1992

Remembering Pearl Harbor

Joseph Quentin Nesmith Sr.

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REMEMBERING PEARL HARBOR

by

Joseph Quentin NeSmith, Sr.

and

compiled by

Nancy Pearl NeSmith

Auspices
Bulloch County Historical Society
Post Office Box 42
Statesboro, Georgia 30459
Dear Dr. Mabry,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, you have permission to reprint my father's account of Pearl Harbor. His connection to your county is as follows:

Joseph Quintin NeSmith is the son of Joseph Glover NeSmith of Cochran, Bleckley, Georgia. Joseph Glover NeSmith is the son of Simon Green NeSmith of Cochran, Bleckley, Georgia. Simon Green NeSmith is the son of Garrett NeSmith of Wilkinson County, Georgia. Garrett NeSmith is the son of James NeSmith and Jane Price of Screven County, Georgia. James NeSmith, whose name is on the monument you helped dedicate, is the son of James NeSmith and Elizabeth of Bulloch County, Georgia.

My father's father was worked for the railroad, so my dad lived in Florida (mainly Key West) until he went into the military at age 16. He was born in 1919 which makes him 22 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

From Hawaii my father was stationed in Mojave, California. From California my father was stationed at Cherry Point, North Carolina. From Cherry Point he was stationed at Quantico, Virginia. From Quantico he was transferred to El Toro, California.

The Korean War broke out and he fought in Korea. From Korea he was transferred to Kaneohe, Hawaii. From Kaneohe he was transferred to Cherry Point, North Carolina. From Cherry Point he was transferred to El Toro, California and then to Japan without his family which made him decide to leave the Marine Corps.

After his retirement from the Marine Corps he became an Orange County, California Coroner Investigator. He retired from the Coroner's Office and helped with the family business. In 1990 my family moved from Santa Ana, California to Las Vegas, Nevada where he died in 1992.

Among his papers I found one page of a resume which might answer some questions you might have. Also, I've included a copy of his pedigree chart. I hope this helps.

Thank you for your interest,

Nancy P. NeSmith
By special request the following is included:

1939. I returned from the Virgin Islands in June. (About ten to twenty.) I went home on furlough and met Dorothy. After I got back to Quantico N.C. where I was stationed I used to go to Washington D.C. on Saturday (get a 12:00 noon at the 5th Ave and 42nd St.) and stay over Sunday to sight-see the museums, Smithsonian etc.) I was welling near Lincoln Memorial when a man in a car pulled over to talk to me. He was in civilian clothes. He told me he was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps in the War Plans Dept. of the Navy. I was in uniform (blue) and the said I looked short. I prayed. He said he had to go to his apartment for something, so I went with him and the introduced me to his wife. (I was relieved because I thought he might be queer. I didn't want to trust him.) He seemed like a neat guy on a weekend drink. He said that we were going to war with the Japanese before the summer. The Marines were going to get into it first with the Japs. He said he had friends in personnel at

Headquarters, N.C., and if I wanted to get a transfer to the West Coast California I drop him a card and he would "guarantee it." Well, I thought it over and was itching to get in a war so I put in for a transfer to San Diego. I had to agree to getting my enlistment to get the transfer. I odd the 12.30 train and got a card (The had given me his name and address). I didn't hear from him but I did get my transfer a couple weeks later.

The outfit I joined at San Diego was Aircraft Two. Which made me having served in all by Marine aviation units at that time. Everybody in Marine aviation 1940 stationed in North Island San Diego I was given leave in May June. {$^{1}$} October 17 signed 2 year extension. I had a backmark (4 yrs.) on my above and corporal stripes. I went to Florida and got married. Dorothy came to California and we lived in Escondido. Reenlisted came just about that time because the Marine Corps began to build up its strengths. I went from corporal to Technical
Sergeant, in less than a year, 1941. Then, Aircraft Two was transferred to Haskell in January 1941. Daniel went back to Florida to see some of his family.

My unit was stationed at an air strip near the Ewa plantation village. (This was 5 miles as the crow flies from Pearl Harbor. To get to Pearl Harbor by land roads, it was about 12-15 miles.) The air strip was the Ewa Meeting West Station where the Navy's zeppelin, the USS Macon, used to moor. When it was in Hawaii, I saw the Macon when I was a kid in Key West. It flew over the Keys. It was a huge ship. The Hindenburg was larger, I saw that too, I'm sure.)

We lived in tents at first, I was in the motor transport and was second in charge. (Technical Sergeant I made in June.) Some of the girls and girls followed their men, too. I wrote Dorothy about it. She was worried, wondering if I was safe, or if we were in danger. I told her we were not in danger, just working hard to keep the flight. Dorothy (always independent, 17 years old, 18 in July) couldn't stand being away from me, (or was it just the trip to beautiful Hawaii?) for several months, even my allotment check. (Think she had a job too) and bought a three-foot long ticket and came out.

She arrived on the Matsonia and one of the two at the Ewa Beach store lines, the one island boat to meet the ship. She arrived broke over money on her strike room (1000) so I had to bail her out. She had a great time with a flock of guys, training, her sword. No, actually she was just sick from all the fun.

I had rented a little house in EWA Beach, (6 rooms and 1 bath) most houses had come out, and we had a lot of friends living near. We had a block of fun. We moved to a better house across the street (right on the water's edge) We had a stripped down Chevrolet car. I don't know what year it was—old. Dorothy was really a sight in that car. All piled up, with her foot to the floor board, going to Seabird Army Base for the commissary or to the Ewa Beach plantation. Everybody knew the name of the commissary.

On Dec. 5th (my payday) we went to the Ewa commissary store and bought...
groceries. We bought a duck,figuring we'd cook it Sunday. We had never had a duck before and we have never had one since! (As it turned out we never ate that one. really gave it to some soldiers who were guarding the beach.)

On Saturday, Dec. 6, 1941, we had a parade and review at the base, in order to make room for the parade, the planes were bunched up at end of the parking area, after the parade everyone wanted to go on duty, so the planes were left like they were all bunched up close at one end of the area. Off at noon I went home. I don't remember just what we did maybe we went shopping that afternoon and bought the duck.

Charles and Helen Kasha (Marie Tio's wife neighbors) asked us to go to WAIPAHU that night to see Jack Benny in the movie "Charlie's Aunt." I can't remember what that movie was about. But that happened the next morning, that morning, that day went through my mind.

Dec. 7, 1941, Sunday. Just before 8 a.m. I woke up and went outside to bring in the newspapers. I saw a flight of six planes with torpedoes hanging below them fly across just down the road. They were headed for Pearl Harbor (about 3 miles away). I noticed they were red tails painted on their sides. The sound of the Japanese. I thought they were Army air base planes dressed up to look like Japanese.

I went back in the house to the bed. Dorothy was still sleeping. I had barely started reading the Sunday paper when I heard loud explosions over towards Pearl Harbor. Gunshots could be heard. I went out and looked. There were huge columns of black smoke thousands of feet high. Dorothy had dressed and come out. We knew the Japanese had attacked P.O. They were some Japanese worker doing some construction work on a house. They were killed. On the lot next door, the Japanese plane came flying down the street, strafing the houses. Those workers disappeared. Dorothy and I had our next door neighbor, Fritz Frankenfeld, and his wife had behind their house. Fritz counted 36 bullet holes in our fence. The Frankenfelds, Dorothy and I went down the road to Charlie Backman house, his wife Helen was nearly hysterical. A spell from the gun at Pearl Harbor had landed in their front yard. Charlie had a 22 caliber pistol which he was
Later we heard that he was captured.

We never heard anything about the American planes. They must have been up on gunnery practice for the rear fleet, I guess. That's the only explanation I can think of for their being up and armed. They hadn't got enough time to take off from Ford Island at Pearl Harbor.

We went through the village of
cane plantations. I can't remember why but we left the car and walked (or ran) the last few hundred yards. At the gate the corporal of the guard was handing out .45-caliber automatic pistols. I took one with some ammunition.

I was full of grease, the breast was under attack by several strafing planes. No bombs, just .45's. I learned there were two distinct attacks on two. The first was the one when we arrived there. Later there was a still and gone more planes came.

I don't know if they were the same one, I went to the Staff Transport area where I normally works. Lt. Malden, 1st Lt. Larry Darrell was there and he and other Senior Staff groups (guy's will remain in World War

One at Kanskas) were directly

going to shoot at the right plane from

my hotel was afraid he might draw

fire from the planes, but they weren't
diy more planes than I knew of. I'm

debunked shak. We, Marnie, agreed that we would report in to
down hill at Ewa Navy Yard. We

used Charlie's car and dropped our

wives off at Capt. Trango's house

(who the heck was Capt. Trango?)

and they stayed with several other wives.

On the way to the base we left

shells falling on the hills all around

us. We saw three planes coming

toward us and we jumped out of the

car and hid in a ditch, but it

was two Army type torpedoes with a Japanese plane sandwiched

in. The American rear seat gasses

were crossing it. The gun plane

was about 100 yards ahead of

thing and just ahead they were still

firing a 37 at us because suddenly

the Japanese pilot bailed out in his

plane, he was on fire. His plane came into

the ground. I was so close that the vehicle caught fire. We

were a little concerned because the

landing was near the beach area where our wives were.
the fire at the strafing planes. Our planes on the ground with a blaze into fire. They will easy targets all blown up.

An old Serbine Sergeant (from Pavlovska) was near me. He was crew chief on a big two engine amphibian type which was parked 250 feet from the other planes. He must have liked that plane because he yelled at the ferry, calling them out telling them to get that damn amphib, at least one of the engines to blow up, and that took him a while. He got up and the ferries blew up. Old John checked.

Those one went to the quartermaster and broke down the door to the gun storage room. He brought a box of 30 cal. Springfield 1903 rifles with a few cases of ammo and got a rifle with a couple bandoleers of ammo. (The pistol, .45, before in the bucket of gasoline, was proof to start at airplanes). We were behind a brick fence and a bulldozer. Someone yelled for us to lead the planes. From a couple couple plane lengths ahead like statute clock. The pilots must have been concentrating on the parked airplanes. They were firing with fixed machine guns straight ahead. They will go down you could see the pilot faces with their full faced helmets. One plane was a two seater but the rear seat gunner was dead hanging on the side with his arms flapping in the wind. It is peculiar the quicky you become a killer yourself.

I thought nothing of bulleting at those planes hoping to bring one down, and we did. There was the wreckage of six planes against the outfield of our field. Maybe we got more credit than we deserve.

I had an amusing P-38 fighter plane (any airplane) dive on one of the strafing planes and it went down in flames. He immediately pulled up and another jeep plane didn't come. It seems someone should have recorded the cheers that went up by those Marines for the Army Air Corps (later to become the U.S. Air Force).

That pilot must have been either of those two army pilots who were stationed at Wheeler Field.
at Seapile Barracks Army Base. They jumped in a car and raced to Haleina Field on the north end of the island. There were grass landing strips there and their planes were parked there with the guns loaded. They had been using the field to fly gunnery practice missions. They became national heroes because they were the only American pilots to get up in the air. Their台湾 shot down 2 planes as well. got up. I was the only pilot to get into the air — actually they were the only ones to come back. The guys in the Navy torpedo plane that we saw shoot down the gun plane were much braver than me. At a time of crisis you never can tell who will become a hero. Our adjutant took a bullet through his hand. A private, a real good kid by the name of Greenhouse, helped him wrap up the wound. Then told him, "Captain, get your gas mask on, the bulldozer King is there!" The colonel crawled under and stood.

When the attacks were over

my boss, Harry Darmo, asked me if I had seen Tuchman (one of our deck sergeants). I told him no and someone else saw he was still there and the maid said, "Harry, will you go get Tuchman and bring him on deck?" He said, "He was a German spy, Larry paid also put other people looking for him. I went where he had said last seen and saw him alone in the brush. I didn't get close to him because another man a corporal named Warren, from another section came by on the other side of Tuchan. He asked to go with his gun (I had not seen Tuchan) that if they saw Tuchan to bring him in. He saw a spy. Tuchan appeared to have heard him and swung around and aimed his rifle at Darmo. I don't know if he fired, because everybody but me started shooting at him. I was in the line of fire and had to "hit the deck." When the shots were over Tuchan was dead. He was one of three that were killed that day by the p.p.274 (274) and that old (W. B. Call Netter) had been told that Tuchan's father in law was a paid German agent and
That Lynham had been sent in to his father, including maps of the field. We lost all of our plans that day. One man lost a plane. It was parked a long way from the other planes in a dirt runway. One night through the dark, a photographer shot through his upper arm and an X-ray shot shot through the cheek of his butt.

We were lucky. I guess we were the target of planes who had unloaded on Pearl Harbor and were on their way back to their ships. We were always afraid of getting shot when we were under fire. They were shooting from planes which were firing straight ahead and we could always tell where the shot was. Some people got hit even in the auto parts lot. A shell hit among them and exploded. One of our own from back.

We couldn't allow off the base the rest of the day and that night. We got a message from the black that we were well off. There were wild rumors about Japan landing at Nanihili beach. We were ready and armed to the teeth. Gas masks, too, everybody was issued one.

That night about 9 P.M. a lot of firing was heard from Pearl. The joy was out with all aircraft and later we learned that it was a flight of American Navy planes that came in from a carrier to land at Ford Island Navy Field. They were all shot down. Once one crew fired at them everybody else followed suit. They didn't stand a chance.

Dorothy began staying with John, her wife, and daughter. John was 24 yrs. old. On one night I was on the next. That was one of us was always there at night. Dorothy stood it as long as she could and she went to Pearl Harbor to see the chaplain. The chaplain she saw was the same one that was helping on a gun crew on Pearl Harbor day and yelled, "Help me out of this bomb and get the ammunition." That staffing. We knew who famous, even a song was written about it. Will he could see the scared, pregnant, girl wanting to go home to be safe with her family. He was touched enough to get them on a ship home. She said her voy out with the government paid her way back. She came home on a Dutch ship in a convoy and was seasick.
most of the way, but that's like story. I got there after D left with a gun when I went to Midway Island. I got a new job there, and a promotion to Master Technical Sergeant. I was put in charge of Gunship Ordinance.

In December, the Air Corps sent 25 4-engine bombers. The Liberators, I think they were called. (As big as a B-17) Their mission was to fly from Midway to the only occupied island of HAKE, it was captured at the beginning of the war by its Japs. The bombing was to take place on the morning of Christmas Day. Each plane carried five 500-pound general purpose bombs and one 500-pound secondary cluster. We calibrated Xmas eve by loading the planes. They used our bombs and gave us our own power. I personally fused all 950 bombs. We worked all night. I checked and double checked everything. Later reports said they all worked perfectly. This was my Xmas present, to try it all we got 25 numbers or slips of paper in a hat. We paid a dollar each for the draw. My number was 25. We were betting on the number of planes that would return. We counted them as they came back that afternoon. All returned.
Mr. Ed Duncan
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