



Verna Van Etten

Civilian

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick Randle: Will you state your name and spell it for us.

Verna Van Etten: My name is Verna Van Etten.

Rick Randle: Verna you grew up in West Jordan?

Verna Van Etten: Magna

Rick Randle: Tell us about what you remember on Pearl Harbor Day.

Verna Van Etten: It was Sunday of course and we were waiting outside playing in the apple tree because my parents were getting ready and had gotten all of us ready to go to church. We were waiting for them to come and take us to church when someone (and I don't recall who) came out of the house saying that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. We had no idea what Pearl Harbor was being at the age of seven. I had no idea. All we knew was that it must have been very important because everyone was yelling and running and very angry... I remember that.

Rick Randle: And did you have any relatives—brothers and sisters that joined up and went into the war at that time?

Verna Van Etten: I had an uncle and he was living in Manti, Utah at the time and he is the only one of my relatives that I recall was in WWII. He was stationed in the Philippines.

Rick Randle: Tell us about your experiences at school during the rest of '42 and '43 and maybe the air-raid drills. Did they have air-raid drills down there for you guys?

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember about the school period of time—that one doesn't come to me, but I do remember air-raid drills and on every block it seemed like there was an air-raid warden. I remember them wearing either white or stainless steel helmets of some kind identifying themselves as a warden. There were cars going around the neighborhoods and they

were all painted army green or kaki green. I remember air-raid test where we would have to hang quilts at the windows in order for no light to be able to come through the windows in order for the enemy planes to see us.

Rick Randle: Kennecott Copper is down there. Did they have any special things to protect that industry?

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember any of that, I'm sorry.

Rick Randle: Tell us a little bit more about the air-raid warden. Was it just a local citizen volunteering?

Verna Van Etten: Ya, they were volunteers. They came around and checked on individual homes and people occupying the homes to see how many were there in case they had to count, they could do that during an actual raid. Other than that, that's the memory... that's about it.

Rick Randle: Everybody had to turn their lights out, or if they didn't turn their lights out they had to put blankets or quilts over the window?

Verna Van Etten: Absolutely.

Rick Randle: Tell us what you remember about collecting stamps for war bonds.

Verna Van Etten: We did, and I haven't thought about that, but in school they sold us stamps to put in a small book and we pasted them in and we could buy a war bond at the end when the book was filled up we got that. I remember rationing of a lot of products like butter and leather. I remember my mother wearing canvas shoes. For some reason that sticks out in my mind because the leather and the butter and that kind of thing were saved for the war effort. About that time I remember margarine. It came in a plastic bag with a small pellet inside that was a yellow color and you would kneed and mold the bag and it would make yellow margarine and that's what we had because butter again was saved for the war effort.

Rick Randle: Let's go back again to these war bonds. Do you remember filling out these little books of stamps? You would put ten or twenty-five cent stamps in there and it became \$18.75. If you kept it ten years it would be worth \$25... ?

Verna Van Etten: I remember in school our teachers would sell, as I recall they were red or dark pink stamps that we pasted in a small book and when they were finished then we could save them for ten years, or whatever the time was, and we could turn that in then for a war bond totally \$25. It originally told \$18.75 but when you kept it for those ten years it was \$25.

Rick Randle: Did you remember collecting anything for the war effort like tin metal materials and/or I remember we used to save fat and that kind of stuff.

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember that but I do remember saving string and I have no idea why, and also aluminum foil. We would tear the... when gum came in a five-number pack the gum was wrapped in white paper and coated with aluminum foil. We would peel that off and saved it and it was in a big ball. I have no idea whatever happened to the string, nor the foil, but I knew we had to save it.

Rick Randle: So all of the little kids were happily saving string and saving foil? I remember in that era, and maybe you remember it too, some people in the Midwest saving so large of balls of string that it would become four or five feet around. Tell us more in detail more about rationing and what you remember in as much detail as you can.

Verna Van Etten: I know that there were, it seemed to me at the time, and being a small child I don't know what seems big, but to me it seemed big... gas rationing. My father worked for Utah Power and Light and he was allowed gasoline for his company truck because he was working for Utah Power and needed that facility. I remember gas rationing and we had sugar rationing and all of these things had different colored stamps that would be saved for this. I don't recall a lot of the colors of the stamps, but there were several things that we saved for gasoline and especially...

Rick Randle: I think meat was rationed too...

Verna Van Etten: Yes, meat was rationed, of course. I remember that. I don't remember saving fats like you were saying, but we probably did.

Rick Randle: What about silk stockings?

Verna Van Etten: Oh there was no such thing! I remember my older sister and she would be probably eight to ten years older than I am. She would... they had leg makeup and they would paint, with an eyebrow pencil, a seam up the back of the leg and that's what they had because there were no silk stockings.

Rick Randle: All of the silk was being used for parachutes and that kind of thing?

Verna Van Etten: Yes... everything for the war effort.

Rick Randle: Did you have any fear at your age? Were you worried about the Japanese or Germans coming over?

Verna Van Etten: I was. I remember hearing about labor camps in Utah and the Japanese people being interned in these labor camps. I don't remember a lot about it, but I remember thinking, "Oh we have to be afraid of those people" which is of course now very foolish.

Rick Randle: Verna tell us what you remember about VE Day when the Germans surrendered.

Verna Van Etten: Once again I remember everyone being extremely happy and everyone was banging on pots and pans and drums and I believe at that time we were in Midvale... we had moved to Midvale at that time. I remember, of course there was no television, but I remember hearing radio reports and my mother and father and older relatives talking about the Germans surrendering and what a happy day that was and we didn't have to worry about them anymore.

Rick Randle: And what about VJ Day, was it a little bigger celebration?

Verna Van Etten: I think it was... as I recall it was. In those days they used a terrible term for the Japanese and I'm not going to say it because it's offensive to me, but we were all very happy that the Japanese had surrendered as well so that we didn't have them to worry about anymore either. We had won the war! I remember seeing newsreels in the matinees that we used to go to when we had the money to go. There were newsreels showing news footage of the surrender of both the Germans and the Japanese.

Rick Randle: I remember they just packed downtown Salt Lake City with cheering happy people.

Verna Van Etten: I wasn't there. I wasn't in Salt Lake City at the time. I was too young to go.

Rick Randle: Did you have any idea that you'd just experienced the new atomic age and what kind of changes that might make in your life?

Verna Van Etten: I don't know that I remember it being at that time, but later on in my life I of course read about the airplane that was built over in Wendover and Jimmy Doolittle and those kinds of names you know. I remember that, but I don't know that I remember at that time... it may be a mixed memory.

Rick Randle: Do you remember being scared at all?

Verna Van Etten: Oh yes. I was very afraid because I came from a large family—I had four brothers and three sisters and I remember my mother being terrified. How was she going to make sure where all of us were so she could gather all of us up and make sure we were close to her? That's about it for those kinds of memories.

Rick Randle: I'm about your age and the thing that scared me were the air-raid drills at school where we had to get under our desks.

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember that. I do remember the air raids at the house.

Rick Randle: I remember one time they told us to not pick up any strange objects because the Japanese were sending balloons over with booby-traps. Did you ever hear anything?

Verna Van Etten: No.

Rick Randle: You said people were angry on Pearl Harbor day. How did that manifest itself?

Verna Van Etten: ...angry tones when they were talking to each other about those dirty rotten "blanks" and why would they do that to us and what gave them the right to do things like this to a country like ours, and how cowardly they were that they had bombed Pearl Harbor in the early morning when know one was really prepared. I remember the sinking of the ships again from the newsreel footage. I remember seeing that, but mostly the angry tones... how angry they were and how dare they do that to us.

Rick Randle: How about your uncle? Did he get through the war all right?

Verna Van Etten: He did. He of course contacted malaria, which was common I guess within the Philippine Islands, and I remember that he brought home a ring for my oldest sister that had been made from a Philippine coin and somehow over the years that ring has been lost. I wish we could find it.

Rick Randle: Were there any Japanese citizens living in Magna and might have been your schoolmates?

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember schoolmates, but I do remember farms. It seems like there were farms around Magna and they were of course the farmers of the vegetables and this kind of thing.

Rick Randle: Do you remember how the treatment was after Pearl Harbor?

Verna Van Etten: I don't. I don't remember.

Rick Randle: Now your husband was a veteran of WWII... tell us briefly where he served and what he did.

Verna Van Etten: He went into the service... he volunteered when he was 17, and he of course is quite a few years older than me. I went to kindergarten when he went into the service, so people laugh about that. I remember that... he tells me that he was stationed in Tokyo and he was in the motor pool and he was a driver for a General. I have his name at home in his things, but I don't recall it. He learned to play golf with the General.

Rick Randle: You mean he was in Tokyo after the war?

Verna Van Etten: Yes, I mean after the war. He has a daughter who was born there, and he married a civilian employee of the United States there and they had a daughter and she was born in Tokyo.

Rick Randle: So does she have dual citizenship?

Verna Van Etten: No.

Rick Randle: Describe these newsreels. Is that the primary way you got to find out what was going on?

Verna Van Etten: It was. I don't recall that we took a newspaper and... we probably didn't because we didn't have all the money in the world and a newspaper probably was too much money, but I do remember \$.14 to go see the matinees on Saturday afternoons and we would see the footage of the surrender and newsreels of battles of what they could show, and I'm sure a lot of it was censored at the time.

Rick Randle: Were they patriotic-type newsreels?

Verna Van Etten: Yes, they were now that you mention that. I remember that... they were waving the flag a lot. It's just not coming to me. Other than that I'm sorry I just don't remember anymore than that.

Rick Randle: That's all right. It's interesting to note that the main news was by radio and those weekly visits to the theatre.

Verna Van Etten: Right. Newsreels were always at the front of the movie of course.

Rick Randle: Do you remember any of your parent's favorite radio broadcasts?

Verna Van Etten: I do. My grandfather who was blind was living with us for a while and we had a big Philco radio, it stood about three to four feet tall, it sat on the floor. He was losing his hearing as well, and he would sit with his hand cupped to his ear like this up to the speaker on the radio and he lived daily for the soap operas; Porche Faces Life, Our Gal Sunday, General Hospital... so he lived for those. I remember coming home from school and finding grandpa at the radio. It was a common occurrence.

Rick Randle: Tell us about the newscasts like Gabriel Heather and H.B. Kaltenborn. Do you remember those?

Verna Van Etten: I don't. I remember the name Gabriel Heater but that's all.

Rick Randle: How about the Roosevelt speeches? Did your family sit around and listen to those?

Verna Van Etten: I'm sure we did but I have no recollection of it at the moment.

Rick Randle: How about the kids at school. Did you know anyone your age that lost their brothers or fathers in the war?

Verna Van Etten: Not that I recall.

Rick Randle: Did they have any special parades or anything in Magna?

Verna Van Etten: Absolutely! I remember a parade and the young boy who played "Boy" on the Tarzan series was in that parade. I remember that specifically. He had on this little loincloth and he had curly hair... I remember that specifically, yes.

Rick Randle: How about Kennecott Copper. They probably had a lot of their workers go to war. Did they hire women out there to work?

Verna Van Etten: I don't remember that. I do remember again from newsreel footage talking about Rosie The Riveter. I remember seeing this kind of thing but I don't know of anyone personally.

Rick Randle: What war songs do you remember at that age?

Verna Van Etten: My uncle had "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again." Is that one?

Rick Randle: Do you remember the Andrew Sisters?

Verna Van Etten: Oh yes, I do... I remember "Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me."

Rick Randle: Do you remember "Coming Home on a Wing and a Prayer?"

Verna Van Etten: Yes I do. It was talking about the bombers as I recall, yes.

Rick Randle: Thank you Verna for coming in. We appreciate it very much!