mr. Misenhimer

In April of 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mrs. White

Yes, I do. We didn't know because we were in the midst of a tornado. In fact, we thought we were going to have to evacuate the patients. Oh, the tornadoes were terrible in Oklahoma. You know, it took three quarters of a house and left a piano sitting right here. It took the three corners, oh, gosh. I recall it. But, you know, those people were really nice. They made afghans like that on the back of my davenport. If I ever made one of those, I'd never give it to anybody. But they had a Navy Mother's Club and they made every nurse one of those for Christmas. And, we did a lot of Christmas shopping for those patients who were locked up at Great Lakes and at Oklahoma at Norman because guys would want to get gifts and they couldn't go and the Red Cross was scarce as hen's teeth. We had about two Red Cross people for all of the patients, we didn't have hardly anybody. And, so my roommate and I, when we were at Great Lakes, we probably bought about a thousand nightgowns at Marshall Fields and took them home on a train. We'd take the last train out with all the things and one guy, a guy that got on that I knew from Medaryville, he was Richard Owens, he died last year. And I said, "Hi, Richard!" and then all the guys on the train said, "Hi, Richard, where'd you come from?" Oh, gosh, I forgot where I was. This woman that was in charge of these nurses, was what you really call GI, regular Navy and she had been in about 40 years and knew everything.

I've got to show you one of the group pictures here someplace.

Mr. Misenhimer

Every six months, what now?

Mrs. White

We filled out a paper to say where we would like to go for our next assignment of duty. But we never got to go there. I wanted to go to a hospital ship and I wanted to go to California, I never got there. I had to pay my own way. So, I did when I got out of the Navy.

My friends have all died. One of them had Alzheimer's, one of them was killed and one of them was a diabetic.

Mr. Misenhimer

She's showing me a picture of her group here at Great Lakes, the nurses.

Mrs. White

This is our first group and there I am. It's strange. It doesn't even look like me. Oh, well. It doesn't have to look like you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back when Roosevelt died, what reaction did you all have about Roosevelt dieing? President Roosevelt died on April 12<sup>th</sup> of 1945.

Mrs. White

The power was off for a while and we didn't know it as soon as every body else did because we had the tornado.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you did hear about it, did you feel like it was a great loss?

Mrs. White

Yes. Isn't that strange? Probably the women, the civilians that worked in the dining room are the ones that brought the word into us when they came to prepare the food. They were very upset because they said that he helped the United States more than any other president and that we should all feel really sad.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then in May of '45, Germany surrendered. How about that, any kind of celebration or anything.

Mrs. White

We didn't have any celebration but Medaryville did. My mother wrote me a note and said the town went wild that night. But, we didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about when Japan surrendered in August?

Mrs. White



Well, there was a lot of hatred for the Japanese. And, I think I felt some of it and that's the reason I felt that, when I became a civilian and Pete and I were married for quite a few years, we decided to go to Japan because we didn't want to carry that hatred around because its like bad baggage. When you think somebody is against you all the time. The people were nice to us in Japan and I just say they're workaholics. We were eating breakfast and if you take your last sip of orange juice, they come running to get the glass. They just take off the dirty dishes and they go running to catch the elevator to get to their job. Their food was good and they gave us flowers and they gave us peaches and they gave us everything and they were really nice to us so I don't feel like breaking the Japanese dishes. Some of my friends threw their Japanese dishes out and broke them and I have a couple in the cupboard there. I think they did a good job painting them and they are artistic people and I'm just sorry there had to be Pearl Harbor. But, I've been to Pearl Harbor, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing that?

Mrs. White

I recall hearing about it and I wondered if we should but I thought about these 19 year old kids that I shed so many tears over and I thought, that's the things you do cause our war would have gone on if they wouldn't have dropped the bomb. So, I admired Harry Truman because he made the decision – The Buck Stops Here – I'm going to drop it so...

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, when you traveled from Great Lakes to Oklahoma, what did you travel in?

Mrs. White

The train. The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this a troop train or a regular civilian train?

Mrs. White

A regular train. And the air conditioning went off and it was hotter than Hades!

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there a group of you that went together or just a small number of you.

Mrs. White

No, it was about, I've got the list here, there was about a dozen of us. And we stayed friends for quite a while.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was the highest rank you got to?

Mrs. White

Lieutenant J.G., Junior Grade

Mr. Misenhimer

Which is the next thing above Ensign.

Mrs. White

Uh huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

And when did you get that promotion?

Mrs. White

Its in here some place.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Oklahoma or at Great Lakes?

Mrs. White

In Oklahoma. But, you have to have report after each six months and they have to be good. I had a three-year nursing program and they said what are you going to do? Somebody calls you in and asks you what you are going to do. They don't want you staying out here not doing anything. So, I said I wanted to go back to school and get a degree because I figure all these GI's are going back to school and it wasn't easy. I went back to Michigan and it was like Purdue now, 400 in a lecture class. But these fellows had their wives doing the typing of their papers and everything and I had to do all of my own typing. But, I got a degree. I got a Bachelor of Science in Public Health Nursing. Well I always wanted to be a public health nurse in a county but you got too many bosses and I decided I don't think I want to do that and I met a Superintendent from Knox and he said, "Mrs. White, I wish you'd go back to school. We need teachers desperately." And he said, "You've got good grades and you can make it." And he said, "You just go to summer school and I'll give you a job." And, so, I was the school nurse at Knox for two years and then Rensselaer said, "Wow, he's a good guy and we ought to get him for Superintendent. We need a new Superintendent in Rensselaer." So, he called me up and said he was going to Rensselaer and how about you going back to school and being a teacher? And I said I thought I'd like that. He said, "I'll sign the papers if you go back to IU for summer school and then you can get a part-time procedure on it. So that's what I did. I don't even know how many years it went but quite a few. But I taught in Rensselaer for 22 years after that because the nurse said, "You know, Mrs. White, people are sick on Sunday and Saturday as well as during the week and I had two children, boys, and I wanted to go places with them and I didn't want them going with their Dad all the time and I wanted to go, too. So, I went to IU much to everybody's sadness. They all wanted me to go to Purdue.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you get your Master's?

Mrs. White

I don't even know that. I didn't go to the thing. The dentist / doctor from Francesville called up and said, "Sally, how come you didn't tell us you were getting a Master's Degree?" I went summers for so many summers.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, it says here you got your Master's on May the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1974 down at Indiana University. Now, when you went back to school when you got out of the Navy, did you have a GI Bill?

Mrs. White

I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for that?

Mrs. White

I used the GI Bill to get the degree in Nursing at Michigan.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this is the University of Michigan the 13<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1949 is when you got your BS up there.

Mrs. White

Yes. We were married in '48. I just said, "I've got to finish school because I've got to have the degree." That was all there was to it because that was part of my goal. And, Pete was seven years older than I was. Lots of people didn't think we'd make it with our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary but we were married 54 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, you say also they tried to recall you for the Korean War? You were still in the reserves?

Mrs. White

I was still in the reserves and now I'm not.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, you didn't have to go in?

Mrs. White

No, because the doctor called them and said that I was pregnant. Bob was born in April and this was in February of '53. So, I didn't have to go. My brother went to Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Here is where you resigned from the reserves in the 17<sup>th</sup> of March in 1953?

Mrs. White

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's when you resigned? And, did you have to stay in the reserves when you got out? Or were they just the decision you made?

Mrs. White

That's the decision I made. I didn't go to too many places; maybe I'll go someplace else. I didn't know if I'd get married or not.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any kind of souvenirs during your time in the service?

Mrs. White

Oh, I got a better mind!

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, that's a good souvenir. Right.

Mrs. White

Yes. I learned to play golf because both places had golf courses. At Great Lakes they paid \$40,000 a year for a golf course. All those guys that were in re-hab went out there and it wasn't even a good golf course. Really, it was weeds, full of weeds!

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, the Red Cross, you mentioned they only had very few people at Norman, is that right?

Mrs. White

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any other experiences with the Red Cross?

Mrs. White

No. USO was there. They took a lot of times when guys were patients their folks would come and they would go to the USO and cook a meal because that way they could cook what the fellows liked, the guys liked. That way, I got invited to several of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had mentioned that the people in Chicago were real friendly. How were the people in Oklahoma?

Mrs. White

Very friendly. Yes, and I don't know if it was, well, it was just different times that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any medals or ribbons?

Mrs. White

I got Good Conduct and whatever else you get. I never sent for them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mrs. White

I just think the people were all so nice. Not only were the nurses and the doctors but so were the patients. I did learn that a guy could have a girlfriend and a wife both. Now, I didn't know that before. And the telephone would ring in the ward and I would say, "Elwood, its for you." He would say, "Find out who it is, ask what her name is." And I said, "Why?" He says, "Because it might be my girlfriend or it might be my wife." I didn't even know that before. And, I learned to play cribbage. Do you know how to play cribbage?

Mr. Misenhimer

No. I don't really.

Mrs. White

See, it's a good game for patient and nurse because two people can play it. And, if you work 3 to 11, you give out the medications and there you wait until 11:00 pm to give out the pills and hardly anybody knows how to play cribbage.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you'd play cribbage with the patients?

Mrs. White

Yes, with the patients. There was no TV yet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, what did you think of the commanding officers you had?

Mrs. White

I had good ones! In fact, I was called in for special duty on one he was so good! I guess I got along good with people. And, in Chicago, do you remember the old ah ... the most beautiful hotel in the world at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Edgewater Beach? Yes, uh huh.

Mrs. White

Yeah, I had a patient there. It was the best duty I ever had. So, Pete and I went there on our honeymoon. That was our second stop. We stayed all night at the Palmer House and then we ate at the Edgewater Beach and then went on to a fishing place in Wisconsin. But, this guy, was really high up, I don't know what his rank was but I had to shave him. I had never shaved a man in my life. That's another experience! He said, "I've got to shave before my wife comes, do you think you could handle that?" I said, "I can but I might pull some whiskers here!" because they were getting kind of long. He said, "Well, you did a good job."

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a straight razor or a safety razor?

Mrs. White

Safety razor. Oh, I wouldn't take one of those straight ones, I would have cut him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, the officers you had over you, were these doctors?

Mrs. White

Yes, and one of them was from Houston. He was my best one. He made coffee every morning and he had it ready when we got to work. He was really a good guy. He had a real nice wife, too. He brought her every once in a while to the ward. He told me that they had awful storms in Texas and the snakes would come up in the water and I thought he was just telling me that but they did!

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, is there anything else that you haven't said that you would like to say?

Mrs. White

I am a talker.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, that's fine.

Mrs. White

I have a good memory, too and that's the reason I made it through a Master's, a Master's plus thirty. But, there is no use to get a PHD around here because they can't pay you the wages and, so, you might as well take the classes and find out what they are talking about and do it so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions with the nurses at all?

Mrs. White

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Has the group ever had any that you know of?

Mrs. White

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nobody ever kept in contact or anything like that?

Mrs. White

No. But, there were four of us who were really friendly and we kept in contact. As I say, I am the only one that is living.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, you all would get together from time to time?

Mrs. White

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, not as a reunion as a group?

Mrs. White

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, Pete's outfit did, huh?

Mrs. White

Yeah. We went to Pete's for 20 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

For 20 years, huh?

Mrs. White

Yes, but see, those fellows were 19. Most of us were about 23 or 24. Age has something to do with it I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah.

End of Tape.



Transcribed by: Jon A. Bell  
Pulaski County Public Library  
Medaryville Branch  
Medaryville, Indiana

## Appendage

1. **Picture of Lt. J.G. Olive E. White**
2. **Picture Nurses at Great Lakes Naval Base 1944**
3. **Honorable Discharge from US Navy Reserve**



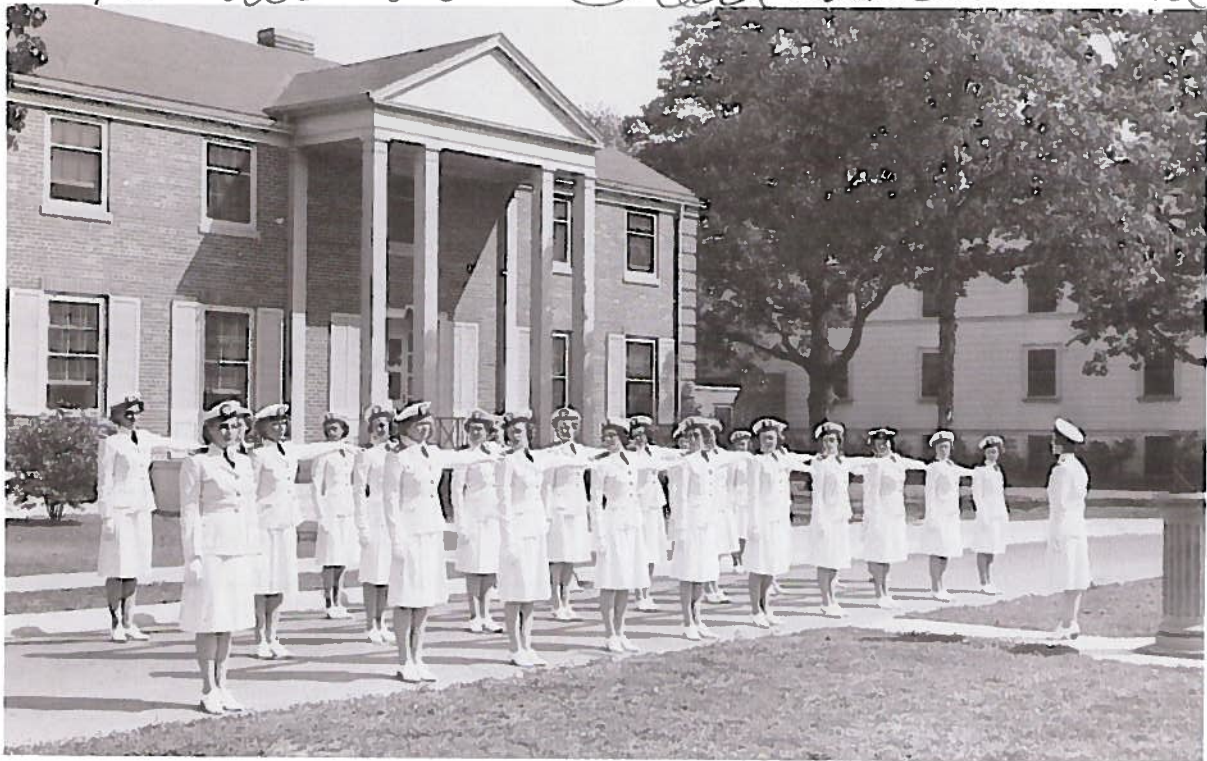
Lieutenant J.G. Olive E. White



~~Gary Methodist Hospital Nursing School Class 1943~~

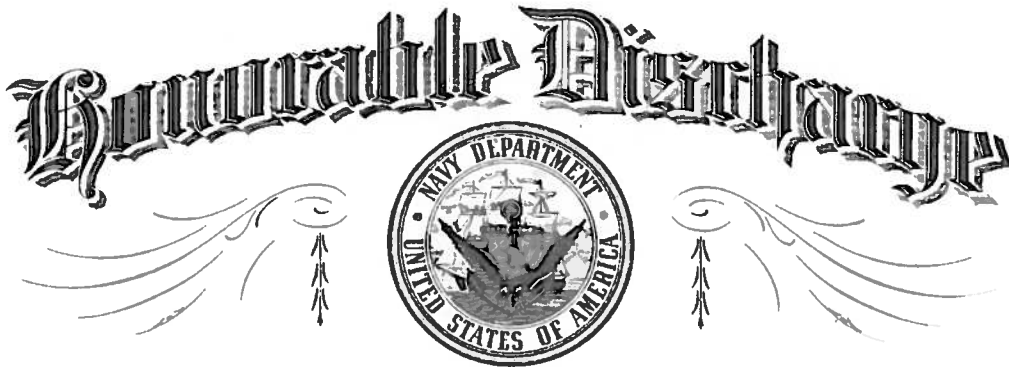
*Nurses at Great Lakes Naval Base*

*1944*



Nurses in Formation at Great Lakes Naval Base

*1944*



from the Armed Forces of the United States of America

*This is to certify that*

Lieutenant (junior grade) Olive E. White, NC, U.S.N.R. (365034)

*was Honorably Discharged from the*

**United States Navy**

*on the 17th day of March, 1953. This certificate is awarded*

*as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service*

*R. D. Anderson*

R. D. ANDERSON  
Secretary of the Navy

Discharge Paperwork From The United States Navy