

Emily Therese (Wodniak) Rogers  
Reid Chapman  
29 April 2003  
Black Mountain, NC

Emily Rogers grew up during the Great Depression in Chicago. Her father, a baker, couldn't provide many extras, though the family was relatively well fed. Her family stressed hard work over the pleasures of life. She studied nursing and began to work at the University of Chicago Research Hospital.

Emily was struck with "disbelief" when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, but when she heard that the Navy needed nurses, she saw the great opportunity for change. She enlisted at the age of 29 and was commissioned as an officer on December 5, 1942, almost to the day a year after Pearl Harbor was attacked.

She went to the Great Lakes Naval Station for training before proceeding to Pearl Harbor, where she served as a Ward Supervisor. She vividly remembers one leave, in particular, when she, her sister, and her sister's boyfriend went into Chicago to dance. On the way into town they got a flat tire, and while they were taking the tire to a service station someone broke into the car and stole Emily's purse. In her purse was about \$100 and her orders to Hawai'i.

Mrs. Rogers has a strong streak of mischief to her personality. While en route to Hawai'i in a convoy of ships she slept in triple deck bunks. She laid in on one of her friends, asking what they might do if the ship should sink. As she puts it now, sixty years later, "I scared the hell out of her."

She recalls her work as "easy. We had hospital corpsman who did all the work," though her shifts were at times as long as 12 hours. She spent her time off riding bicycles around the compound, going to the beach, and hiking. Nurses had a private beach at Pearl, where they had access to a cottage. There were, of course, also many dances.

She recalls those 18 months at Pearl Harbor "the best years of my life." When asked why she quickly responds, "lots of men, lots of officers, and we had quite a few dances. I loved to dance." Since she was an officer, the dances were attended by officers exclusively. Asked if she had many boyfriends, she confides that she had "lots of romances," but quickly adds that they were not serious. More importantly, she had "lots of friends."

When the war ended, she was sent to Jacksonville, Florida to be "separated" from the Navy. She at that point enlisted in the reserves. Mrs. Rogers then returned to Chicago to work at the research hospital. Her parents retired to Florida and while visiting them she met her future husband John. They were married in 1950.

Shortly after getting married she got a telegram from the Navy notifying her that she was being recalled into the Navy. Her husband said, "You can't go, you're married," to

which she quickly replied, "I'll lie about it." Asked now about that response, she says wistfully, "I sure wanted to go back. Those were mostly good times we had."