

## **Primary Source: Norma Shaver and Serving in the Pacific** <sup>[1]</sup>

*This interview comes from the "Remembering World War II. World War II Veterans Oral History Preservation Project." Those interviewed told about conditions in active duty service, battle strategy, and other important elements of warfare.*

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### **Working at General McArthur's headquarters**

Shaver

Well I was in the headquarters, I was assigned to the headquarters and they had me getting letters to... at first they said General McArthur. People would ask about their sons. They hadn't heard from them in a long time and ask where he was and we would know. We would send out letters and find out where he was and notify the writers. We would give the information exactly where he was stationed if it was possible.

Interviewer

Did you ever see General McArthur?

Shaver

Yes I did. I saw him, you know, going in and out of the office. The day that they had a memorial service for President Roosevelt, he was there and I saw him.

Interviewer

Was he a big man, a small man?

Shaver

Yeah, a big man.

Interviewer

What was his reputation? Did the troops like him?

Shaver

Well, everybody, well he had a lot of criticism. Sometimes they said nobody liked him, but people were all for him at his headquarters.

Interviewer

Why didn't they like him?

Shaver

Well he was arrogant, that's what they said (laughter).

Interviewer

Stuck up, huh?

Shaver

Yeah. And he was old Army, you know, his family was Army. But I was pretty low down on the totem pole. I didn't have much to do with him, whether I liked him or didn't like him.

Interviewer

Were you promoted to [PFC](#) by this time?

Shaver

I can't remember exactly what year...

Interviewer

You were probably making a ton of money, what, maybe \$50 a month? How were living conditions? Where did you live?

Shaver

In [Brisbane](#), we lived in a park and had stationary tents. Then I moved up to [New Guinea](#), we had just regular tents. In the Philippines, we lived in a schoolhouse set up to ... and then when I went to Manila, we were at the university there. But the buildings were not, you know, in too good a shape.

Interviewer

Tell me, as a woman in the military service back in those years, what were the regulations about your behavior? Could you, for example, go out with an [officer](#)? Could you date an officer?

Shaver

No, you're not supposed to. You were supposed to be strictly with enlisted men.

Interviewer

But you could date an enlisted person?

Shaver

Yes. It was against the regulations, but you know things happen.

Interviewer

(laughter) Did you have to wear a uniform 24 hours a day or could you put on civilian clothes?

Shaver

No, you're supposed to wear a uniform.

## The Philippines

Interviewer

So you started off with McArthur in Australia, went with him to New Guinea, went with him to the Philippines.

Shaver

Yes, that's right.

Interviewer

Okay, tell me how was life in the Philippines?

Shaver

Well it was tropical. We worked in the mornings and we took a couple of hours off in the afternoon and then we worked, then we'd go back to work after the evening meal.

Interviewer

Why, was it so hot?

Shaver

Yes, that's right and it rained just about every day.

Interviewer

Oh, did it?

Shaver

Yes.

Interviewer

Were you living under canvas? In a tent?

Shaver

We lived in the town hall in [Leyte](#).

Interviewer

Dormitory?

Shaver

No, it was a college, I think.

Interviewer

Did you have much to do with the Filipino nationals?

Shaver

Well yes, they were around all the time because they were always waiting for our food scraps. It was really, really bad. There was so much...people just wandering around that didn't have any place to go because the city was getting destroyed.

Interviewer

You never saw any Japanese, did you?

Shaver

The only time I really saw Japanese is down in New Guinea. Two of them showed up at the mess hall. All kinds of different people and nobody paid much attention (laughter).

Interviewer

(Laughter) You mean there were Japanese soldiers? And they walked into your mess hall?

Shaver

Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer

And they got fed?

Shaver

Yeah. When the war was over, by the time the bomb had been dropped, when the Japanese people came to set up to surrender on the ship Missouri, but they did come to headquarters where I was and I did see that group of Japanese soldiers come into the headquarters.

Interviewer

What an exciting life you've had. Well did you stay on Leyte or did you move to another island?

Shaver

Well Manila is on [Luzon](#).

Interviewer

So you moved up to Luzon and again you were assigned to the McArthur headquarters?

Shaver

Yes.

Interviewer

What kind of work did you do there?

Shaver

I worked in the adjutant general's department and that's when I answered those letters from civilians about where their friends, people who wrote into McArthur to find out about their sons and then we answered them. Well of course it was a form letter we sent out to where they were and everything.

Interviewer

So there would be a family, am I correct, there'd be a family in the United States, they had not heard from their son for a long while. They were concerned. They would write to McArthur's headquarters, is that right? And then the letter would go to you.

Shaver

Yeah, you know, it would be assigned to me or a lot of other people that were working in the office.

Interviewer

How would you find the soldier or whoever who hadn't written?

Shaver

Well we had, that's where the records were, the personnel records, McArthur's headquarters. Of course they weren't always there. They moved around and you had to check where they were last or whatever.

Interviewer

Well so the military records could be found in your office. You would find the name of the unit of the soldier. Would you write to the soldier and tell him to shape up or what would you do?

Shaver

Yes, we would write to the...well all military correspondence goes down through ranks and so it was sent to his commanding officer and we told him to write home to his family and to continue to write and then we'd notify the family of exactly where he was stationed at that time if we could find him. We usually did, but there were some that we did not locate all the time.

Interviewer

You know, that's such an important job. I mean it's not dropping bombs or shooting rifles, but it's an important job.

Shaver

Yes it is. It's part of the process that needs to be done.

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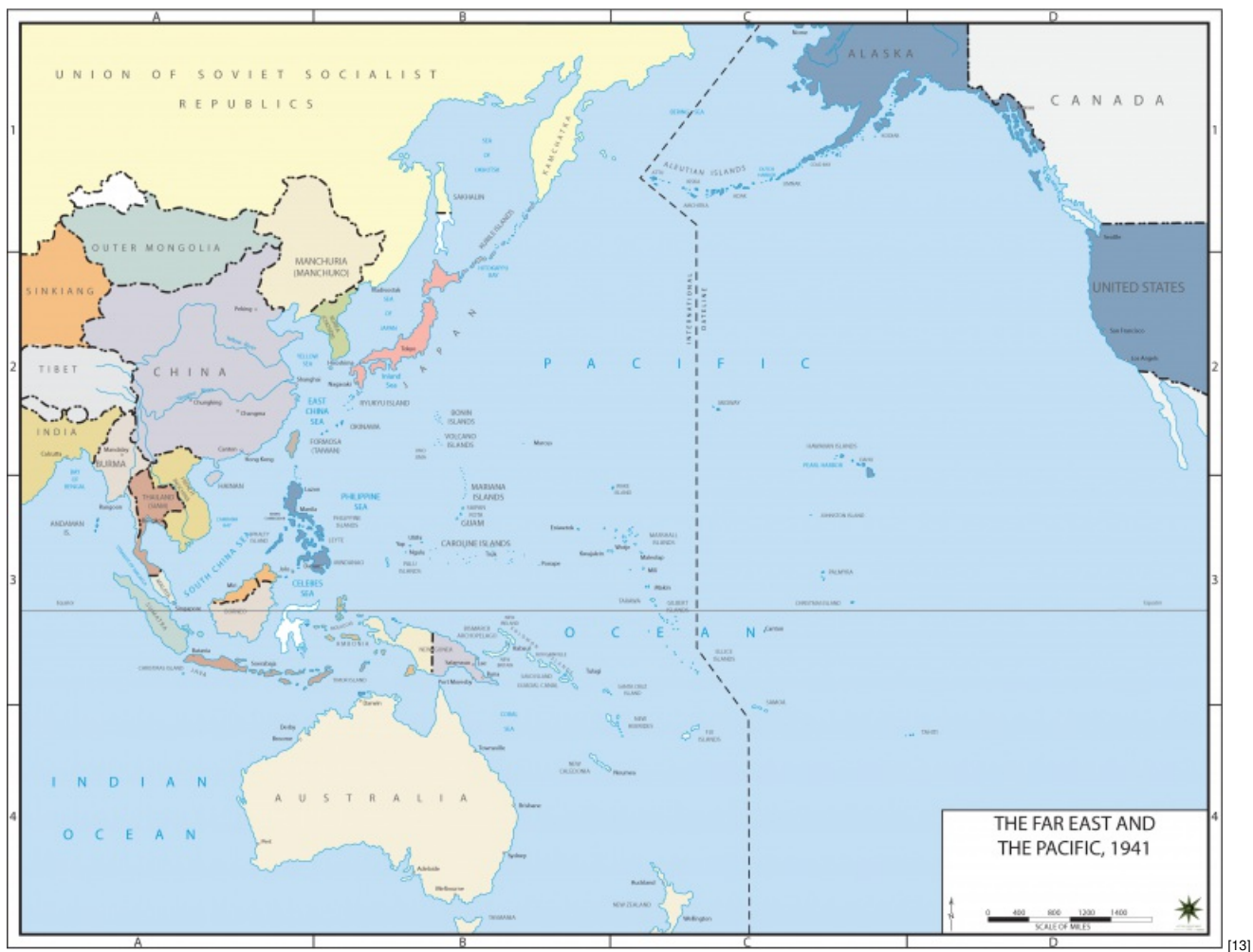
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[ANCHOR: A North Carolina History Online Resource](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

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#### **Places:**



[13]

This map shows the locations and events of the Pacific theater in World War II, including those Norma Shaver mentions in this interview.

#### For Teachers:

[World War II and the Pacific Theater: General Island Life Lesson Plan](#)<sup>[14]</sup>, State Archives of North Carolina

#### Related Topics:

[Oral History Resources](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

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