

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Margaret Emily Russell
Winamac, IN
July 19, 2016
WAVEs
U.S. Navy

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is July 19, 2016. I am interviewing Mrs. Margaret Emily Russell by telephone. Her phone number is 574-946-3103. Her address is 305 N. Riverside Drive, Winamac, IN 46996. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Emily, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Thank you.

Mrs. Russell:

Well, I'm glad to participate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, good. Now, the first thing I need to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes, my granddaughter lives with me. You want her name?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, if you moved, she would move with you, right?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'd rather have somebody else.

Mrs. Russell:

My daughter lives in town.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I don't care where it is. They could be in any state, anywhere. What's her name?

Mrs. Russell:

Kim Russell. She has a cell phone. The number is 574-242-0943. Her address is 805 E.

Chouinard, C.R. 800 E, Winamac, IN 46996.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what is your birth date?

Mrs. Russell:

1-17-24.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mrs. Russell:

Waveland, Indiana, in the country.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your parents' names?

Mrs. Russell:

O. Archie Collings and Nancy Inez Collings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Your maiden name was Collings?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. Two brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your brothers in World War II?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. My older brother, was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did he do? Do you know?

Mrs. Russell:

He was in the Air Force. He worked on planes. He didn't fly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's not still living, is he?

Mrs. Russell:

No. I'm the only one. Nobody's living.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, mightily I would say. We lived in a house that had two apartments so we could have money and pay all the bills. My father worked at the tile factory in Anderson. We had meat once a week. We survived on potatoes and beans. We weren't any different than the neighbors. We were all in the same boat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a garden?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, most of the time my father had a garden. He was a good provider and he could grow anything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have chickens or anything like that?

Mrs. Russell:

No. We lived in town more or less.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mrs. Russell:

I started in high school in Anderson and then we moved to Jeffersonville and I finished in Joliet, Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you finish high school?

Mrs. Russell:

1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mrs. Russell:

I went to a commercial school for secretarial school and then I went to work at the defense plant

which was outside of Joliet and worked in the defense plant where they made munitions for the bombs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job there?

Mrs. Russell:

Just a typist. I was a typist.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, on December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, yes, it was big news, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you and how did you hear?

Mrs. Russell:

I was going to school I believe in Joliet and probably heard it through the school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mrs. Russell:

Well, I didn't think about going into the service then, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Your brother did. When did he go in?

Mrs. Russell:

I'm trying to think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it before the war or early in the war?

Mrs. Russell:

Early in the war I would say. He was living away from home and I don't recall the year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You mentioned you were in Joliet. Your family had moved to Joliet, Illinois?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. My father got a job in this defense plant which under DuPont I think was the name of it but it was a defense plant where they made the ammunition.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you work there?

Mrs. Russell:

I imagine two or three years because I decided that I was just a typist and I wanted a little adventure I guess. My parents didn't mind that I signed up to go into the service. I had to go to Chicago for a test and from Joliet that wasn't too far.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go into the service? What date?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, my. I'd have to get...I don't recall. I'd have to get out some papers to find out. (She got her papers.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go in?

Mrs. Russell:

September 21, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were discharged when?

Mrs. Russell:

May 20, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went in in Chicago, is that correct?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What branch did you go into?

Mrs. Russell:

I went into the Navy, the WAVES.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Navy?

Mrs. Russell:

My brother was in the Army so I guess I wanted to be different.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mrs. Russell:

Western New York. And they put us in an apartment building about eight to twelve girls in one apartment. We had bunk beds. We were on the third floor and you walked up every place, you

didn't ride in an elevator. And then when they called at times you had to go downstairs and gather into a marching group and march to breakfast, march to learn to march and it was at Hunter College in New York City. We went through all kinds of activities. You did calisthenics and you did the marching part and they fed us three meals a day. We would march back to our apartment building and climb up three floors and just the number of girls in the apartment you kind of took numbers at your time for the shower. One bathroom and 8 to 12 girls and we'd shower and get ready to jump in bed and sleep til the next morning and they'd blow the whistle. I don't remember how they awakened us but we all got up and assembled out in front of the apartment buildings and marched back to the college for whatever we were learning that day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what time did they get you up?

Mrs. Russell:

I would think seven. But I don't recall the time. But we had just young Lieutenants that were in charge of us and we took our turns at cleaning their apartment. But we had to clean for the young officers that were in charge of us. That was revealing, too, but the calisthenics were rigorous and they had an armory building close to the apartments and we all gathered, all the apartments, and President Roosevelt came waving his hand and he drove through this armory and waved at all of us. So that was the biggest thrill I suppose.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of training did you get there?

Mrs. Russell:

I think we had some other than the calisthenics and learning to march but we had classes with the piping and making sure that this was what they wanted us to do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long was that boot camp?

Mrs. Russell:

From there we went to Millidgeville, Georgia, first on trains and sent us to Millidgeville after they decided that we could type. There they took over a boys' school, I suppose for young boys and we had more and we were tested for the bookkeeping or the typing and shorthand. We had various classes and we were marched to and from those classes also. We had delicious meals. I gained about twenty pounds I think while I was in Georgia but that was just for a short time and then they sent us back north on the train and I was sent to Harrisburg and when we got to Harrisburg we were put into private homes. I was lucky to get a roommate and we were put in a private home and lived there the whole time. You know, lived there with another person. You would have to get up and be at the station out of town. It was called a naval station where they manufactured the ammunition for the bombs. I was a typist and they would send us downtown where we would take buses out to the Navy depot. It was pleasant. I was living close to the Susquehanna River and on our days off we could take picnics and take long walks and I remember the clothing they doled out to us. I said I had never had such comfortable clothing and I wish I had some of that good Navy uniform right now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of clothing did you have?

Mrs. Russell:

It was just heavy gabardine I believe but it was well made and it covered you and the coats had linings you could take in and out and they gave us two suits which you didn't wear pants ever. You had two skirts, two jackets, probably two shirts and two pair of shoes and stockings so they

always gave you two of everything but if it wore out, you'd have to go to the stores and request replacement but those were the best clothes I ever had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What color were they?

Mrs. Russell:

Navy blue but we had scarves that were lighter blue and had the two types of hats and bags, shoulder bags but I just loved my clothing. When I left home and got married, my father just cleaned out the closet so I didn't get to keep any of it. But then after Harrisburg I guess the war was over and they were just waiting to have enough points to get out probably. They sent us to Philadelphia and put us up in the Ben Franklin Hotel. That was quite an experience. From the hotel you were expected to be out at work by eight o'clock which you'd go on the el and downtown, clear to the end of the line every morning. The end of the line was at the Naval depot where they stored things. I sat with the other girls and drew red lines on yellow paper. You were just waiting to get out is what we were doing but they were taking care of us. Finally I moved out of the Ben Franklin Hotel and we could move into private homes if we could find something close to the depot where the people would take in girls and that's where I moved out of the hotel so I didn't have to ride the el every day. They had gates around the depot that you could go in to work. It was a fine experience. I guess I joined the service to see the country and I saw quite a bit of it on the East Coast.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were living in this private home, how did you get to the base?

Mrs. Russell:

You walked. You found a home that was close to the base and a gate in the fence that you could

enter into the base but you had to walk quite a distance. But I got my teeth fixed while I was there and I thought that was good. They had dentists and actually I still have some of those fillings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

While you were in Pennsylvania, you were in a private home there, is that correct?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, yes. I was in a hotel downtown and then from the hotel, if you could find a home that would accept the Navy girls and they liked the money, too. Out in these homes you had to pay so much which probably was five dollars. I don't recall the sum but...

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had to pay it? The Navy didn't pay it.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. They gave us an allowance for food and housing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your pay when you first went in?

Mrs. Russell:

I only remember \$80 per month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's pretty good for the Navy.

Mrs. Russell:

Of course, maybe that's with food allowance and room, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes. Basically in World War II when you first went in it was \$21 a month. It was for the Army and Navy and all of them.

Mrs. Russell:

I don't recall...I just remember \$80 so I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mrs. Russell:

I was a Storekeeper Third Class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your emblem on your sleeve? What did it look like?

Mrs. Russell:

I can't tell you that either. It was just one stripe. I suppose it's on here. I don't know whether it is or not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your most memorable event from the Navy? A lot of things?

Mrs. Russell:

A lot of things, yes. A lot of them. I think being in Philadelphia was quite an experience. There were so many things to see and do and we did them. We went to see the Liberty Bell. We traveled to New York from Philadelphia to see the museums and...

Mr. Misenhimer:

You must have traveled around quite a bit then.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your work schedule? What time did you go to work and how long did you work?

Mrs. Russell:

I think just 8 to 5 days. I never worked nights. It was just a day job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Five days a week or how many?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes, five days a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Weekends off.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did that Navy work compare to what you were doing before you were in?

Mrs. Russell:

When I was working at DuPont, I was making probably \$300 a week. When I went into the service I was making a lot less and doing the same thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were doing pretty good before you went in then.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes, I couldn't spend it but my parents didn't object to my going and no one said you don't want to do that. I just did it. I guess we remembered the days of being poor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think you would have been 20 years old when you went in then.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. In 1945 I was still in.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had been in about a year then.

Mrs. Russell:

It seems to me that we were going in to eat, into a tea room where we had to climb stairs, so when they told us that he had died. I remember I was going to an evening meal, going into the tea room because the homes opened up to take advantage of the people being there, the Navy being there. There were all kinds of places you could go, tea rooms.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When people heard about Roosevelt dying, what reaction did they have?

Mrs. Russell:

It was a sad time because he had been in office so long. It was just like he was a father to

everyone but yes it was a sad time. I don't remember if the Navy had any special remembrance of him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you all have any kind of celebration then?

Mrs. Russell:

No. I don't remember having any.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then August 6 they dropped the first atomic bomb. Did you hear about that?

Mrs. Russell:

Just through the news. I didn't see any celebrating about that either.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when Japan did surrender on August 14 and the war was over, any kind of celebration then?

Mrs. Russell:

No. Didn't have television. Didn't have a telephone. It was just common talk with your friends would be the only thing but no, we didn't celebrate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've probably seen the picture of Times Square with all that celebration.

Mrs. Russell:

But like I said, I didn't have access to anything that...

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you think was your most memorable event in the Navy? A lot of them?

Mrs. Russell:

Well, being in New York and being I guess going places and the train rides were terrible. They didn't have air conditioning. If you sat next to a window you ended up covered in cinders and dirt. It was terrible.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were coal powered.

Mrs. Russell:

They didn't have a special train. You had to sit up. You didn't have a room.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you went to New York City you went on a train out there, right?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did that take more than one day?

Mrs. Russell:

I don't remember that it did. I don't recall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you were discharged on May 20, 1946.

Mrs. Russell:

I was in Washington, D.C. They sent me there to be discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Discharged in Washington.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got discharged, how did you get home? On a train?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. I took a train to Chicago and then I had to take a bus from Chicago to Joliet. From there I took a taxi to my home outside the city.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were a storekeeper. What did a storekeeper do?

Mrs. Russell:

I suppose it was just the typing and my roommate was a secretary to some of the officers so it was just whatever job they gave you, you did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Basically it was clerical type work.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You weren't storing or anything like that.

Mrs. Russell:

No, I didn't handle any material or boxes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, were you in a particular outfit or unit?

Mrs. Russell:

Not that I know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, the girls I worked with we were compatible. We agreed on when to go to work and where we were going eat afterward and of course I lived in private homes a lot. I didn't live in a barracks or anything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any U.S.O. shows anywhere?

Mrs. Russell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mrs. Russell:

Oh, I think the U.S.O. was more evident. I didn't, only at the train stations they would have the places where you could get a cup of coffee. I didn't see any shows.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were working at these places doing your clerical work, were there many regular sailors around there, too?

Mrs. Russell:

At Harrisburg there were sailors but I don't know what they did. I didn't have a chance to know the men in the service that much. We were just kind of typists and we typed and went home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mrs. Russell:

I never met the officers that I worked for. I never had anything to do with them. I wouldn't know. I can't say that I met any of them. There was always a person in charge of the typists but I think I ...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Never talked to them or anything like that.

Mrs. Russell:

No, they'd just say there's a desk and there's a typewriter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go to work.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You haven't had any reunions of anybody then?

Mrs. Russell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you keep up with anybody you knew in the service?

Mrs. Russell:

When I left service there were about five or six of us had a round robin letter going. You'd write your letter and pass it on. That was just maybe two or three years it kept going. But then someone dropped it and it stopped.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get the G.I. Bill?

Mrs. Russell:

Yes. I just wish the government would do that for the people, service people, now. When I came home and from Joliet we moved to Danville, Indiana. There was a small college, Canterbury College. I got my G.I. Bill that paid my tuition and bought my books. That's how I became a teacher and I came up here to teach because the G.I. Bill gave me that opportunity to go to college. It was a small college in my small town and it worked out just fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What college was that?

Mrs. Russell:

It was called Canterbury College. It was started by the Episcopalians. It had been Central Normal College and a lot of the teachers had gone for sixteen weeks or so and had become teachers, going to the Central Normal College, but the Episcopalians bought it and named it Canterbury and built some buildings and took over some of the housing, put the boys and girls in, used them as dorms. Even put up Quonset huts for the fellows and there were families in the Quonset huts, too. But I lived in my parents' home about six blocks away from the college and I could walk to college and have my classes. So it worked out very well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What town was that in?

Mrs. Russell:

Danville, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you go to school?

Mrs. Russell:

I think I just went year round. I was through in three and a half years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Three and a half. You got a degree.

Mrs. Russell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your major?

Mrs. Russell:

It was just I guess I had to take practice teaching and such so the idea was to be a teacher. That's what I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mrs. Russell:

No. I guess I'd lived in private homes and I had a group of friends. I didn't miss it, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mrs. Russell:

No, I enjoyed it and I benefitted like I said then my college was paid for. All in all it was a good experience.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Without the G.I. Bill you probably wouldn't have gone to college then?

Mrs. Russell:

No, I would not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally or Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mrs. Russell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't get to hear them here in this country, no. Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs of any kind?

Mrs. Russell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No souvenirs?

Mrs. Russell:

No souvenirs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had your uniform but they didn't...

Mrs. Russell:

Yes, I loved those uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But your dad...

Mrs. Russell:

My father just cleaned out my wedding gown, anything that was in the closet went. But I think he wanted to get married again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you get married?

Mrs. Russell:

I got married in 1954. I married Joe Russell. I came up here to teach and I met, buying groceries and all, Kate Ash had told Joe, "Now there's a good-looking girl." So eventually he asked me out and I met Joe Russell through the grocery store. It worked out fine. I lived with the Barnetts here in town. I had a room upstairs. There were about three of us, three rooms and three girls. We were upstairs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got married in 1954. Well, Emily I want to thank you for your time today and I want to thank you for your service to our country.

Mrs. Russell:

Well, thank you and it worked out well for me.

End of Interview

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