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 Quinn NeSmith is the son of Joseph Glover NeSmith of Cochran, Bleckley, Georgia.

Joseph Glover NeSmith is the son of Simeon Green NeSmith of Cochran, Bleckley, Georgia.

Simeon 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 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. (Had been there 26 wks.) I went home on leave and met Dorothy. After I got back to Quantico Va. where I was stationed I used to go to Washington, DC, on Saturday (got a $3.00 room at the Bay City) and stay some Sunday to sight-see the museums, Smithsonian etc.

I was walking 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 he said I looked short. I wasn't, he said. He led to go to this apartment for something. So I went with him and he introduced me to his wife. I was relieved because I thought he might be queer and I didn't want to hurt him. He seemed like a nice guy on a weekend drink. He told me that we were going to war with the Japanese before the Germans. 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 to 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 sold the car, got a job (he 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 the Marine aviation units at that time. Everybody in Marine aviation 1940 stationed in North Island, San Diego. I was given leave in May June was told enlistment expired and I rejoined my 3 year extension. I had a Rank mark (4 yrs.) on my sleeve and Corporal stripes. I went to Florida and got married. Dorothy came to California and we lived in Coronado. Relations came just about that time because the Marine Corps began to build up its strength. I went from Corporal to Technical
Sergeant in less than a year, 1941. Then Aircraft Eve was transferred to Honolulu in January 1941. Darby went back to Florida to see mother one more time.

My unit was stationed at an airstrip near the Eva plantation village, about 5 miles from Pearl Harbor. To get to Pearl Harbor by land route, it was about 12-15 miles. This airstrip was the Eva Meeting Hall station where the Navy's zeppelin, the USS Mako, used to moor when it was in Hawaii. (I saw the Mako when I was a kid in Key West. It flew over the Keys. It was a huge ship. The Hindenburg was larger ship, I saw them both.) My life was in tents at first. I was in the motor transport and was second in charge. (Technical Sergeant I made in Jan.)

Some of the girls and boy friends followed their men out, I wrote Dorothy about it. The wives weren't supposed to come out but there was nothing the military could do to stop it. Dorothy (always independent, 17 years old, 18 years old couldn't stand being away from me, so was it just the trip to beautiful Hawaii) sold some money from her allotment check. Think she had a job too.) and bought a three-foot-long ticket and came out.

She arrived on the Matsonia, one of two of the Matson steamship lines, and went out on the gild boat to meet the ship. She arrived broke many on her sick room, so I had to bail her out. She had a great time with a flock of guys training her around. No, actually she was six-week half the trip, had rented a little house in Ewa Beach, (4 rooms and a bath) just drive took came out and we had a lot of friends living near. We had a beach near. 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 it was it was old. Dorothy was really a sign in that car. All piled up with her foot to the floor board going to Leahi Army Base to the commissary or to the Ewa plantation. Village commissary, and even get to Pearl Harbor up at giving those sailors a treat. She was having morning sickness. And she began to joke out in front of the Thanksgiving Everybody knew the Matson's were expected. On Dec. 5th (my payday) we went to the Eva 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 forget our since! (So it turned out we were the first one, really ours it to some soldiers who were guarding the beach.)

On Saturday, Dec. 7, 1941, we had a parade and reviewed at the base. In order to make room for the parade, the planes were bunching up at one end of the parking area. After the parade, everyone wanted to go on duty, so the planes piled up at the other end of the area. Off at noon I went down. I don't remember just what we did while we were standing but the duck.

Charlie and Holly Barker (Mary's sister and wife neighbors) asked me to go to WAI'AHULU that night to see Jack Benny in the movie "Charlie's Aunt." I can't remember what the movie was about. Did they happen the next morning that would everything clear out of my brain.

Dec. 7, 1941, Sunday. Just before 8:00 AM I woke and went outside to bring in the newspaper. I saw a flight of eight B-planes with torpedos hanging below them fly across just down the street. They were hardly for Pearl Harbor (about 3 miles away). I noticed they were laid

red balls painted on their sides, The浪潮 of the Japanese. I thought they were Army Air Corps planes dressed up to look like Japanese. I went back in the house to get dressed. Dorothy was still sleeping. I had barely started reading the comics when I heard loud explosions over towards Pearl Harbor. Another 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 Pearl. There were some Japanese workers doing some construction work on a house they were building on the lot next door. A Japanese plane came flying down the street, stripping the houses. Those workers disappeared. Dorothy and I and our next door neighbor, Frankel and wife hid behind our fence. Charlie counted 36 bullet holes in our fence. The Frankels, Dorothy and I went down the road to Charlie Barker's house. His wife Helen was nearly hysterical. A spell from the air gun at Earl Norton had landed in their front yard. Charlie had a .22 caliber pistol which he was
going to shoot at the next plane to come
by. We were afraid he might draw
fire from the planes, but that wasn't
any more planes that we know of by.

We, Mamie, agreed that we should report to
the mayor at Ewa. We both left the
plane and stopped our car at Capt. Harnum's
home. The mayor was General Harnum,
and they stayed with several other toast.

On the way to the base we all
gathered in the hills all around
us. We saw three planes coming
toward us and ran into the
field and hid in a ditch. But it
was this thing that had a bomb
with a Japanese plane sandwiched
in. The American rear seat gunner
was crossing in the way plane,
the one plane that was about 100 yards ahead.
They told us that it was a kind of
track, and that it was a trick because nobody
the Japanese pilot bailed out in his
parachute. His plane done into
the ground. We were so close
that the strain really opened. We
were a little concerned because
the two planes were far from the
area where our homes were.

Later we heard that he was captured.
We were dead anything about the
American planes. They must have
been up on gunnery practice for the
near base. Gunnery was the one
operation they didn't think of for their
training and Armadillo didn't enough
for us to take off from Ford Island at
Pearl Harbor.

We went through the village of
Ewa plantation. I can't remember why
but we left the car and walked down
palm, the last few hundred yards. At
the gate the guard of the Island was
having out 45 caliber automatic pistols.
I took one will some ammunition.
It was full of 1474 rounds, the
last was under attack by several
strafing planes. No bombs, but I
clearly heard that there were two distinct attacks
on them. The first was the one
when we arrived there. Later three "fire
fell out and gone more planes came.
I don't know if they were the same
airplane. I went to the Ewa transport
area where I normally worked. I
Met Llloey Baker and Lee and Oren Senior Sport
comers (guy's will remember in World War
One of Hicinor) were drinking
the fire at the strafing planes. Our planes on the ground will be blaze into fire. They will easily target all trucks up.

An old Sepulchre Sergeant (p. Pankowski) was near me. He was circle chief on a big two engine amphibian plane which was parked up near the midway. Outside away from the other planes. We must have wanted that plane becaused he yelled at the pre, causing them to stop and them to get that damn amphibian. At last one of the workers ran on it and the gas tanks blew up. Army just checked.

I then ran to the quartermaster and broke down the door to the gun storage room. I brought a brand of 40 cal. Spring coat 1903 rifle with a few bands of ammo. I got a rifle with a couple bandless 40. ammo (the pistol, I had cleaned in the rush) of gas and weapons to start at airplanes. We can believe in such force had a bulldozer. Someone yelled for me to lead the planes. From a couple couple plane engines, and look like shorter shoes. The pilots must have been concentrating on the parked airplane. They were firing with such machine guns straight ahead. They will go down you could see the pilot places with their fun lined helmets. Our plane was a two seater but the rear seat gunner was lead hanging over the side with his arms flapping in the wind. It is peculiar the quicker you become a killer yourself, I thought nothing of shooting at these planes hoping to pick one down, and we did. There was the wreckage of six planes against the outline of our field. Maybe we got some credit than we deserve.

I had an American P 38 fighter plane (any airplane) alive on one of the stripping planes and it went down in flames. He immediately pulled up under another jeep plane children it come. I wanted someone should have recorded the cheers that went up by those Marines for the Army Air Corps (they to become the U.S. Air Force).

That pilot must have been either Taylor or Welsh, two former pilots who were stationed at Wheeler Field.
At leopold barracks army base, they jumped in a car and raced to Haleia Beach on the north side of the island. They were on the first plane to fly garbage practice missions. The pilots had to fly garbage practice missions because they were the only American pilots to get in the air. The Taylor shot down 2 planes at Welch Airfield. I saw them fly the only planes to get into the air — actually, they were the only ones to come back.

The guys on the Navy torpedo plane that we saw shoot down the Jap plane were very much liked. At a time of crisis, you never can tell who will become a hero. Our adjutant took a bullet through his head. A private, a real good lad by the name of Greenhouse, tried to stop the Jap and told him, "Captain, get your god damn bulldoggs and stay there!" The captain crawled under and stayed.

When the attacks were over, my boss Harry Darrow asked me if I had seen Tschau (one of our black sergeants). I told him no and someone else said he saw him on the railroad tracks. Harry told me to go get Tschau and bring him on dead or alive. He said he was a German spy. I was also sent other people looking for him. I went where he had last been seen and saw him alive in the brush. I didn’t get close to him because another man, a corporal named Kamn, from another unit came by on the other side of Tschau. He shouted to a group of Japs (the Japs hadn’t seen Tschau) that if they saw Tschau to bring him in. He was an ally. Tschau appeared to have heard him and swung around to aim his rifle at Darrow. I don’t know if he fired because everybody (me) started shooting at him. I was in the line of fire and had to duck the cover. When the shooting was over, Tschau was dead. He was one of the few that were killed that day. By the way, I met and talked with the old C.P. (C.P. Wetmore) had been told that Tschau was a paid German agent.
That Luchan had been sent out to his father including maps of the field. We lost all 8 of our planes (407) the day. One more combat training plane survived. It was pulled a long way from the other planes in a different bomber, through the land a photographer ship, through the upper arm and over the top through the chest of his bull.

We were lucky, I guess we were a secondary target for planes who had unloaded on Pearl Harbor and were on their way back to their ships. I was never afraid of getting hit when we were under fire. They were moving from planes which were going straight ahead and we could always still walk to check. Some people lost their cars in the auto park lot, a shell hit among them and exploded. One of our own was killed.

We went off the base the rest of the day and that night. We got a message from the base that we were still ok. There were wild rumors about Japanese landing at Nankin 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 plan was let us all with anti-aircraft guns. Later, we learned that it was a flight of American Navy planes that came in from a carrier and based 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’s wife and daughter. John a M. G. would get off one night and I was on the next. That way one of us was always there at night. Dorothy stayed in the house as she could and she went to Pearl Harbor to see the Chaplain. The Chaplain saw was the same one that was helping on a gun crew on Pearl Harbor day. And said, “I’ll have the Lord and peace the ammunition.” That wasn’t really world famous. Even a song gets written using it. Will he could see the scared, pregnant girl, wanting to go home to be safe with her baby and she was touched enough to get her on a ship home. She said her very own ship! 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 how you get there. After I left with a group 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 Japan-occupied island of Wake, it was captured at the beginning of the war by its people. The bombing was to take place on the morning of Christmas Day.

Each plane carried five 500-pound general-purpose bombs and one 514# incendiary cluster. We celebrated Christmas day by loading the planes. They used our bombs and justs and any ammunition I personally fired 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 end it all we got 25 numbers on slips of paper in a hat. We paid a dollar each for the dinner. 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
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