

**Richard L. Clark
Veteran**

**Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
NYS Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
July 28, 2003
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, New York**

Q: This is a home interview in Woodstock, New York. It is a home interview, it's the 28 of July 2003 at approximately 2:30 p.m. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

RC: My name is Richard L. Clark. "L" as in Leslie, and I was born in Middleborough, Massachusetts. About 15 miles to Plymouth and 30 miles south of Boston.

Q: Okay, and when were you born?

RC: I was born October 8th, 1928.

Q: Okay. What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

RC: I went through one year of high school, of course grammar school and all that. I was transferred to a trade school, and I was there for about 2 and a half years. Then, I enlisted in the service. After about three years, I'd come out of the service and went back to high school to get my high school education and got my high school diploma.

Q: Now, you entered the service in February of 1946.

RC: Right.

Q: Now, why did you join the service at that point? You enlisted?

RC: Yes, I enlisted. I really wanted to get away from home and the home environment, and get out of school, nonetheless. And, yet, when I got into the service, I got a real good education in there. So, it wasn't such a matter of getting away from school, I guess it was getting away from the home environment. My older brother was in the 8th Air Force in England. He was flying B-17's, got shot down and became a prisoner of war. I kind of thought that I'd like to sort of follow of in his footsteps.

Q: Okay, so that's why you picked the air force?

RC: That's why I picked the Air Corps, right.

Q: Okay, could you tell us about the time you were in the Air Force from 46-52?

RC: I went to a place called Sack Field, San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. Which the name's been changed, it is now an acclaimed Air Force base now. That's where I took my basic. After basic I was sent to Bickerton, Florida. I took radar school there. At that time, it was still kind of "hush-hush", but I went through radar school there. After the first 8 weeks there they pulled me out and wanted me to be an instructor. So, I went back to the first four weeks and I taught as a lab instructor for a while, until the CEO wanted me to be a classroom instructor. All through school I aboard getting up in front of a class and speaking. So, I told him I don't think I can do that. He said, "You'll find a way." He was a super guy. The first, probably, 40 minutes in the classroom I was a basket case. After that, I've never had any problem getting up in front of a whole bunch of people and speaking. It just never bothered me after that. I was an instructor for about 16 weeks. Then I got out of there and went back in and completed my other 8 weeks of the 16-week basic course. Then, I took 6 weeks of basic training in radar, and then went over to Germany.

Q: Now what was it like when the air core became the air force in 1947? Was there much of a transition at the time?

RC: I didn't notice a thing, because we didn't change in uniforms at the time. I was still wearing the old army uniform. We had an old air force patch, and that was it.

Q: While you were in occupied Germany you participated in the Berlin Airlift?

RC: Yes, I did.

Q: Can you tell us about that please?

RC: Yes. I was in an outfit that performed the 20-hour overhauls on the C-54 aircraft that they used to fly from Frankfurt to Berlin. After the aircraft accumulated 200 hours, they'd fly that airplane into Southern Germany, near Munich. They would assign the crew that had accumulated a lot of airtime to fly that plane into base. While the plane was being serviced, those guys went off to, well, an R&R location where they had a vacation and a real good time. After about 3 or 4 days when the airplane was ready, they called me back and flew the plane back and into service back into Frankfurt.

Q: Now what did you have to do to overhaul one of these?

RC: Well, we pulled all the communication equipment out of the plane and took it not the shop and went through it with a fine-toothed comb. Checking the functionality of everything; checking the tubes and checking all the circuitry and putting it back into the airplane, making sure it was all up to snuff so that they could go back to service. It was kind of a tough job in that the radio altimeters were all down in the airplane, and there was an unbelievable amount of coal dust. A lot of the cargo that they hauled into Berlin was coal.

Q: Do you have any other anecdotes about while you were in the army in occupation in Germany?

RC: When I first got to Bremerhaven, I stood on the deck of the ship. We hadn't debarked yet. I stood on the deck of the ship looking down. There was a German train down there and a little engine running back and forth, it had a funny little high-pitched whistle on it. I laughed and laughed until I climbed aboard, then I didn't laugh anymore. We went down to a place called Marburg, which was a replacement depot. From Marburg we went on down to Munich. I was in a Munich airbase. I went back down to Munich in September of 2000 and went back to the airbase. Right where the main runway is now where the Autobahn goes through. Everything is changed completely.

Q: I noticed from the form you filled out you said you were in the air force from 46-52 but then you overlapped with the Signal Corps.

RC: Well, I got out of the air force in January of 49'. At the time I got out I joined the reserves. I went back in 51', but I had been in an automobile accident and had had a compound fracture in the right leg. They called me back and I showed up on the base (Fort Devens, Massachusetts) in a cast and on crutches. It's a funny thing, they never x-rayed my leg to verify it was indeed broken. But they looked at me and said, "We don't want you", and they sent me home.

Q: You also said you were in the Massachusetts National Guard.

RC: Yes, I got out of the Signal Corps in 54' and I think it was 55', no 56' it was, my brother-in-law wanted me to go back into the National Guard. Because for summer camp, they needed a communications sheet. So, I had radio and wire experience. So, I enlisted in there. I went to summer camp and I was "commo" chief. The original guy that had been commo chief had some kind of bad accident and they didn't think he was going to be able to ever come back again. Well, he did come back, and my manager in my civilian job needed me for a lot of overtime. I couldn't participate in a lot of overtime while working for the National Guard. That, and also the combination of the fact that me and the commo chief didn't get along at all. I finally got discharged. They turned me loose because they said I couldn't participate. That was about 1957 that I got out. I was out, and I had a 22-year break in service.

By that time, with civilian life and everything, I was shooting (pistols) in competition. I went down to West Point and met a full bird colonel in West Point. He said, "I'll pay you to shoot, and I'll pay you mileage to get there, here's your ammunition and I'll give you retirement credits." I said, "How long?" He said for a year. So, usually it's 3, and I said, "I'll split the difference, I'll go for 2." Everything he said was true. I was having a lot of fun, I was shooting better, and everything was going great. After that, I reenlisted when the 3 years was up. When the 3-years was up, I went for 6. Then, frankly, just before the 6 years was

up, I found out I had diabetes. After I found this out, I knew I couldn't pass the physical, so I extended without a physical. So, then when I got to be 60 years old, they threw me out. A mandatory retiring age. But they didn't give me a 20-year letter.

The following year, I went out to St. Louis and they said, "Well, looks like you've only got 19 and a half years of service." I said, "Wait a minute, I know there was an army reg., I don't know the name or number of it, but I know it existed. It said in I was in the reserve in July prior to 1950 that's good time, regardless of activity." She said, "That's right." She rattled off the name and the number of the army reg. She looked at my record and stated I was in the army January of 49' to July of 50'. You were in the reserve for 21 years and put through all the paperwork and I was retired from the service with an I.D. card.

Q: What rank were retired you in?

RC: E-7. But when that full-bird colonel got me back in he said there was a recruitment drive at that time. He says and the way to sneak through town without being seen is to walk through the fringes of a riot. And he gave me my old rank back. Then, he promoted me after that.

Q: How well did you do in pistol competition for the army?

RC: I made "pistol distinguished". I got 4 points toward rifle distinguished, but by the time, but I tried to go from pistol to rifle I was too old. My eyesight was gone, I could do fairly well at 200 yards, pretty good at 300, and surprisingly well at 400. But when I got back to 600 yards, I shot a group like that. Which was out of the contest.

Q: How do you think your time in service affected your life?

RC: Oh, I think it affected my life in a great manner. It was good for me; I grew up when I enlisted in the service. I found out things that I hadn't known before. I toured quite a lot. I had a lot of really good experiences in the service.

Q: I see you went to working in electronics at IBM. Do you think you would've gotten into electronics if it wasn't for the military?

RC: Oh, no. More than likely not. I don't know what I would've done. Probably mechanic, I have mechanical aptitude. In fact, my mother got sick at the end of my basic training and I went home from training on emergency leave. While I was home, my name came up on orders to go to Clerk Typist school, in Colorado. Carpenters school in Fort Louis, Washington. Machinist school in Scofield, St. Louis Missouri. I was away and couldn't make any of those orders. I got back low-and-behold, I lucked out because they sent me to radar school.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

RC: I do belong to the VFW here in Woodstock. For years I've been the agitate up here.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that you were in service with?

RC: That's a funny thing, because while I was in the reserve, they sent me to Rock Island, Illinois to armor school for the 45 and the M-14 national rifle. While out there, I lived right across the street from a library. I had the opportunity to go over to the library where they had every phonebook in the state of Davenport, Iowa. So, I looked up this guy that I had been in Naples with. He had a strange name, Alan W. Crotts. (?) I found a couple of Crotts in some vague, little small town in central Iowa, and I knew that's where he was from. I called out there and left a message.

The lady called me back on her nickel. She told me that Alan was out in California somewhere, she didn't know where, but his brother was in Phoenix. I called his brother and asked for Alan. His brother was kind of short with me. But I told him I had been in the service with Alan. So, he called up Alan and gave him my number. Alan called me right back, at the hotel in Davenport. And we got together, and we saw each other a couple times after that. But now, we've drifted apart, and I don't know where in the world he is.

Another thing, I was a H.A.M. radio operator at the time. I was in the Signal Corps in 52'. I had a good buddy in there, in Virginia. One day, I was over in H.A.M. headquarters in Connecticut, visiting a friend of mine. He had a computer terminal on his desk, and I said, "What are you using the computer for?" "Oh," he says. He said "One of the things we have is an F.C.C. copy of the database online. I said, "Can you find a H.A.M.? If you know his name and don't know his card?" He said, "Oh, sure." I said, "How about Lowery James M?" He typed in James M. Lowery and got 2 hits. One was in Deland, Florida, the other one was in Phoenix. I started writing this stuff down on each one of these guys. I was going to write them a letter. He said, "Well, how old was this guy?" I said, "Gee, I don't know." He said, "Well, the guy in Phoenix was born in 1921, the guy in Florida was born in 1929." Bingo! I wrote down the information. I got home got his number on the telephone and called him up.

Instantly, as soon he answered the phone, I recognized his voice. I said, "Jim?" He said, "Yeah? Who is this?" I said, "Dick Clark." [Laughs] There was silence for maybe 5 seconds. And then he said, "Who?" I laughed right out loud and I said, "Jim, were you stationed in Virginia in 1952?" He said, "That Dick Clark!" We've been good buddies ever since. I saw that guy last in February of this year. And we're going down in May of next year because I'd rather go when the cold comes up here to get away from the snow. But in May of next year, in Orlando, is a reunion of the guys that were in the Berlin Airlift. So, I joined the Berlin Airlift Association. And I'm going to go to that.

Q: Do you have some things you brought that you want to show us?

RC: Well, I was wondering if you wanted to ask me any questions about what I had here. I've got a certificate of promotion.

Q: Now, if you hold that up to the camera, Wayne can get it.

RC: Okay.

Q: Now, do you still shoot pistols?

RC: I still shoot, but I don't shoot anything other than a .22 right now. My scores have dropped off because my hand shakes a little bit, and my eyes aren't as good as they used to be.

Q: Do you have any pictures of yourself in uniform at all?

RC: Oh, I thought you'd never ask. I've got that in here somewhere, hang on. This was right out of my 201 file.

Q: Where'd you have that picture taken?

RC: When?

Q: Where?

RC: It was taken at West Point as I recall. 88' 07 06. That must've been July 6.

Q: Okay. Got it. [Taking pictures]

RC: Either June 7 or July 6, I don't know how they figure that out. And I have here my distinguished pin. I also have my battle ribbons.

Q: Okay, great. Now, do you want to explain to us how you got that distinguished pin?

RC: To become distinguished, you must accumulate 30 points. You get points by competing on an army or brigade basis. Now my first match was brigade basis. And I only got 4 points for brigade competition. I got 4 points and I did that in 76'. I didn't get any more points until about 1980 in Maryland. I got 8 points and that gave me 12. To get points, you must compete and end up being in to top ten percent out of all the competitors. If you're in the bottom third, you get 6 points. Middle third you get 8 points. Top third you get 10 points. So, I got 4 points for brigade, then I got 8 points in Fort Mead. I also got 10 points in a civilian match in Fort Mead the following year. That gave me 30 points and my distinguished badge.

Q: Do you have anything else you'd like to show us?

RC: Yes, I've got a couple things here. I have an army commendation medal. I can probably show these both at once. An army commendation medal and a certificate of retirement.

Q: Okay, I got them. [Taking pictures]

RC: Okay.

Q: What's that large picture?

RC: That large picture is a picture that I had taken when I was in Naples, Italy. To whom at that time was my girlfriend.

[All laugh]

Q: Okay. Got it.

RC: Okay. You might want to see this. That's two generations of army.

Q: When did your son serve?

RC: He went in a few months before I did. After my 22-year break we went into service together. He went into basic training and I used to go down there and shoot at that time. So, the drill sergeant caught him waving at me at the time. The drill sergeant told him that he certainly shouldn't have any family down there, and to "Drop down and give me ten." Then he said, "How come your father's down here?" My son said, "Oh, he's in the reserve. He's down here shooting with the team." That made the guy feel bad for punishing him. He said, "If your father can show up over here, we'll let you see him for a few minutes." They contacted me over at the range and told me to stop by, and I did. I saw my boy for a few minutes, and shook hands with his drill sergeant. My son was in the airborne which I was pretty proud about. I went down to Fort Benning to shoot with the team and went over to the jump school. I saw one of the east Evans over there who was one of the instructors on the towers, where they jump from the towers. I said to the instructor, "I had a son down here last October." He said, "What was his name?" I said, "Bob Clark." He said "Oh, I don't recognize anyone by that name." So, I pulled out my wallet, showed him a picture. He looked at the picture, his eyes got big, and he goes, "*Oh!* Disaster Clark. I remember him." [Laughter]

Q: You said you also now have a granddaughter that is now in Iraq with the army.

RC: Yes. Her father was never in the service. But, her uncle... two uncles were, and of course, I was. Now she's over in Baghdad.

Q: Okay. Alright. Well thank you very much for the interview!

RC: Okay, you're welcome. My pleasure!