

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. Raymond A. Spruance

9 December 1971

Middletown, Rhode Island

Q. Was your husband happy when he got command of the USS MISSISSIPPI?

A. Yes, he was. He wanted command of that ship above everything.

The Mississippi had always had a reputation as a happy ship, and it remained a happy ship while he had command. I still run into people who served with him on the MISSISSIPPI, and they still remember that experience as being just great.

Q. About that time he was in the zone for Admiral. What were your thoughts and his thoughts about his chances of making flag rank?

A. He didn't talk about it very much, but I think he was confident he would be selected. I recall that when he came up for selection to Captain he was very dubious, but I don't recall any doubts or apprehension when he was coming up for admiral.

Q. Do you recall what he told you when he announced he had been selected?

A. I don't recall his telling me when he had been selected, but I do remember his telling me how he had finally received his promotion. We were living in Puerto Rico at the time and I was going to go to the opera with the people who lived across the road from us, Mr. and Mrs. Hartswell. Raymond was not going with us. Just before we left, he said, "What time do you think you'll be getting home tonight?" I replied that I didn't have any idea what time I'd be home. But he kept persisting and asking me what time I'd be home. I asked him why it was so important. He replied,



"Well, it's not many women who can go to bed with a Captain and wake up with an Admiral." Our friends just thought that was the funniest thing, and his remarks were written up in the paper. Raymond was unhappy that it got written up in the newspaper.

Q. What was his reaction to his orders to Puerto Rico?

A. I had been to Puerto Rico in 1911. He came home one day and said, "Margaret, how would you like to go back to Puerto Rico?" I had just graduated from college, and it had been a perfectly delightful experience. It had been the first time I was ever away from home and it was a gay, sweet, delightful experience. (I think this is when she met the only other man for whom she ever felt any great affection.) I replied, "Raymond, I think it would be simply marvelous!" He said, "Well, Admiral Nimitz has written me and asked if I would be interested in going down there and establishing the Tenth Naval District." So a few weeks went by, and he got his orders. He sent the orders ashore with his exec's wife, who I think had been out for lunch. The exec's wife was hesitant to give me the orders, because in her opinion they were dreadful orders. But I was happy with them. We left the ship and drove to Washington via Mexico. We were in Mexico for three weeks. We stayed in Mexico City nearly the whole time, and were fascinated by that city. We did everything but go to a bullfight; I would not go to a bullfight. We rented a car and did some touring with friends. It was a fascinating experience, and I would be ready to go back there anytime.

Q. Did he talk much about what lay ahead in his new job?

A. No, not at all. When we got to Washington we stayed with our friends in Chevy Chase, the J.D. Jones. He went into Washington



for a couple of days to be briefed. On the day that we were to drive from Washington to New York, the city was paralyzed by snow. Margaret and Edward were to meet us in New York, so I went to that city by train. However the snow was too deep for Raymond to drive the car. I didn't expect to see Raymond for two or three days, because it was a terrific storm. I was safely in bed in my hotel, when I heard a knock at the door at 2 AM in the morning. There was Raymond! I asked him how he had ever made it. He replied, "I just did make it!" He had had a horrible trip and had followed behind a large truck most of the way. He was determined to see Edward and Margaret. He knew if he didn't get there that day he would miss them. We stayed in New York for about two weeks, and I did a lot of shopping. Margaret came down from Vassar a couple of times to be with us.

Q. Did you give much thought to what lie ahead of you?

A. I don't if Raymond did but in my own mind I was looking forward to it. I don't think Raymond was much looking forward to being in the tropics because the heat did not agree with him. He really suffered in hot weather. When we left Puerto Rico he said, "I hope we never have duty in the tropics again." And then of course, we had 3½ years in the Philippines.

Q. How did you get to Puerto Rico, and what did you do in your first weeks and months there?

A. We had a lovely trip down. We stayed initially in the Cantada Hotel. It was right on the ocean. Raymond was very busy, and I told him I was going to walk and see if I could find where I had stayed in 1911. I felt like Rip Van Winkle; it had all changed terrificly. When I had arrived in 1911, I had been met



by a pretty carriage and a team of horses. There was only one car on the island at that time. That car had belonged to my uncle. That car went over a cliff and then there were none. So I went looking for that house where I had had such a happy 3 months. I walked along and had a feeling that I was in the right area. I walked down a funny little road where I was quite sure we had lived. I found a gentleman sitting on his porch. He asked "May I be of any help?" I said, "Well, maybe you can." I told him that years ago I had visited my aunt and uncle and that I thought they lived near by. The man rose from his porch and said, "Who are you?" I told him that I was Margaret Dean, and he remembered me. Well, he told me that my uncle's house had burned to the ground several years ago. (Her uncle's name was Dr. Samuel Beech Grubbs.)

We then got a perfectly charming house. It was on the beach, right across from the Hartzell family who had lived there all their lives. It was a charming Spanish house, and we had a competent staff. Raymond was very busy. He was very disgruntled most of the time. He had an incompetent staff. They were nice people, but they gave him no end of trouble. He had a particularly difficult time with Captain Virgil Griffin. He seemed to go out of his way to make things difficult for everyone around him. Gerry Bogart remembers him well. I can't remember his job, but it had something to do with being head of the Air Force.

We spent a very happy year and a half in those quarters. We finally had to move when the owners told us that they intended to return to the house the next winter. They gave us plenty of notice so we had lots of time to find new quarters. We



began looking for new quarters and some were being completed for the naval officers on Isla Grande. The area was a perfect mess. Raymond was asked if he would be willing to go out there so that the junior officers would follow his example and move into the quarters as well. So we moved into the new quarters which were very comfortable. However, it was certainly unpleasant to be living there in the midst of all the new construction that was then underway. It was very primitive living. The new buildings were being constructed on top of a swamp and Raymond was heartsick over that. Building them on that swamp was some kind of a political decision. He was very unhappy about the whole thing. He didn't talk about it much, just a few caustic remarks, but I knew he was most unhappy with the whole project.

Q. How did he get interested in Roosevelt Roads?

A. He just seemed to feel that was the best place to build a naval base. He was happy about the progress being made there. I think he would have been much happier if the entire naval installation was built at Roosevelt Roads, rather than San Juan. I do know that everything on Isla Grande was sinking. I would leave the base in the morning on one road, and then have to return to my quarters on another road because the original road would have begun sinking in the short period that I was gone. It was a stupid, outrageous place to construct buildings.

Q. What do you remember about Brig. Gen. Dailey? *See RAS to MDS 6/10/45*

A. I remember him very well. We saw a great deal of him. He was a widower and lived in a set of beautiful quarters. Raymond enjoyed him, but he seemed a little bit difficult as most things seemed to be down there. For one thing, he was very afraid that



Raymond would make his number before he did. <sup>This</sup> ~~He~~ seemed to be on the General's mind for a long period of time, because he always spoke about it, even to me at dinner parties. He was very serious about it, but of course Raymond didn't give a hoot about that.

I could also remember seeing Admiral Greenslade when he was down on his mission for a few days, and Admiral King was down there also. Reggie Kaufman was there also; a great many people came through. They usually stayed with us. They were all very tense and felt that almost anything could happen down in the Caribbean.

Q. What do you remember about Virgil Baker?

A. Virgil Baker owned some extremely valuable property that had a lovely old house on it. Everybody on the staff thought it was a great joke because he had somehow gotten that land with a 100 of years lease. It was a completely crooked deal. Raymond thought it was funny because he thought it was highly amusing that anyone could have been taken in by Virgil Baker. Years later after we had left Puerto Rico, Raymond got a letter from Virgil Baker saying that he was still in trouble with the government over that land and the lease. I asked Raymond what he was going to do about it. He said he would do nothing, and he tore up the letter. We had no contact with Virgil Baker while we were in Puerto Rico, because he had a very "bad odor." He came to see Raymond several times in the office, and it was rather embarrassing.

Q. What was your social life like?



A. It was very pleasant, and we lived comfortably. After 4:30 in the afternoon the cooling breezes would come. We made many friends there such as the Wildemans. We would visit them in their home up in the mountains which had an orange grove. Raymond got his walk on the beaches. He would take the visiting firemen down to the beach and walk them to death. It was very pleasant, and I loved it. It was a very pleasant tropical life. We made many friends in the American community there, whom we still correspond with. The American colony all loved the Navy; we didn't meet many of the Puerto Ricans. We didn't mix with the Puerto Ricans at all. I loved every minute of it, for example I got to play lots and lots of golf.

Q. When did you start playing golf? *[she was in tournaments]*

A. When I was told to stop playing tennis. This was about 1935 or 1936.

Q. Did you and the Admiral ever play tennis and golf together?

A. We played tennis often, but he did not like golf. He played a good game of tennis. He worked a little bit on golf. I thought he would be a good golfer because he had such excellent powers of concentration which I think golf demands. I really enjoyed golf and would play it 3 times a week. I think he starting taking up golf when he was President of the War College, but he didn't like it because he was bored by it. He was always trying to get ot of it, but he was sweet about it. We used to play out at the Sachuest Golf Club which was very hilly and had a lot of stone fences. Raymond spent all his time peering over the fences looking for his ball. He would find everybody else's.



He would get into great conversations with other golfers such as "Is this your ball?" No, I think it's your ball." Well, I stood it as long as I could. One day he came over beaming because he had found his ball. I said to him, "If you don't start taking this game seriously!.." He replied that he had been waiting for me to say that and that he wasn't going to play golf any more. He didn't play any more golf after that. I do recall that he tried for awhile to play golf with 3 others of his own age, and they were a perfect nuisance on the golf course.

Q. What was his reaction when he got his orders to command Cruiser Division Five in Pearl Harbor?

A. I remember his answer very astutely. He was very upset, because he thought he was going to get command of a battleship division. He did not want the cruiser division at all. He knew war was just around the corner, and he was glad he was going to Pearl. And of course he was happy that he would be working with Billy Halsey, but nevertheless he was disappointed. But I do remember his attitude distinctly.

We drove across the continent from New York. As I told you the other day, He didn't think Margaret and I would ever get there. He kept puzzling why Ernie King may have wanted him as his Chief of Staff. He kept thinking about that all the way over on the ship from the States to Hawaii. Margaret later told me that Dad was supposed to have reported to Washington every evening on his trip across the continent but that Dad didn't do it. That was typical of Raymond; he wanted to get out in the fleet. I don't think Admiral King ever brought that up. Once



Raymond was asked where he got his pull with Admiral King. I don't think he ever had pull with Ernie King, but I think King got to know him quite well when he visited Raymond down in Puerto Rico. King saw a great deal of Raymond down in the Caribbean and liked what he saw. <sup>We saw a great deal of him then.</sup> Because of that trip he knew and appreciated Raymond much better.

Q. How did your husband and Amiral King get along?

A. Very well. Raymond told me many times in later years how he stood up to Admiral King in making the plans for the war in the Pacific. Raymond recalled one time when King came out to Hawaii to have it out with Raymond, Nimitz, and the Staff. They apparently had quite an argument and finally King said, "Spruance, youre right."

King stayed with us several times at the War College. King was once asked by somebody else how he knew Spruance was going to be so good.

Q. What was life like those first few months in Pearl Harbor?

A. The ships were out a great deal and it was rather a tense situation.

Q. What was your husband's mood and outlook on life in those last few months preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor?

A. He was alert, interested, and seemed up. The Fleet had been alerted and it was doing strenuous maneuvering. He came home whenever he could, and we discussed what I would do in case of war. (Note: it would appear that Spruance was rather certain that war was imminent.) We discussed at length whether I would stay in Hawaii or go home or return to California. He was worried about my ability to handle our finances. "My banking experience was lacking." It was everybody's mind about what



the families were going to do. Of course the families all felt they were going to remain in Hawaii. We never dreamed that we would be forced to leave. The general feeling was that war with Japan was inevitable. In November a transport came through with Navy families from Guam. They were highly indignant that Admiral Hart had ordered them out. One Navy wife in particular was bitterly complaining against Adm. Hart. Her husband was later captured and made a prisoner on Guam. Raymond told her that Adm. Hart had done the right thing and that she should be happy that she was on her way home.

We were working in the Red Cross making bandages.

Q. Do you remember about Captain Zacharius talking about Ambassador Nomura?

A. Zacharius "knew it all", and he spoke Japanese fluently. He called on Raymond one afternoon and held forth at great length that there was not going to be a war. This was sometime in November. Zacharius was a very articulate person, and Raymond listened to him quietly. Zacharius was smart and knew the Japanese character and insisted that there would be no war.

Raymond was so sure that Margaret and I would not be allowed to go to Hawaii with him in Sept. He just felt that our place was in the States at home.

I saw him twice after the attack. He was very grim and grave then. During that time the entire island was under black-out and no one was allowed on the streets after dark. We would normally have dinner at 5:00 and then hole up for the evening. One evening Raymond got restless and wanted to walk. I said  
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"Raymond, you can't do that; you'll get into trouble." He wouldn't listen to me and went out for a walk. I accompanied him, and an armed guard confronted us from behind some bushes. He stopped us, and I was perfectly delighted. He interrogated us and reminded us that we were under martial law and should not be outside. So we turned around and came home.

Q. How did he get along with his staff? Did you socialize with them much?

A. I don't recall. I don't remember much about his staff.

Q. What were your activities on the 6th of December?

A. Josephine and I were going to have lunch on the Northhampton on Friday when the ships were expected in. We waited the longest time on the pier and finally somebody came out and told us that the Enterprise and Northhampton would not be in that weekend. The next day Josephine went up in the mountains. Margaret and I had to cancel out a dinner party that evening because the ship was not coming in. We all felt rather sorry for ourselves. I was going to an Admiral's party, and Margaret was going to a party of ship's officers.

We had just moved into this new house the Wednesday before. As I recall the neighbor had told us to engratiate ourselves with this fiendish little boy that lived across the street. I went out to get the paper and heard the loud noises. Like everyone else I thought it was just the Army doing some exercises. The mean little boy said, "Lady those are Japs bombing Pearl Harbor." I told the little boy that wasn't funny at all. The boy's father came out and confirmed that the Japanese were attacking.



I asked him if he believed it. He said that it was hard to believe but that he felt that it was true. So I went in the house and awakened Margaret. I woke Margaret and told her that the noises that we were hearing were the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor, but that I couldn't believe it was happening. Margaret responded that I should turn on the radio. The radio said that it was the real thing that we were being bombed and it told us what to do and what not to do.

Q. What was your reaction?

A. One of disbelief. We weren't frightened but we realized the magnitude of what was happening. We were told not to go into the streets or to use the telephone, and other similiar precautions. Margaret went down to the beach where she reported that soldiers and sailors were digging in for an invasion. The owners of the big houses on the beach were feeding coffee and doughnuts to these men. The men seemed to be very nervous, and everybody on the island was of course very excited. Margaret later took the car down to the shipyard and picked up a classmate of hers named Joann and brought her home. Joann lost her husband on one of the battlships that was sunk. I joined the Red Cross and we all worked around the clock.

Mrs. Spruance then repeated a story of Margaret <sup>Baughman</sup>~~Bowman~~, the wife of the CO of the Naval Station, coming to her house in the wee early hours of 8 December. That MOnday night there were seven women sleeping in our two bedroom house, including Josephine, and we were being guarded by a big strapping sailor who was armed adn sleeping on our sofa. We were defenseless but everyone tried to get or~~g~~anized. Raymond told me later that if the Japanese



had reattacked that it would have made things much worse and would have prolonged the war by many months.

Raymond came in Monday noon and called me, but I did not see him until Tuesday. By Monday we were progressing more upset at home, and I was reassured when Raymond called and said that he was all right and that Edward was all right as well.

Q. What was your husband like when you first saw him on Tuesday?

A. He was absolutely licked. He looked 20 years older. He looked perfectly ghastly. He was grim and grave and had to force himself to tell me what had happened and what his feelings were. He said that he had no idea what had happened when the word first came through to him. He said he was deeply shocked when he saw the wreckage in the harbor, because it was his first indication of the seriousness of the attack. He was very deeply, emotionally, upset. I never before nor never again seen him the way he was then. He was shattered. But he was recovered by the next day. He went in to see Kimmel and was heartbroken by what he saw, because Kimmel was so dazed. He had been a great admirer of Kimmel. The sight of those flaming battleships was a terrible emotional shock to Raymond. He just had to tell me about it, but he never spoke of it again after that day. He talked about all the other facets of the war but never again about his reactions to seeing the sunken ships for the first time. It must have been the most shattering experience of his life. Perhaps the only other experience was as traumatic to him was the death of Edward, but in that case he would not speak about it.



But going back to the days of Pearl Harbor, after Nimitz arrived they were all raring to go and get after the Japs. Raymond was elated when Nimitz came out and took charge. We talked a great deal about when and whether Margaret and I should return to the States. He wanted us to stay, but he did not think we would be able to. We talked about where I should stay and he wanted me to remain in California. I wanted to stay as long as I could and if I could have gotten a war essential job I could have stayed indefinitely. As it worked out, I returned to the States in January. Josephine was most anxious to get back to the States because Edward had gone to the San Francisco shipyard to get his submarine repaired. I went down to the shipping office on the 26th of January to find out what was holding up passage for Josephine because she was so very anxious to return to the States and be with Edward. While I was there I was told that I was scheduled to leave on Wed. the 28th. I was told that I did not have to go but that I had VIP quarters and would I please make a decision so they would determine who would be in them. I did not want to leave Pearl Harbor, but I talked to my close friends who said I should take that ship while I had the chance. It was a good thing that I did, because we found shortly thereafter that Margaret had tuberculosis. When we left Pearl Harbor our thoughts were rather numb when we contemplated the future. We had no idea how long the war would last or what would happen. As the ship was returning, we would have an early dinner and then take out pillows to sit on deck because there were no deck chairs. Several other ladies who were wives of high ranking officers and I would discuss the future. It was pitch black



of course. The first day out the ship zig-zagged and it was very exciting. One of the ladies who was with me was Mrs. Norman Scott, whose Admiral husband later got killed early in the war. The trip seemed endless. The food was mediocre and the ship was crowded. But we were well cared for; for instance the mothers with little children ate first. Going back to our day of departure, we were all unhappy of the thoughts of leaving our loved ones behind, but we tried to put on a brave front. However as we were pulling away a small boat came alongside and played Auld LANG Syne, this caused us to all cry, and I think it was good for us. We felt very sorry for ourselves, and we also had the shock of seeing at close hand the destruction of our fleet. We plowed our way through the oil that still covered the waters, and planes circled overhead the first day to provide protection. After that first day, we thought we were safe. Just before we landed in San Diego the Chaplain called us together and told us that upon landing we would certainly be besieged by reporters. He suggested that it would be wise if we did not talk to the reporters, so we didn't. The wives and mothers put on a good show, and didn't tell the reporters what had happened or their personal feelings. I can remember the reporters came after me, eager little beavers, but I wouldn't tell them anything. They recognized me as being the wife of Raymond.

Our car had come over on another transport, and we had to go up to San Francisco to get it. We stayed for awhile with the Gunthers and then I found a house for us. That was when I found out that Margaret was so sick with tuberculosis. I dread to think of what would have happened if we had found this out



while we were still in Hawaii. Margaret had first told me that there was something possibly wrong with her lungs because of a medical examination given to her at Vassar. But she seemed to healthy, and we didn't think anything about it when she went down to Puerto Rico with us. In Puerto Rico we had three doctors look at her, Army, Navy, and civilian. None of them TB specialists. They all pronounced Margaret healthy, ~~and~~ Raymond and I were relieved, and Margaret had a gay time down there. When we went to Honolulu she got a job so she worked all day and danced all night. When we got back to San Diego she wanted to get a job but felt that she had better get a checkup first. I asked her why she felt she needed a checkup, and she said she had felt a little pain in her chest when she walked up the hills of San Francisco. By then it was too late to do anything about it, and the next day she was in a hospital. It was very serious. It had gone from one lung to another, and it was pretty bad. But I knew she was going to get well, because I felt she would do exactly what she was supposed to do, and she did. She had a good recovery, and fortunately I could be with her. Tuberculosis in those days was treated by complete rest, food, and proper exercise. She was in a sanitarium for 3 years. Margaret was never depressed and studied and worked hard all the time.

Life in Monrovia was dreary and I never like to think about it. I didn't know anybody there but I did get to meet one very smart individual who had a great brain. I still keep in touch with him. His name was Sproul, and Margaret and he became great friends. There was one other family in Monrovia who we got to know, and then another family named of Bixby in San Mateo. We



spent Christmas and Thanksgiving with the Bixbys. I worked like mad in the Red Cross. I christened one or two victory ships. That was thrilling, and Margaret accompanied me for the second ship. As Raymond grew more famous newspaper reporters would come out and interview me. I remember one photographer who wanted to take a picture of me reading one of Raymond's letters. I tried to cooperate as best I could. On another occasion I went to Pasadena to help sell bonds in a great rally. That was fun. I'm still distressed at any thought that there was any rivalry between Raymond and Billy Halsey. When he came back from the War he was greeted with a great deal of pageantry in Los Angeles. I was invited to attend many of the events with him, and it was very exciting because I got to meet many famous people such as movie stars. I recall one of Billy's speeches at that time. He was going to speak in a great auditorium. He said that this was the first time that he could publicly announce that the Third Fleet and the Seventh Fleet were one and the same. Then he paid a terrific tribute to Raymond. He was speaking extemporaneously. He said that I want you to know that someplace in this audience is Adm. Spruance's wife, who put up a great fight herself or words to that effect. He <sup>was paying</sup> ~~was paid~~ a beautiful tribute to Raymond, and by that time I was in tears. He said that he wanted me to stand up, but of course I would not. But there before that huge audience the first thing he said to them was a tribute to Raymond. That shows the affection and regard <sup>between</sup> ~~to~~ those two men. Going back to Virgil Baker, He said I think it's perfectly wonderful that anybody could get away with anything as crooked as that. He didn't admire him, rather he was rather pestered by him.