

The National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with:

Jean Adams

Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

September 17, 2015

Today is September 17, 2015. My name is John Fargo and I am a volunteer oral historian for The National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today, I am in Austin, Texas at the home of Jean Adams to hear of some of her experiences during World War II. This interview is in support of the Education and Research Center of The National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today Jean. I would like to start out with a d little bit of background, Jeans Where were you born and when?

Jean Adams: I was born in Washington, D.C. December 20, 1919, at Walter Reed Hospital.

Fargo: What was father's occupation?

Ms. Adams: He was in the Army. Most of the time he was in the Corps of Engineers.

Fargo: Did you have any sisters and brothers?

Ms. Adams: I had two brothers. Both of them were career military. Both of them went to West Point.

Fargo: Where did you go to high school?

Ms. Adams: I went to Justice Hall which was a girl's school in Washington, D.C.. From there I went to a girl's Elgant which was a girl's college in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is now part of the University of Pennsylvania.

Fargo: Did you graduate from there?

Ms. Adams: Yes, I graduated in 1939.

Fargo: What did you do after college?

Ms. Adams: At that time my father was the Army Engineer in Galveston, Texas and was involved in flood control and rivers and harbors. So, I went to Galveston to make my debut. That is what you did in those days.

After that my younger brother, who had been stationed in the Philippines, thought I should see the world, so he and his wife invited me over there. Consequently; I went over there in 1940. Apparently things did not look too good as the Navy evacuated their

dependents in November of 1940. I was evacuated back to the United States in April of 1941. My sister-in-law was evacuated in June of 1941. My brother had a battalion of Filipino Scouts and he was captured before the Bataan March.

Fargo: Did he survive?

Ms. Adams: Yes, he survived and he stayed in the military.

Fargo: So, you came back to the United States.

Ms. Adams: Yes, it was just before the war began. I remember the 7th of December. I had gone back and lived with my parents and went to secretarial school. That's what many young ladies did during that time. You either became a teacher or a secretary. My mother had a close friend who was an assistant to of Oveta Culp Hobby who was trying to set up the WACs. She and my mother were talking and she thought that my brother, being a prisoner of war, and they were trying to get people to join the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. for it would relieve a man to go to war and they needed lots of men. And, that's the way the WACCs started for us to go into the military and relieve a man to go to war. So, this is what I did. So, my mother and my father talked me into it.

They thought that my brother being a prisoner and a terrible situation existed and that I should help out.

Fargo: So, you were one of the first people to go into the WACs?

Ms. Adams: I went into the second Officer's Candidate Class. The first one was in June of 1942 and the second one was late June of 1942. We went to De Moines, Iowa. There we were taught the ethics of military. How to march and so on.

Fargo: Tell us a little bit about that training.

Ms. Adams: You know, that was 75 years ago and about the only thing I can remember from that six week of training to be an Officer, was the marching. The one thing I remember from learning how to run a kitchen was to make sure that they didn't use the coffee grounds more than twice. (Chuckle)

Fargo: You were actually trained by regular Army military personnel.

Ms. Adams: Yes. We had male officers that trained us.

Fargo: How id you feel about that. Being away from home and in an environment like that?

Ms. Adams: Well, I had been away from home before, so I was used to that. Actually, it was cold during our training and I wasn't use to that.

Fargo: Where were you staying, barracks?

Ms. Adams: We lived in barracks. As I recall all of us were in one room. We had our own bed and a footlocker at the foot of the bed. It was a typical barracks.

Fargo: How was the food.

Ms. Adams: Typical military food.

Fargo: It didn't impress you, one way or the other.

Ms. Adams: No. After about six weeks, we graduated and my assignment was to train more Officer Candidates, so I stayed on the base, but I lived in one of the Officer's Quarters. There were about five of us lived there.

Fargo: So, you took the place of the place of the Army men.

Ms. Adams: The men in the Army.

Fargo: How many where in your class?

Ms. Adams: I don't remember.

Fargo: Did you pretty well fill up the barracks?

Ms. Adams: Pretty much.

Fargo: What was your term of enlistment?

Ms. Adams: It was for the duration of the war.

Fargo: Did you have any authority to reserve your commission?

Ms. Adams: I think if you were pregnant, you could.

Fargo: You were in the Auxiliary.

Ms. Adams: Yes, for about a year and a half. It was July of 1943 when they changed it over. You had to put your hand up and resign. I was engaged to a gentleman who was stationed in Trinidad and we had discussed getting married after the war was over. Then I was transferred to Washington, D.C. This was 1943. There I went to class for six weeks, to become an Inspector General.

Fargo: Where was this? The Pentagon?

Ms. Adams: Yes. I served under Oveta Culp Hobby. I also served under General Stacy who was the Army Colonel in charge of that. My husband returned to the States and we decided to get married then. So, we did. Soon after, he was transferred to California. So, I asked General Stacy if I could get transferred to California. He said, "Jean you know we don't transfer people around for their own convenience." I said, "If I can't, I am not going to put my hand up and re-enlist." Soon afterward they said that I was going to be transferred and that I was going to be promoted. I told them that I had already told my husband that I was going to join him. I have always kind of regretted it as I felt like I should have stayed in.

Later on, they changed things and wives could be transferred to be with their husbands.

Fargo: Tell me something about your tour of duty with the Inspector General's Office.

Ms. Adams: Well, I sat in on a couple of Court Martials. I remember investigating a matter involving a kitchen group of blacks that were complaining that the work was too hard and pots too heavy. So, I investigated that and in doing so I lifted one of the pots and it was so heavy that I almost fell down. I also investigated the VD (Venereal Disease) rate among the enlisted blacks. I had to call my husband, because I was so innocent that I didn't know what VD was. That is about all I can remember.

Fargo: Do you recall any of the particulars of the Court Martial, you sit in on?

Ms. Adams: On one of them, a girl said that this man had raped her. What she did, she went out with him and later on they went up to his hotel room. In those days if you did this, you were just asking for it. I did not think that she had been raped. I might think differently now. They did not convict the man involved.

Fargo: As remember, the Inspector's General's Office was pretty tough.

Ms. Adams: (Laughing) I was interesting. I can't remember the other things. I do remember that my husband was in the South Pacific for he was there for twenty-two months.

Fargo: You had joined him in California. Where in California?

Ms. Adams: Hamilton Field. He had a group of P-39 (Aira-cobra) out there. He left three months after I got there. He went to the Pacific, Guadalcanal, the Solomons and the Philippines. He had a group of P-39s and then they got P-38s (fighter planes).

Fargo: He was over there 22 months; did he go back to California?

Ms. Adams: No, back to Texas. He was supposed to come back after twenty-two months, on leave; my father had retired and was living in Portland, Oregon. During that twenty-two month I was involved in the Service Club program. When he came back, he was supposed to go back and be involved in the invasion of Japan, but they dropped the Atomic Bomb, so he didn't have go back. So, I am very glad they dropped that bomb.

Fargo: So, he came back and went to Texas?

Ms. Adams: Yes, we went to Waco, Texas where he had a Wing that was being dismantled. They were closing the base. There were so many pilots that they were manning the gates. From there we went to Arizona and from there we went to Iran where he was Air Advisor to the Shah of Iran, for a couple of years.

I had a baby, while we over there and so he had dual citizenship. Oh, my gosh, we went to Washington, D.C., a lot. Then we went to Viet Nam. We were there for two and one-half years.

Fargo: You didn't join him there, did you?

Ms. Adams: Yes, with the children.

Fargo: What year was that?

Ms. Adams: It was from 1963 to 1965. We were evacuated from there.

Fargo: In 1965?

Ms. Adams: He was with General Harkinson. He was over there until the Viet Nam war was over. He left there and went to Hawaii and became the Chief of Staff of a General, whose name I cannot remember.

Fargo: Did he retire from there?

Ms. Adams: Yes. He was there four years and then he retired.

Fargo: Was he a General at that point?

Ms. Adams: Yes. He was a Major General.

Fargo: So, you were brought up in the Army and ended up with the Air Force.

Ms. Adams: We ended up coming here and we were here two years before he passed away.

Fargo: That was an interesting life, Jean.

Ms. Adams: Yes, it was an interesting life. None of our children served in the military, but they all liked being military children. They had a good life. Even today, they talk about all the places they were and enjoyed it.

Fargo: None of your boys went to West Point?

Ms. Adams: No. They had no desire to.

Fargo: Looking back on it, you stated that you wish you had not resigned from the WACs.

Ms. Adams: I felt guilty that I had resigned. That is the reason, I have not talked much about being in the WACs. I felt kind of funny about having gotten out.

Fargo: Did you get any benefits, after.....

Ms. Adams: Actually, they didn't classify the people who were in the Women's Auxiliary Corps. during the war as veterans, until sometime later. I have heard that they are now classified as veterans and they can use veteran benefits.

Fargo: Did you establish a relation-ship with Oveta Culp Hobby?

Ms. Adams: Well, she came to my wedding. I knew her, but she wasn't a close friend or anything like that.

Fargo: What was your husband's first name?

Ms. Adams: Milton

Fargo: Major General Milton Adams?

Ms. Adams: Yes.

Fargo: Did you ever have contact with General Page?

Ms. Adams: Yes, I use to see him in the office.

Fargo: He had a son, Donald Page who was a Lt. Colonel in the Army and he was killed in Korea and was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor. He was in Korea att he same time that I was there and I have read a lot about him.

Ms. Adams: General Page was a very fine man. I think that it was very difficult for him to be around a bunch of women instead of being involved in fighting the war.

Fargo: How old of a man was he, at that point?

Ms. Adams: Probably around forty.

Fargo: Now you said your one brother was a Prisoner of War of the Japanese; did he stay in the Army after the war was over?

Ms. Adams: Yes. He became a Colonel and he went to Korea.

Fargo: You have led and interesting life and being a General's wife made it even more interesting. From what I have read that is almost a job in it-self. Is it not?

Ms. Adams: I guess. We did do a lot of entertaining and things like that with various people. I guess the Lieutenant's wives looked up to the General's wives and wondered if they were doing the proper things.

Fargo: You know, from everything I have read, the WACs were perceived by the public as not the place where you would want to daughter or wife to be.

Ms. Adams: I think that is why my family made such a big deal about it; saying I was marrying a pilot during the war.

Fargo: What was his rank at that time?

Ms. Adams: He was a Major. He became a Lt. Colonel eight months after we were married and then a Colonel. Rank was obtained pretty fast, during those days.

Fargo: You are right. It was a good recruiting tool.

Ms. Adams: Yes, it was. Here was a nice little girl that had gone to all of these girl's schools. In other words, it was the nice people who were joining the WACs.

Fargo: Yes. Professionals. I agree. They had a hard time recruiting during those early years of the WACs. But ultimately it reached about 150,000.

Ms. Adams: That is correct.

Fargo: Well, Jean, despite the fact it was only two years, I thank you for your service.

Ms. Adams: Thank you.

Fargo: You have had a very interesting career. Before we wind this up, what was your most interesting and enjoyable duty station during the years you were with your husband?

Ms. Adams: Actually, I enjoyed every where we went. I thought Iran was a fascinating country. I was only twenty--five then and it was an interesting world to see. I found Viet Nam an interesting part of the world too. We got to go to Japan and China and of course Hawaii. Of course, nobody can turn down Hawaii.

It was a wonderful life and I feel like I was very blessed.

Fargo: It sounds like it. I thank you for your time this morning.

Ms. Adams: Thank you.

OH #04489

Transcribed by:
Floyd C. Cox
San Antonio, Texas
February 2, 2022