

**William H. Ratigan**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clark**  
**Interviewer**

**Interviewed on September 24, 2012**  
**At the Troy Senior Center**

**Q:** Sir for the record would you please state your full name and, date birth please.

**WR:** William Ratigan, Date of birth is March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

**Q:** Okay, and where were you born?

**WR:** Troy, New York.

**Q:** Okay, Did you attend school in Troy?

**WR:** Yeah, but not much. I barely went to school.

**Q:** Now let me ask you, as a young child, do you recall the attack on Pearl Harbor?

**WR:** Yeah, and I remember where I was.

**Q:** Whereabouts were you?

**WR:** I was in south Troy on Monroe Avenue where we lived. I was going around the corner to the drug store or something, and we got word that the war had started, that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor.

**Q:** Now, did you notice the life change after that?

**WR:** Not a lot, not in Troy. I never thought as much, I was only eleven years old.

**Q:** Did you know about the rationing that went on?

**WR:** Oh yeah, but we were used to that. I came from a family of eighteen, seventeen, brothers and sisters. Nine boys and nine girls. There's a debate about that with my brothers and sisters, some say it wasn't that much. Some say it was more, because they're counting the ones that were born and then died right away, stillborn. But they named them all, there would have been eighteen, nineteen.

**Q:** What kind of work did your father do?

**WR:** He was in the WPA when I was a kid. Lived on 9<sup>th</sup> street, I was nine years old. He worked with the WPA, and we lived off of that and what they call surplus, they call it welfare today. Surplus, I think it was stuff that they had stored up from the First World War, butter, canned goods and meats, and stuff. It's easy to shut and close.

**Q:** Now, did you have any brothers or sisters that went into World War Two?

**WR:** All my brothers did, well no. Lets' see, one of my brothers' they wouldn't take because he had too many kids, my brother Jack, he wouldn't go. My other brother Herby went in, he's the one we left at Pearl Harbor, but they sent him back home just before it happened and the he went over to Europe. My other brother Arthur, he went to

someplace in Texas for training with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, and his knee bent backwards. That was it for him. Then my other brother Geane joined the Navy, he was in for four years, I believe, He got out and joined the Air Force, and got discharged from the Air Force. Myself I went and joined the Army, I was in for three years, went to Alaska for two years. I came back, and as soon as I get back they try to sign me up for the Marines and I said No, no; it was 1950, and I said I'll go in, but not now. They were going to give me so much, I said I already did the time.

**Q:** Okay, let me go back a bit, did you graduate from high school?

**WR:** No, I didn't even go to high school.

**Q:** Did you go to work, before you went into the service?

**WR:** Well yeah I worked at the leather factory, while I was still in school I worked there. In trade school I worked down in Utica. I worked five and ten, down in the city of Troy.

**Q:** Now you went into the service in 1947.

**WR:** Yup, I got out in 50' and they tried to reenlist me and I said No, I want to go in, but I'll go later if I go. So it was June of 50' that I joined.

**Q:** Let me go back to when you joined the service in 47', did you enlist or were you drafted?

**WR:** I enlisted, I was only seventeen years old.

**Q:** And you enlisted in the Army, why did you pick the Army?

**WR:** Why'd I pick the Army, I don't know, there was no special reason.

**Q:** Okay, and where did you go for your basic training?

**WR:** Fort Dix.

**Q:** And was that your first time away from home?

**WR:** Yup.

**Q:** Okay, and what was basic training like for you, did you enjoy basic training?|

**WR:** Yeah, it was only eight weeks, the Marines was three months.

**Q:** Once you completed your training at Fort Dix where did you go?

**WR:** I went to a war college down in DC. I was there in Fort Myer, Virginia, that's where I was stationed. The Unknown Soldiers Tomb is there.

**Q:** And what did you do down there?

**WR:** I was a cook.

**Q:** Okay so they sent you to a cook school?

**WR:** No, not the Army. I was a cook.

**Q:** So on the job training?

**WR:** Yeah, I don't know where they got that Idea, maybe they figured I wasn't good for anything else.

**Q:** So, you were a cook?

**WR:** Yeah.

**Q:** And that was down in Washington.

**WR:** Washington DC, yup. And then I went from there to Alaska for two years. Fort Greely Alaska.

**Q:** And what did they have you doing up there? Where you a cook there?

**WR:** Yup, I was a cook there.

**Q:** And how did you like Alaska?

**WR:** Oh I loved it. I should have stayed there when I got out, and become a native. I could have taken an acre of land and develop it, build a living quarters on it, and within a year and the land was yours. More than an acre, whatever they allot you.

**Q:** Now, did you do any hunting or fishing during your time off?

**WR:** Fishing, Yeah. And there was a guy saying there was gold running out of the mountain, in the stream out of the mountain at Fort Greely. They were finding gold in their water, and salmon, you could almost walk across the stream on the backs of salmon, there were so many.

**Q:** What were the winters like there?

**WR:** Weren't bad. They weren't bad. I think maybe what took care of the winters pretty good was the sea air, it probable made it milder; at the south post. But I went to Fairbanks, Anchorage, Naknek, Sitka, a lot of those places. I'd just stop in on my way to Anchorage, I had to go to Anchorage to have my teeth taken out, that were bad.

**Q:** So, you were there till 1950. Now, that was the end of your enlistment, did they try to get you to reenlist?

**WR:** Yeah, as soon as I got back to the states I got discharged, that was the year they wanted to reenlist us.

**Q:** How come you decided not to reenlist in the Army?

**WR:** I just wanted to go home, I'd been away from my wife for three years; I couldn't go back for a vacation, we only had thirty days a year, I couldn't get back for vacation. So I decided to go back home for a couple of months. Then I decided that I wanted to see how tough the Marines are so I went in the Marines, they took me.

**Q:** Okay so, you joined the Marines in 1950?

**WR:** Yeah, I went to Paris Island for basic training. I was there for the two months, and then they did send me to a baker school.

**Q:** Now did you find that the training you had in the Army helped you in the Marine core?

**WR:** Not especially. I think the only reason they took me was because they felt sorry for me; my teeth were so bad. I heard the doctor say, if he don't get in the service he's going to die. It was 124 pounds that I weighed; my teeth were poisoning everything I ate, they were so bad. I couldn't afford to have them done, my mother and father couldn't afford it. It was so bad that they said lets' take him in and take care of it, which they did. And finally I went to Alaska and they took them out completely.

**Q:** Alright so you're in the Marine Corps, 1950.

**WR:** Went through boot camp.

**Q:** And then they sent you to a cook and baker school, you became a cook again. Was a lot of the training repetitious, I mean, you probably knew more about cooking than anybody else?

**WR:** I evidently did, because I had three years of it in the Army, you know, it helps. And I met some nice guys in the Army that were good men, that helped me along, but I never thought about that. I just figured that they thought that I wasn't worth putting anywhere else, because I was so small and skinny.

**Q:** But you had plenty to eat though right?

**WR:** I sure did. I had a lot of friends too.

**Q:** Now, did you end up in Korea, during the Korean War?

**WR:** Yes I did.

**Q:** And how did that come about?

**WR:** I was sent from cook and baker school to El Toro Air Force base, California, and my number came up to go over on a draft, 13<sup>th</sup> draft. Soldiers went over there and that was it.

**Q:** How did you get over to Korea, did you fly over?

**WR:** By boat.

**Q:** Okay, whereabouts in Korea were you stationed?

**WR:** Busan, I can't remember where, but we went to Japan and then we flew to Busan. And from there it was north to Pohang, and I was attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine airway. Ted Williams was supposed to be their squad commander, the ball player. And whenever they had a show, they would barrel rolled over our heads, all we had were tents.

**Q:** Did you ever see Ted Williams?

**WR:** No, I never did.

**Q:** Now were you ever under attack by the North Koreans?

**WR:** No, we were too far from the lines. We never were shot at. We did get orders to dig foxholes, and sleep out a night or two. The enemy came through one night and killed almost one whole squad of guys in their sleeping bags.

**Q:** Oh, really?

**WR:** Yeah, killed them all. Somebody wasn't on duty or something. They made us go

and dig ourselves a hole outside, and spend the night. The only casualty there was that some guy shot a cow.

**Q:** Now did you have much interaction with the Korean people at all?

**WR:** Yeah, I was trying to find a picture I've got at home, I know I got it; I used to go to the fence we had around our area and I was feeding the Korean kids some candy, through the fence, me and three or four other guys. I don't remember taking any other pictures, nothing special.

**Q:** How much time did you spend in Korea?

**WR:** A year. The one R&R they gave me I went to Japan and I spent seven days over there, it was nice.

**Q:** Now once your year was up where did you go next?

**WR:** Back to Treasure Island, and then from there I went to Quantico, Virginia, to finish up my time.

**Q:** And you continued to be a cook?

**WR:** Yeah.

**Q:** Now what rank, I see you were a buck-sergeant?

**WR:** Yeah, I almost got staff-sergeant, but a kid beat me out of that at Korea.

**Q:** So, it's 1954 and you decided to get out of the Marines?

**WR:** Yeah, and I regretted it ever since, I wish I'd stayed in.

**Q:** Now why did you decide to get out, were you homesick?

**WR:** No, I just got married, but I think what made me want to get out was the fact that my wife wanted me to stay in.

**Q:** Now whereabouts is your wife from?

**WR:** Lansingburgh, She ended up living right here in Troy.

**Q:** Okay so you met her?

**WR:** We got married here. I met her when I came home.

**Q:** So you got out in 1954.

**WR:** Yup

**Q:** Did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

**WR:** I got my GED and that was all. And I did buy, late in life, about ten years ago, I bought a house in Lansingburgh. A little late in life, but I did it anyway. It was kind of a bad investment, because it isn't in that good a shape.

**Q:** But you're still living there?

**WR:** Yeah, I'm still living there; if I could get rid of it I would, but I can't.

**Q:** Now, did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

**WR:** No, no I never did. I often wish I had their names and stuff.

**Q:** Did you any veterans' organizations?|

**WR:** No, I never was interested in that for some reason.

**Q:** So you never joined a Marine core league or the Legion?

**WR:** No, I just wasn't much of a joiner that way; these club I would go to some of the things they had, but I didn't want to join them.

**Q:** How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

**WR:** Well, as far as working, I was always energetic, I always wanted to work. But they did teach me some discipline; I think every kid born today should have to go through there. Has to go through there whether he likes it or not.

**Q:** Once you got out what kind of work did you do?

**WR:** I worked for a roofer, I've got a list of all the jobs I had, I didn't get fired I just went from one to another, trying to get ahead.

**Q:** When did you retire?

**WR:** I'm eighty two right now, I retired in 98', around 98' something like that. Social security, and for my Teamsters.

**Q:** Oh, okay you were a teamster.

**WR:** Yeah, I drove a truck, besides working on roofs I drove a truck. For the last twenty seven years I was driving a truck.

**Q:** Tractor-trailer?

**WR:** About two years of that. Mostly it was local delivery for Sears, Ward's, and Macy's. I liked it.

**Q:** Any children or grandchildren?

**WR:** Yeah, I got three sons; one lives up here in Lansingburgh, up above me in my house, He just finished twenty-two years in the Navy, not just, about ten or twelve years ago. And my other son lives up in Buskirk. And my other son is in a Federal prison for robbing a bank. And he had two kids. My one son, the Navy guy, he had six kids, so I got grandchildren plus great-grandchildren, about fourteen or sixteen grandchildren and great grandchildren. The reason I'm hesitant about the amount is because my Navy son, the one that lives above me, his wife rode on down the road and we haven't seen any kids in fourteen years.

**Q:** Now is your wife still living?

**WR:** My wife, I divorced my wife in 1960. Never got married again.

**Q:** Well is there anything else you would like to add before we close?

**WR:** No, nothing much. Oh and if you've got any pull up there ask anybody if they have my grandfather's hat. He had his hat on top of the flag, and it was shot off; I've got a picture of it, I've got to bring it down.

**Q:** What was his name?

**WR:** It was John Brower Debose. He wore a fez.

**Q:** Oh he was one of the Zouaves.

**WR:** Yes Zouaves. It's hard to pronounce that word, unless you know how to pronounce it properly. He lived in Troy I think he joined in Troy too, I'm not positive, it might have been New York City. He was a Joe he lived, he got out. I asked him if he had his hat, he said no.

**Q:** How did you know his hat was on top of the flagpole?

**WR:** He told us, well not me my mother, and family it was has hat on top of it.

**Q:** So he told the family then, that's very interesting.

**WR:** Yeah. He didn't die in the service, he lived years after.

**Q:** Now what unit was he with?

**WR:** Jeez, I had it written down too. The hundred and, know I'm guessing, the 130th or 150th something.

**Q:** The unit was out of Troy though?

**WR:** I think it was, yeah. The guy was nice enough he gave me a picture of the hat on the flag, told me where he enlisted, when he got out; I think he was only there for two or three years.

**Q:** Well in the Civil War he was lucky he survived. Alright thank you so much for your interview.

**WR:** I wish I could give you more.

**Q:** No, that's fine.