

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET SPRUANCE

13 December 1971

Middletown, R.I.

Q. I note in the Spruance papers that there is a great deal of material relating to his ancestors. Did your husband have a great interest in his heritage?

A. He did not seem to be overly interested, although he did show interest at the time when the papers first came into the family. He got the letters from Aunt Bessie. He was very proud of his great-grandfather Bishop Ames and what he had stood for. However, he was rather disinterested in the rest of his ancestors, although he was proud of them. But that was all in the past. He never discussed them, and I often wished that I had discussed his ancestors with him before he died.

Q. There were a number of naval officers whom he told Savvy Forrestel had impressed him. I would like to mention their names, and would you please tell me what you recall about them?

A. A. W.R. "Bill" Rush. Raymond talked about him quite often. He was a character, a sun-downer and everybody knew him. When he and his classmates got together they talked about Bill Rush more than anybody. Raymond recounted that one did not say good morning to Capt. Rush before Capt. Rush had said it. For example, one day he passed Capt. Rush and said, "Good Morning, Sir". Rush responded, "It is not a good morning until I say it is." That's the kind of person Rush was and he did not have a happy ship.

B. Captain Henry B. Wilson. He was Captain of the Pennsylvania when it was put into commission. Raymond admired him tremendously. Their paths crossed again when Raymond was executive officer of the Mississippi. He admired him very much, and Wilson had a very attractive personality. We did not know them socially, but Raymond always admired him.

C. Frank Taylor Evans. He was the son of "Fighting Bob" Evans. We knew him very well. He was a fighting captain but was never selected for admiral. He was sharp and shrewd and had a delightful sense of humor. They became very close friends. We saw him again when Raymond had duty with Admiral Andrews. He was very clever and very gay. He knew he would never make admiral because of a few black things on his record when he was young. He often said that if he could live his life over again he would have made the grade by not having made these mistakes. He was a very curious person and surprisingly he got along very well with Admiral Andrews. Raymond said time and again how much he learned from Captain Evans.

D. Rear Admiral Robinson. Rear Admiral Robinson was Chief of the Bureau of Engineering when Raymond was stationed there in the early 20s. It was at that time that Raymond did some exceptional work for the Navy (could this have been his invention that saved the government so much money?) Admiral Robinson wrote very good fitness reports on him, but I did not know the admiral that well myself. Raymond certainly looked up to him and admired him.

E. Admiral Watson. He worked for him as Chief of Staff and at first did not like the idea of having the assignment. However he and Admiral Watson got along very well, although he did not admire him as he had some of the other officers. Those officers which

most impressed him were the people whom he said he ~~learn~~/ learned a great deal from.

Apparently Admiral Robinson was a very quick and demanding person. He always kept Raymond on his toes, and Raymond would come home and say "What a day!" And that's all he would say.

Q. Let us now talk about the letters that he wrote you during the war.

A. He didn't write that often and would tell me just before a big operation that someone was coming/^{up}and that I would not be hearing from him for awhile. When he came home, and he only came home 3 times during the war, he talked about the war very little. Mainly he wanted to get out of his uniform as fast as he could. Then he would walk like mad. I remember when I saw him (at this point Mrs. Spruance said it was the Christmas following Midway and I told her that the record showed that it was March of 1943. There seemed to be some confusion on this date that he came home the first time.) When he was with Margaret and me he described that battle in great detail, and he used a map to explain what had happened. I couldn't understand what he was talking about because it was so complex, but I think Margaret grasped what he was saying. I can still remember his describing it while Margaret was hovering over his shoulder. I remember another occasion when we were on the Seacloud in 1948 on the anniversary of the Battle of Midway. Ann Brown asked him to explain the battle, which he did very vividly and in great detail, much to the delight of the 9 or so guests who were with us at the time. (John Nicholas Brown and his wife have confirmed this.)

Q. During the battle for Tarawa, were you aware of your husband's involvement?

A. No. He never disclosed anything that was coming up. The only way I knew that something was in the wind was when he said in his letters "You won't be hearing from me for awhile." He didn't talk much to me about the war, but when his friends would drop in after the war he often liked to reminisce with them about what had happened during the war.

Q. Did many people call on you in Monrovia who had recently seen your husband, to tell you how he was?

A. Very few, although I do remember when Gunthar visited. It was through Ernest Gunthur that I found out that Raymond was going to get command of an entire fleet. I sensed that something was up during the Battle of Midway. I was staying with Ernest and Helen Gunthur on Coronado, because I had seen them so often when we were in Hawaii. Helen told me that she sensed that something was up by the way that her husband was acting. When the good news about the battle broke, I was going to have dinner with Admiral Brown, who had just returned from the Pacific. Turner Joy's ship was in at the time, and Turner picked me up. I'll never forget that evening. I came down the stairs and Turner, who is normally a very austere person, through his arms around me and said, "Oh, would I have loved to have been with Raymond!" I said, "What has gone on?" So he told me and it was a great evening. That was the first that I heard anything about it.

I remember long after the war he told me what a hideous thing the Battle of Tarawa was. In Raymond's last years when he

was mentally slipping, we were visited by a man who was going to do a film or documentary on the Battle of Tarawa. He wanted Raymond to see it and to comment on it. I should have forbidden it because of Raymond's condition, but I did not. Admiral Ingersoll, who was an naval intelligence, lived hearby and was there also. The man came to our home with his screen and his pictures. He showed it in our small drawing room and I shuddered at what I saw. Raymond just sat there. He was rigid and did not say a word. When it was all over the man said before I put this on the air I would like to hear your comments. Raymond was silent but Admiral Ingersoll said, "Before you show this on the air make sure that you explain to the viewing public the reason for this battle and the reason that we had to sustain these kinds of losses." Upon hearing that Raymond spoke up and said something to the effect it was to pave the way for a further advance, I suppose into the Marianas. My impression was that I could not understand why so many lives had to be lost to capture that very small island. Adm. Ingersoll was so very firm that the reason for the sacrfice had to be put across to the public. (Find out which Ingersoll it was. Mrs. Spruance said it was neither Stuart nor Royal.) I never know what happened to it. I p~~re~~sume it was being made for television, but I never saw it. It was supposed to be on CBS. It was just one horrible scene after another, and it seemed so pointless. (At this point Mrs. Spruance mentioned that she never recalled her husband ever having a wetting down party, although they were not uncommon in her day. This was probably prompted by the fact that I had recently had my wetting down party.)

Q. In a 7 Feb 42 letter he mentioned somebody named of "Cortland".
Who was he?

A. That was Cortland ^{Baughman} Bowen, a classmate. (~~She spelled it something to the effect of Baughman, check the class roster.~~) His name is really Chester and that's how he was known at the Naval Academy. But after he was married I think his wife preferred the name Cortland. I think Cortland was the Commandant of the Base and I knew his wife, Ruth, rather well. That's probably why Raymond spent so much time with him in the early part of the war after I left. Another person whom he was friends with in the early part of the war was Bat ^{Cruise} ~~Cruze~~. He knew Bat ^{Cruise} ~~Cruze~~ from the days down in Puerto Rico. [Edgar Allen Cruise 6458]

Q. On 10 Feb. I noticed that he mentioned that Ernest Gunther had failed selection for admiral.

A. Yes, and he was very upset about it however he later was selected and I'm sure it was because of the efforts of Nimitz, Halsey, and Raymond. He was a great naval officer and Raymond said he was one of the bravest he ever knew. He was an aviator, ^(?) and had had a run-in with Adm. King. I guess that's what kept him from making Admiral the first time around. Margaret were with the Gunthers in Coronado when the selection list came out. We all took it very hard, because we knew them so well.

One of the reasons that Raymond felt so strongly about Gunther can be demonstrated by what Ernest did when he was navigator of the Mississippi and Raymond was the Exec. A plane had crashed in the water near by, and Ernest went over the side and rescued the pilot within a very few minutes. Raymond said that was typical of

Ernest.

Q. What can you tell me about Penn Carrol?

A. Penn was a good friend and a hard worker. He worked himself and those about him too long and too hard and he ended up with a heart attack. Penn's wife and I were great friends. Penn was typical of the type of close friend for whom Raymond had a great affection. Penn was working very hard on the War College Staff. I don't know what he was doing, but it took him forever to do it. Raymond would say, "I can't imagine ~~what~~'s keeping Penn so long." Penn was a man of few words.

The reason Raymond told me to keep calm when Margaret went into the hospital and was constantly giving me advice about how to handle the car and my finances, was that he thought I was a worrier. I guess I did worry and I sputtered a lot. He said he never worried but I'm sure that he did. I never think about those years but they were pretty grim. In later years I talked to him about his anxiety for Margaret. But I think he had great faith that everything was going to be all right. I don't think he realized how long the ordeal was going to be. I put off telling him about Margaret's condition for quite a long time. I couldn't bear to put upon him that additional burden.

Q. I noticed he mentioned Jimmy Walker?

A. Jimmy Walker was with him on the staff in Puerto Rico along with Rufus King and Red Walker. I think Jimmy Clark was his chief of staff. Red did not get promoted to captain, but of course that staff was not what it should have been.

Q. He talked about taking Prim for walks with him. Who was Prim?

A. I don't remember him at all.

Q. In another letter he said that Junghans isn't going to make it.
Who was he?

A. I do not recognize that name.

Q. He mentioned having somebody named Furlong for dinner.

A. Furlong was a classmate. ??

Q. Who was Swede?

A. That was Swede Overesch. Swede was with him in the destroyers in the Mediterranean. They were lifelong friends and lived right around the corner from us in Pebble Beach. Swede had received orders to the Torpedo Station in Newport when we were first at the War College ~~and the~~ in 1926-1927. He did not have quarters so he stayed with us for about 10 days. Our paths crossed many times in later years. Swede is my righthand man.

Q. Who was Chandler?

A. He had command of one of the cruisers.

Q. He mentioned going to a party given by Mrs. Roger Paine?

A. Paine was a captain. George Hussey was another friend of ours in Pearl Harbor.

Q. He mentioned sending his trunks to Belle?

A. That was my sister in Indianapolis. We sent everything to her to get as far away from the West Coast as we could. Perhaps it was because we thought the West Coast might be attacked.

Q. After he had visited you the first time he mentioned Roger Small?

A. That was another friend in Pearl Harbor with whom he had a close association. Roger Small later died but his widow lived near us for quite awhile. Raymond was very distressed over Roger's illness.

Q. He mentioned that Pedro was raising rabbits?

A. Pedro was his steward.

Q. I note that he spent a great deal of time with the "big five" in Honolulu.

A. Yes, he did. He was wined and dined and I hope that he was able to relax with them. Two of his closest friends out there were Betty and Herman von Holt. He was very fond of Betty von Holt and also Martha Stanley. Martha often speaks about what a wonderful adorable person Raymond was. Yes, he certainly got to know the Hawaiian society. When we returned in 1957 for the 15th anniversary of the Battle of Midway, those people certainly showed their appreciation for the Navy.

Q. In early April 1943 he said, "I'm sorry Ruth did not let you in on her secret." Who was Ruth?

A. That was Ruth Baughman. Ruth was a great gossip and always liked to feel that she knew all the interesting events soon after they happened. Ruth stayed in Pearl Harbor for quite a long time because they had large, comfortable quarters. Raymond loved to joke that Ruth seemed to know everything that was going on. She would write to me and hint what was going on and which would prompt me to write to Raymond and ask him for more details about those things that Ruth was hinting at.

Q. I note he mentioned that Earle is going to Leavenworth for a job that he almost had in 1935?

A. Yes, ^[J.B.] Earle was a classmate. There was some talk of our going to Leavenworth at that time which I would have liked because we would have had quarters. The only time we ever had quarters was when we came here to the War College.

I used to complain to Raymond that he never told me anything. But he always said to see Ruth because she would know. Raymond did

not believe in the wives knowing what was going on. For instance, when he had command of the Mississippi he would never tell me when he was returning to port. This got very embarrassing when the other officers' wives would call me to ask when the ship was coming in or to inform me it was already there. I was always the last to know. I didn't know anything, but I was glad I didn't.

Q. Did your husband have difficulty holding his temper with other people.

A. Yes, he had a very quick temper but he learned how to control it. He would seethe, but he would not lose it. But there were occasions when he would. For instance, after retirement another retired naval officer once visited us and was saying some very cruel things about Admiral Kimmel. Spruance, who admired Kimmel, simply tore into him. "You weren't even out there. You don't know what you're talking about." A terrible hush came over everything. But that didn't happen very often. We remained good friends with that man, but I think he resented it.

Q. He learned a lot from Admiral Nimitz?

A. Yes. I can remember when Raymond was exec of the Mississippi we saw Chester Nimitz in Long Beach. I think he had command of a ship. At that time Raymond told me that Nimitz was the greatest man in the Navy. During the war Chester Nimitz sent me a great bouquet of orchids. I called everybody in to see them because I was so pleased, especially knowing what a busy man Nimitz was. The note he sent to me said in effect that he didn't trust Raymond to get the flowers to me on time. (Probably these were orchids that were grown in Hawaii) I've always been touched by the glowing tribute that he gave to me and Raymond that was inscribed on

two pictures that he gave us. Unfortunately the ink is now starting to fade. But the picture that impresses me the most is one of him and Raymond walking across a battlefield with the trees stripped of their foliage. They both looked so hot and tired in this picture. When the Nimitzes lived in Yerba Buena we saw them often and it was great fun to hear those two old sea dogs reminiscing.

Q. Who was "Sunny Jim Parker"?

A. A classmate. He was a tall, gangling man who was very smart. He was an intellectual with a wonderful sense of humor. Ketn Hewitt knew him very well also.

Q. In July 1943 he told you very emphatically not to send you Harpers Magazine.?

A. I can't imagine what it was. It may have been Fletcher Pratt. I can remember when he saw Raymond when Raymond was President of the War College. Raymond gave him a great deal of his time. I asked him why he didn't take notes. He said he did not because he could retain these things in his mind. I mentioned this to Raymond and he said very little except words to the effect that explains why Pratt's articles are so inaccurate. So when Raymond saw the article he said the reason it was so poor was the fact that Pratt did not take notes.

Q. He mentioned how Edward, as a newly commissioned Ensign, gave him quite a lecture on how to run the Navy in 1938?

A. I remember that very well. He had just graduated and was on the Indianapolis. We spent lunch and dinner together but most the time was spent up in our hotel bedroom. Edward was telling me

all the dreadful things that were going on in the fleet. He didn't talk to his father he talked to me, but it was for his father's benefit. Edward let off all kinds of steam, but Raymond did not say a word. When Edward left that night I complimented Raymond that he had held his tongue. Raymond replied that he had felt the very same way when he was an ensign, and everything that Edward said was perfectly true. But the Navy doesn't change. A few days later we were at a party and he was sitting next to Mrs. Shafroth. She was a dignified lady and rarely laughed. Suddenly she started to chuckle and laugh. She said that Raymond had just told her how the U.S. Navy should be run from an ensigns point of view. Everybody just roared and Raymond often recalled that incident. Raymond would say that that's what every young ensign had to go through. Q. Just before the Tarawa invasion he told you in his letters that he was waking up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Was that unusual?

A. He was a very sound sleeper. Nothing could disturb him. I remember once he slept through a slight earthquake. I remember I woke him up and told him that we were in an earthquake. His only response was that's all right, let it shake, and he went back to sleep. It was not typical of him to wake up that early in the morning.

Q. He mentioned in one letter about going up to Padua with the Hills?

A. That was Harry and Margaret Hill who were also friends of ours. Padua was about an hour away from Long Beach and Raymond enjoyed going up there to see the pretty girls and to listen to the beautiful music and see the beautiful dancing.

Q. In 1944 you mentioned a belt he ~~was~~ wearing?

A. I was probably talking to him about whether or not he had a new belt. He always kept wearing these terrible old belts. I think in that picture he was wearing a ~~new~~ belt, and I commented on it. He had old hats and belts that he loved dearly.

Q. In August of 1944 you were starting to be concerned about his health. Why were you concerned about his health?

A. I supposed I was worried about the terrible hard work he was doing out there. His staff doctor, Dr. Willcutts, said the only thing wrong with him was that he wasn't eating enough for breakfast and he prescribed one egg per day for Raymond at breakfast. He did take good care of himself, but I always worried about what he wore in cold weather. He would never wear a coat and I always used to nag him about it. You probably that story I told you ~~when~~ he went to Admiral Nimitz's funeral and refused to wear a coat that day. He had just gotten out of bed from the flu that very day. He left without a coat and I couldn't go with him because I was sick myself. I don't think he realized how that disturbed everybody. He would never wear warm clothing even in the chilly Coronado evenings. And he took a peculiar pride in tking cold showers. He never took a warm shower. He never wore a hat, even if it was raining. Yet he never caught a cold or seemed to get ill. And the only time I saw him down and out was that flu just before Nimitz's funeral.

Q. Did he have good health all through his life?

A. Yes, very good health. He was always very careful. He tended to have indigestion. That's why he didn't drink liquor, except for rum. He was very careful, very abstemious. He took very good care of himself physically. 5-13-

Q. What was your reaction when he wrote you after two years of war that what he was doing was interesting and pleasant?

A. I always told him not to say that in public. He would say it was an interesting war. I responded "Raymond, how can you say that?" He responded, "It was my profession and it was an interesting war."

Q. How could he reconcile the death and destruction with the statement that it was "interesting"?

A. I think he was referring to the plotting and the planning. As I've said again and again, he was a very sensitive human being. For example, his remarks at the Battle of Midway when somebody told him about the newspaper article about the killings in Chicago. I can recall when I saw pictures of the survivors of the Indiana. I asked him how he could go through that. He replied, "I had to." It's a wonder he didn't have ulcers.