

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SPRUANCE

6 December 1971

Q. Mrs. Spruance, when we last spoke we left off with your husband having

had duty as Executive Officer of the USS MISSISSIPPI.

The next duty that he had was head of the Correspondence School at the Naval War College. I understand that he first had received orders as Naval Attache to Brazil. Do you recall the circumstances?

A. That is correct. He had been given the offer of Naval Attache to Brazil. That kind of duty would have pleased me, because I would have gone any place other than the War College.

Q. Why didn't you want to come back to the War College?

A. I had had such an unhappy experience running a household when we first came to Newport that I had no desire to repeat it again.

Q. How did the Admiral feel about another tour of duty at the War College?

A. When he told me he had these orders to Brazil I was perfectly delighted, and I said that I hoped that we can go, and he replied, "No, I have no desire at all to go to Brazil."

The next possibility that we had was that he might go to duty in Dahlgren. ^[Yorktown] I was thrilled over the thought of going to Dahlgren because that station had such lovely quarters. I loved that part of the country. The Admiral also was very happy with the thought of going to Dahlgren. We had already measured the curtains for our quarters, and we were both very much looking forward to it. Then one day he came home very disappointed and said, "We're not going to Dahlgren after all; we are going back to the War College."

Upon hearing that news I collapsed. (Note: at this point Mrs. Spruance said that they went there because of the influence of Adm. Kalbfus. I pointed out to Mrs. Spruance that Adm. Kalbfus was President the third time they went there, and Adm. Laning was the President in the early 30's. At this point I'm not sure of their thoughts of going to Dhalgren were prior to his going to Newport in the early 30s, or prior to his going to Newport in the late 30s.)

When we went to Newport the second time we lived at 4 Hunter Ave. Everybody called that house the "yellow peril"/

Q. Did you like the house?

A. It was an interesting house but it ~~wasn't made~~ had some things that didn't work very well. WE had many problems with it. It had a magnificent entrance. The doors had come from one of the Vanderbilt summer cottages.. The living room had beautiful paneling. Apparently the people who owned the house had some very big plans, for the dining room was beautifully decorated. After that however, they must have run out of money, for the rest of the house was perfectly hopeless. We had an interesting time in that house. I can remember once Raymond came up out of the basement and said, "I'm going to need a rowboat; it's just like Venice down there." He did not refinish furniture on our house on 4 Hunter Ave., because he didn't have a place to work on it. The cellar was flooded most of the time. He also lacked time to refinish furniture because the Correspondence Course took so much of his time. He had to grade the papers of the students, and he did not enjoy this at all. He was also disturbed because he felt many students were not particularly interested in the

course and did not give it their best efforts. He had put a great deal of time into that Correspondence Course and was most disappointed with the response. However, he never brought any of the papers home; he did all his work at the office. Also he talked very little about what he was doing at the War College. It was also at this time that Raymond's mother came to live with us. She had been a widow for many years but had not been an unhappy person. She was still busy reading manuscripts at Bobbs, Merrill and lived in an apartment with two other ladies. However, when they died, she had no where else to go so she came to live with us. She did not want to live with us because she was a very independent person, but there was no other place for her to go. Mrs. Spruance was a very stimulating and very interesting person, and she was very interesting to have around. But she was very independent and resisted having to come to live with Raymond. Again, she had no other choice. She just loved Newport and was very interested in everything that was going on. She came back to live with us for a second time in Newport as well. She would discuss things with Raymond on topics such as events at the War College; in fact she got into many more discussion with Raymond on these kinds of subjects than I ever did.

Q. Did you have your own furniture?

A. We had our own furniture on the East Coast, but we would put it into storage when we went on the West Coast. When we lived on the West Coast when Raymond went to sea duty, we would always rent a furnished home or apartment.

Q. What was your social life like during ~~the~~ 1931 and 1932?

A. I really can't remember too much about it. Edward was just finishing up high school at Rogers, and Margaret was a freshman. I

I recall that the parents got very involved in the activities of the teenage children, and that the children would very often gather at various homes for some very happy parties. Teenagers and their activities were much different then than they are now. We had teenagers in our own home quite often making fudge, having very happy parties. Raymond was very pleased that the friends of Edward and Margaret liked to come to our house, but he ~~was/~~ ~~not~~ would not congregate with them.

Q. Did his attitude toward his children change at all?

A. Well, he never really understood children. He was a great tease. Adm. Halsey was at the War College at that time, and we saw a great deal of him and his wife. (Note: Mrs. Spruance referred to them as Annie and Billy). Everybody called Halsey "Billy" except Margaret. Margaret called him "Captain Bill". Margaret admired Halsey tremendously, and he was perfectly marvelous with children. Children just adored Halsey. About that time his daughter, Margaret Halsey, became engaged to young Lee Spruance. Lee Spruance was a distant relative of Raymond's. When my daughter Margaret came home shortly thereafter I said to her, "Good news, there is going to be another Margaret Spruance." ~~Yes, I said,~~ Margaret Halsey is going to marry your father's third cousin." Margaret pondered on that bit of news for a few minutes and then said to me, "Is he a naval officer?" I replied, "No, he's going to be a very successful businessman." Margaret just couldn't understand it...she just could not understand why Margaret Halsey was going to marry a civilian. I later told Billy Halsey about this, and he thought it was very funny and he said, "I agree with Margaret."

Q. What was Halsey like in those days?

A. He was a very lovable and a very humorous man. He was a sweet, warm, adorable man. He was also very, very amusing. I was very fond of him. He would do sweet, kindly things. I can give you an example of his way of doing things. During the war Margaret was very ill with tuberculosis in a hospital in Monrovia. Billy had come home because of his own illness. I visited Margaret every day. One day when I went to see her I saw that she was in a very happy, elated mood. I asked her what had happened and she gushed at me, "Oh, Captain Bill has been here to see me." That was an example of how Halsey, busy as he was, would remain faithful to his closest friends and took the time to come out and see Margaret and make her so happy when she was feeling so sick. He had told Margaret on that visit that his own two children had contracted early stages of tuberculosis in Berlin shortly after World War I, apparently because of lack of proper diet. Therefore, he was very sympathetic to Margaret's own case of tuberculosis. ¶

As another example of Billy's devotion to our family, Raymond was in the Mediterranean in 1924-1925..I was staying with the children at a pension outside Paris. Billy came to visit us, and he spent two or three days with us. He was particularly devoted to Edward and Margaret and had spent a great deal of time with them. Shortly after he left, an English couple who ~~had~~ were also residents there, approached me and the woman said, "Oh, Mrs. Spruance, I think your husband is simply charming. We're sorry we didn't meet him." I didn't know what to say to them.

Q. How did Raymond and Bill Halsey get along before the War/?

A.. They were very close friends. Their friendship first began when they were both on destroyers on the West Coast in the early 20s.

We saw a great deal of the Halseys in the early 20s. The ship's wardrooms did many things together such as picnics, for instance. How strange it was thought that these two men were so close yet their personalities were so ^{very} different. I think one reason they got along so well was because Raymond appreciated Billy's ability. They did many strenuous destroyer's tactics under Captain Evans, and Raymond had great admiration for Billy's shiphandling and seamanship abilities. He admired Billy's daring. They had lots of fun together. They loved to talk together about the early days of the Navy, and Billy seemed to appreciate Raymond's sense of humor. Those days in Coronado were my first introduction to the Navy, and it was a rough introduction. The officers and their wives of the wardrooms of those destroyers were a gay, high-living group of people. Coronado was very gay in those days, and there was a great deal of drinking. There were many social events during the weekends, most of which involved heavy drinking. Raymond and I would go along because we enjoyed the company, even though we did not drink. It was, however, a completely different way of life than either Raymond or I ^{was} ~~were~~ accustomed to. I think that during that period is when he learned that he could not drink, and from that time on he would drink only very occasionally. As an example of the social activities on Saturday nights we would often have beach parties which would be preceded by cocktail parties at somebody's house. By the time that we set off for the beach, everybody else was drunk or almost there and whooping it up and having a gay time, whereas Raymond and I would be absolutely sober. Then we would go down to the beach in groups of 20 and 30 and would have great roaring fires. There would be all

kinds of delicious food, but it seemed before the party was over many of the people were passed out. In fact they drank so much that they ate very little, and I can remember Raymond and I saying to each other, "Let's eat some of this good food." So that was my real introduction into the Navy. Even though Raymond and I did not drink, we certainly did not feel left out. We were Accepted by everybody. As another example of the good times that we had in Coronado, I can recall that one ^{Saturday} evening we went to a little tavern called "The Blue Lantern". Raymond had had a bit too much to drink, and when he awoke the next morning, he discovered he was missing his panama hat. He insisted that I go back to the tavern the next ^{day} (Sunday) and pick it up, which I did. I asked the proprietor, "Do you have a panama hat that was left here.?" The proprietor responded, "Yes, I do, it was left in the top of the palm tree." Well, I told Billy about that, and he teased Raymond about that as did everybody else for the rest of the time that Raymond was commandin' g officer of the ship. He rarely wore a hat, but the reason that he had been wearing a hat that day was because we had been on a picnic, and it was hot. Billy used to drop in many times. I can remember one evening he dropped in rather late; it must have been about ten o'clock. We had a fire crackling in the fireplace. Raymond told Billy that the only liquor ~~that~~ in the house was a little bit of cognac. Raymond offered Billy some cognac, and Billy replied, "Not at this time of night, Spruance; you still haven't learned how to drink." I wonder how how Raymond ever fitted into that group, but he did and he made many friends, who remained his friends for years and years. Johnny Hoover was another of our friends at that time.

Raymond and Johnny Hoover were very close. They had been friends ever since their early days at the Naval Academy. After Raymond had died, he sent me a letter that said, "If I had had any idea of how far gone Raymond was, I would have been out there immediately. I shall never get over the shock ~~of/realizing/now/~~ when I realized how ill he really was." Johnny Hoover was a very difficult person. I was very fond of Johnny and also of his wife who was a great deal younger than him. As an example, when we lived on Hunter Avenue, Margaret and Pat Griffin were great freinds. They were playing tennis up at the War College. They had one more game that they wanted to p~~aa~~y. However, the courts were closed to the young people at a certain time in the afternoon, and that time had just come. Hoover, who was an avid tennis player, came down to the courts and very gruffly told the girls, "Get off the courts!" Margaret came home and told us about it, and Mary Griffin also called me up to tell me about it. She and I were both furious. She later gave him hell for being so rude and abrupt with those very sensitive young teenage girls. But that's the kind of person that he was. Margaret recalls an instance when Hoover relieved Raymond as Commander, Tenth Naval District. Margaret was on the beach near some naval personnel who were discussin~~g~~ the impenidng takeover by Hoover. These people were most unhappy because they know of Hoover's reputation and feared the very worst once he took command. Again, that's the kind of person that he was...he was very difficult. I will say however though, that he was a devoted family man. I was very fond of Johnny Hoover, but I understood him. His real name was Howard. One day when I was talking to him I said, "Do you like to be called Johnny or do you like to

be called Howard?" His reply..."My close friends like you and RAYmond can call me Johnny. Everybody else can call me Howard." I called him Howard after that. Raymond recalled when he first came to the Naval Academy he was very small...in fact so small that he barely got in. However, he did grow somewhat by the time he graduated, so I didn't think of him as being a particularly small man. For that matter, I never thought of Raymond as being a small man even though many people referred to him as "The Little Admiral". But Johnny was really a cold fish; to analyze him would be fascinating.

- Q. What do you recall about his next tour of duty when he was chief of staff to Adm. Watson in Coronado?
- A. We enjoyed it, but Adm. Watson was a very difficult person. However, Raymond seemed to get along very well ^{with him} ~~with a~~ and never talked about him very much.
- Q. Why didn't you take your furniture with you when you went to the west coast?
- A. We always went out there for rather short periods of time, and it wasn't worth the effort to take our furniture with us. Also, there were always very comfortable houses to be rented out there, and there was no need to bring our own furnishings.
- Q. What were the ships operating schedules like?
- A. Out on Monday, back on Friday. Whenever the ships did go to sea, the wives would get together and take trips of their own to see interesting places about the countryside.

Going back again to furniture, I can recall that when we first went out to Coronado in the early 20s, I left all my household effects in my mother's attic in Indianapolis. When we returned

and went to duty in Washington we were in a bad fix. Our pay was low; we had little money, and rents were very high in Washington. I was desperate, and Raymond was discouraged. He wanted to go back to sea, because ^{he said} we could not afford to go on shore duty. My family was summering in Rhode Island at the time, and I wrote them a letter telling them how bad off we were. My father sent me a very small check to help out. We finally, however, found an unfurnished house on an unimproved street on 41st street. It did not have a stick of furniture in it. The rent as I recall was \$100 a month. Fortunately for us, Raymond was able to buy a complete set of furniture for \$250 down from a naval officer going out to China. So we bought the furniture, and we were very happy, and we spent a great deal of our time in Washington, refinishing that new furniture that Raymond had just bought. We spent that summer refurbishing we had bought from the naval officer who had gone to the Orient. This was great fun, and it preceded his activities in restoring old furniture which began in Newport. The furniture we bought was actually trash. We worked very hard at it trying to make it look worthwhile. Our house when we were done was very pretty. We had a wicker settee... and, typical of me, I bought some very expensive French imported material. Both Raymond and I went to work with needles and tufted the settee. We didn't know anybody in Washington at the time, so the minute Raymond got home we immediately went to work on the furniture. When Raymond went to sea again in Europe, we stored our furniture. At that time (1925) I had inherited some money, so we had begun to live much more comfortably. When we came to ~~Newport~~ ^{Washington} the ~~first~~ ^{second} time ^[1927], we were very excited to get our

furniture out of storage. When the furniture was delivered, we were appalled when we saw it through new eyes. It was old and shabby, and we wanted nothing to do with it. I recall that we gave a sideboard to the moving company people. We then went out and bought ourselves a great deal of new furniture, which we enjoyed very much. My advice to Edward and Josephine many years later was never to store any furniture that was not of good quality.

Q. Please tell me some more about what the wives would do in that period of ~~about~~ the 20s when the ships would go to sea.

A. We did not know many civilians then. I spent a great deal of time playing golf and playing bridge. San Diego was a very sleepy little town then. We enjoyed taking trips into the country.

Q. Did most of the families live in Coronado?

A. At that time, most everybody lived in Coronado, but a very few lived in San Diego.

We always felt very sorry for those people who lived in San Diego. We felt sorry for them because they were so far removed from the social life of Coronado Island. I had one or two friends who were unhappy in the Navy life, but I really enjoyed the Navy. We always lived in very interesting places, and I enjoyed moving from one duty station to the other. When I lived in Long Beach, I visited Los Angeles frequently. I particularly enjoyed concerts at the Hollywood Bowl. My companions were Mrs. Turner Joy and Mrs. Robert Griffin. We would take picnic lunches when we went to the Hollywood Bowl together. Los Angeles was beautiful then, and I was crazy about it. I don't feel that way about it now.

Movie Stars were very famous people in those days. We enjoyed visiting the movie lots and going through Hollywood ~~and seeing~~ ^{to see} where the stars lived. We made many lifelong friends from those days in Long Beach. We returned to Newport for a third time in 1935 when we lived on Champlin Street. Carl Moore lived right down the street from us. Those three years in Newport were undoubtedly the happiest tour of shore duty we ever had. Mrs. Spruance was still living with us, Edward was at the Naval Academy, and Margaret was in high school. Those were very pleasant years. We had a wonderful black cook named Naomi upon whom I depended very, very much. We went to the Naval Academy for Edward's June Week and rented a house. We had Edward's first love with us at that time, a girl named Mary.

Q. How did Edward happen to go to the Naval Academy?

A. That is a complicated story. Raymond felt that Edward was not Naval Academy material. He felt that way because Edward was too much of an individualist. Mathematics was a poor subject with him. We both wanted Edward to go to college. When Edward said he wanted to go to the Naval Academy, I know that Raymond was very happy. He was happy because it was Edward's decision. We had hoped that he would go to Princeton. Raymond and Edward walked together many times, and Raymond told Edward he would give him a good education and send him any place he wanted to go. Raymond emphasized to him that he did not have to go to the Naval Academy. He did well in high school, and went to the Severn School for one year of preparatory work. Edward was very unhappy at the Naval Academy. He did not like anything about it. He hated the discipline and was very rebellious. I have always admired him for sticking out those 4 years. Before he went to the Naval

Academy Edward had fond hopes of doing a great deal of sailing, because when we lived in Newport in the early 30s he owned his own boat which he enjoyed sailing very much. Shortly after he got to the Naval Academy, he went out sailing and took off his uniform to the waist. He was summoned back to the sailing basin and reprimanded for being out of uniform. In fact, he got demerits for that act. He never again went sailing at the Academy, which was typical of his stubborn and independent behavior. Edward was very tempermental. The first picture he sent me from the Academy, showed him with a long and tragic face. I know he was terribly unhappy there. At the time we did not know he was that unhappy, because he did not mention in his letters. However, as a mother I sensed that he was not happy. One weekend Margaret and I went to Annapolis to visit Edward. When we met him he was wearing galoshes and carrying a raincoat. Margaret said to him, "Why are you carrying those things with you?" He replied in a very disgusted voice, "We were ordered to wear these things at six o'clock this morning. The sun has been shining since noon!" This was an example of how he was so unahppy at the Academy. Rather than just accepting that way of life, he would boil and seethe. We did not visit him at the Academy very often. However I feel that Edward loved the Navy after he graduated even though he was not happy at the Academy. Another occasi~~on~~ we went to the Naval Academy to see a play. Margaret sat between Edward and Cecil Beldish (?). The play was lots of fun and beautifully done. But somewhere during that performance a Lt. stepped on the stage and told everybody to keep their place. He then held a muster to determine if two midshipman who had signed up for the

play were at the play or had gone over the wall. The mothers were there all dressed up and were having a wonderful time. Edward was so gloomy! He was so disgusted that the Naval Academy would do this in front of the parents! As we walked out Edward said in a disgusted voice, "Have you ever seen anything so absurd, so petty! The idea of asking you parents to sit through that sort of thing!" I replied, "Why Edward, it was fun." But he just seethed. But later Edward loved the Navy and loved the ships. However, the Navy did not come first as it did with his father. Edward's family came first. Raymond was dedicated to the Navy, and Edward was not. After Edward died, Josephine and I were talking about Edward's life at the Naval Academy. She said that Edward told her that the reason he went was because his father wanted him to go. Of course, Edward was dead at that time, and I could not confront him with this. However, that was absolutely wrong. Edward did not have to go, and we did not force him into it. She said that Edward told her that if he didn't go to the Naval Academy, he would have to go to Wabash College. Perhaps the reason for this was because his grandmother told him that the finest lawyers and judges came from that college. He may have thought he was pleasing his father. Edward had a high school history teacher who admired him very much. After Edward had accepted his appointment to the Naval Academy, she approached me at a party and reproached me for allowing Edward to go to the Naval Academy. I replied that I was thrilled that he wanted to go. She replied that he would never be happy in the Navy because he was a complete intellectual. I think he was.

Q. What do you know about the disagreement between the chief of staff, Capt. Wilcox, and your husband?

A. The argument centered around Kalbfus' writing of "Sound Military Decision". Raymond and Fuzzy Theobauld ~~th~~ought the book was just awful. Capt. Wilcox would defend the book, and they had many, many arguments. Raymond brought a draft home and read it to his mother. After the first paragraph, she replied, "It was written by a German." Fuzzy and Raymond would come home from the War College after working hours and would discuss the book for hours and hours. Fuzzy had a very loud voice, and Mrs. Spruance and I could hear him even though we were upstairs. Raymond said that Wilcox did not want to buck the Admiral. It was very unusual to hear Raymond talk about another naval officer like that. Wilcox did not want Spruance and Theobauld to see the Admiral. During one of the afterhours discussions between Fuzzy and Raymond, Raymond's mother said to him "You will never make Admiral." You don't yell loud enough." The feelings between Raymond and Capt. Wilcox became very bitter. I think that Wilcox feared that if he criticized "Sound Military Decision" that it would hurt his career. Wilcox never forgave Raymond for bypassing him and going straight to Adm. Kalbfus. Before that we had been good friends. Afterwards, our friendship ceased. Raymond felt that Wilcox did not have the moral courage to tell Kalbfus that the book was no good. During one social engagement I had made some teasing remark about Raymond. Adm. Kalbfus sternly reprimanded me by saying "You must appreciate the fine naval officer that your husband is." This was an indication of the great admiration that Adm. Kalbfus had for Raymond.

Q. What was the relationship between your husband and Kelly Turner at that time.?

A. They were close friends. Raymond did a great deal to help Turner. He fought to keep Turner on the War College staff. He appreciated Kelly's brains.

Q. How would you describe Turner's character and personality?

A. He was brilliant. I knew ^{him} and his wife very well; we were very close. Later during retirement he would call Kelly every day after his wife's death. Kelly was a devil; very difficult, and he drank heavily. In the War College ~~during~~ during the 30s, Kelly was a hard-working man who read a great deal. However, there was no indication of his drinking at that time, even at our parties on Saturday nights where we would try to release some of the steam and tension. When Raymond was President of the War College Kelly lived not too far away in Mystic. Later, when we moved to Pebble Beach, his wife Harriet told this story to me. Several years earlier they were crossing the continent to live in Carmel. At that time Kelly confessed to her that he was an alcoholic. I passed this on to Raymond and told him that I couldn't believe it. Raymond replied that all that time in Newport Kelly had been drinking. (I am not sure if Mrs. Spruance meant Newport of the 30s or Newport of the 40s). This caused me to remember that during the war I had visited the widow of one of Raymond's class-mates in Coronado. At that time she told me that Kelly was drinking, but I refused to believe it. Her name was Katherine Nettles (?). When Raymond next came home on leave during the war, I told him that I had a rumor to tell him that would shock him terribly. "Kelly Turner is drinking heavily." Raymond said, "That is no rumor. He is drinking." Raymond told me other tragic tales about Kelly. For instance, during a conference on Guam, Raymond

went to get Kelly and was appalled by what he saw. Kelly was absolutely blotto! They were scheduled to go to dinner with Adm. Nimitz.that evening. The dinner was ~~to be~~ ^{aboard ship} ~~for Chip.~~

Raymond said he didn't know what to do. He poured him full of tomato juice. He did everything to get him sober, and Kelly responded well. He went to the dinner appearing absolutely sober. Raymond said that his state of drunkenness at that time was beyond belief, but that Kelly always seemed to rise to the occasion.

Q. Did you see the Turners much in Newport during the 30s?

A. Yes, they lived right down the street from us and we saw them often. ~~He was a devoted husband.~~ He was very fond of my two children and regretted that he had none of his own. However his last years were an absolute nightmare. After his wife died he began drinking terribly; he went to the dogs. After Harriet's death, Raymond would call him every morning about 7:00A.M. We were so very worried that someting tragic was going to happen to him. Shortly after Harriet's death, Raymond called up Kelly and said, "What is the best time to call you; I intend to call you every day." They enjoyed their 7:00 calls, but then one Sunday morning we were called and told that Kelly had died. (Mrs. Spruance confirmed that Theobauld and Turner argued often like raging bulls, and that Spruance, being a quiet man, enjoyed listening to them.)