

Roy Wilcox
Narrator

Sean Quinn
Interviewer

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Delmar Library.

Sean: For the record, can I *have* your name your place of birth and your date of birth?

RW: My name is Roy Wilcox. I was born in Chester, Massachusetts on June 20th, 1931.

Sean: If you were born in 1931, you were alive during WWII, do you have any memories or experiences of that?

RW: I had 3 Uncles that were in the Second World War; Uncle Rufus landed with the 45th infantry division, and went to Italy and France. My Uncle Raymond was a Sargent in the Air Force and he is buried now in Arlington Cemetery in Washington, DC. Another Uncle was in the Engineers in the Second World War. I was named after him and he is buried in Chester Massachusetts. I remember quite a bit about talking to them after they came home, things that they went through when they were in the service.

Sean: Your uncle Roy do you know what he did as part of the Engineers?

RW: His outfit built bridges for the tanks to get across the rivers and stuff. They did a lot of that stuff.

Sean: Did you have any personal experiences? There was rationing at the time and Rosie the Riveter was a popular image did your Mom help out?

RW: Oh yea! There was a lot of rationing you know of gasoline and food. We could only get so much and I remember going to the store and you had coupons to buy like sugar, butter...those are the things I really remember but... My mother was a stay at home mom. She did not work in a factory. My father worked a corporate job during the Second World War.

Sean: After the World War you joined the Armed Forces, for the record what branch did you join?

RW: I was in the Army. I joined in August of 1948 and I was in the Army until May of 1952. I was signed up for 3 years but when the Korean War broke out President Harry Truman extended us for a year. If

you had any overseas time you got out 3 months early so I got out in 9 months so I was actually in August of 1948 to May of 1952.

Sean: What encouraged you to join the Army?

RW: I don't know, I dropped out of school, I was in the 10th grade and I didn't like school so I thought I have got to do something so...some friends of mine were going in, one went to the Navy and another one went to the Air Force and I went to the Army. I don't know why but...I had 2 uncles in the Army, I went Army.

Sean: At the beginning of your term where did you do training?

RW: Alright, we were one of the first units to do training at Camp Kilmer New Jersey. They never did it before and they never did it after us (smiles) I guess we were just that bad. (Both laugh) Anyway, we went there and after basic training they decided they were going to open up Pine Camp which is now Fort Drum. Pine Camp they opened up to train the National Guard so they sent a whole detachment of us up there to refix the barracks as they had been closed down after the Second World War because they used that as a prisoner of war camp, We also built rifle ranges and tank traps and cleaned the place up as it was a mess from being shut down for all those years. Then we went back to Fort Dix and then I became a mail clerk at Fort Dix New Jersey. Then towards 1950 they sent me to Panama. Of course then the Korean war, I was stationed in Panama the 33rd Infantry Division, Fort Colby in Panama. We were on the Pacific side of the Isthmus, They said we were there to protect the Miraflores Lock on the canal.They didn't want the Koreans coming over and taking over the locks or something. I was the mail clerk there too. A very interesting job (laughs).

Sean: What kind of mail were you responsible for as a clerk?

RW: Mail for the soldiers, their letters and things. We had a room with the mail in it and boxes and we would sort the mail out. I also drove a jeep for a lieutenant colonel whose job it was to go out to the troops who were returning from bivouac where they destroyed things that belonged to the Panamanians there...he would go out and pay them off, give them money for fixing up the stuff the soldiers had messed up.

Sean: So what was a day in the life for you?

RW: Average day was up at 6:00 in the morning, breakfast, go out and do calisthenics... one day we had an interesting one,,, we had a General coming in to inspect the troops, so they had the whole regiment lined up on the tarmac out there with fresh khakis , looking sharp and it started to rain(laughs) Well when they had a rain in Panama , in a matter of hours the rain would fill a dyke 8foot wide and 6 foot deep so you can imagine... we were soaked! We stood there because he was supposed to land at any time of course with the rain I guess he couldn't. They kept the plane up for a while, well we were soaked right through to the skin... anyway it stopped raining and 2 hours later we were dry. That was one day.

Sean: Did thr general ever arrive?

RW: Oh yes and of course he inspected a bunch of wet troops but...(laughs) It was just part of being in the Army I guess. A typical day was just calisthenics, sorting mail and chow.

Sean: What memories do you have of the other soldiers there with you?

RW: A friend of mine, a sergeant, had a car and one day he said lets go for a ride and we took a drive through the interior of Panama and we stopped for lunch one day...and the Panamanians would knock iguanas out of trees and mongrel dogs would snap their necks and the Panamanians would skin their toes and pull the skin back,I don't know how, and tie them to a pole with 10 or 15 iguanas coming down the street... so we stopped for lunch and I didn't speak Spanish and my friend was good at it so he ordered dinner and then he said 'Do you know what you are eating?' and I shook my head no but it tastes like beef and he said it is iguana. It was very interesting and we met people and of course with me not being able to speak Spanish I didn't know what they were saying but they were very friendly and we would try to talk.I went up to Panama City several times and bought things and sent them home. It was an interesting place.

Sean: Do you have other stories to tell about your interactions with the Panamanians?

RW: I didn't speak Spanish so I was kind of lost with them.

Sean: As you were in Panama at the time of the Korean War, how much did you know about that conflict?

RW: Only what I read about in the Army paper. I had a buddy who after the war told me about his experience in Korea. I guess it was pretty bad. They didn't call it a war they called it a conflict. That bothered me because there were guys over there getting shot and killed so it wasn't just a conflict, it was a war. But the worst part was if they had left General MacArthur alone he would have gone straight through Korea and stopped what was going on, too much stuff going on from Washington. They were running the war from Washington and I was being run as it should have been done.

Sean: When you talk to people who fought in Korea, were there any resentments because they were fighting the war and you were in Panama?

RW: No,no well not as far as my buddies. Somebody had to be stationed someplace. They got the short end of the straw I guess.

Sean: Were there any troubles in Panama or was it smooth sailing?

RW: No. Very quiet there, no problems at all.

Sean: So how many of your old Army buddies are you still in touch with?

RW: None. My good friend I went to school with passed. He had M.S. My friend in the air force has passed away. I am 82 years old so you know a lot of my old friends are gone.

Sean: Are you a part of any military organizations?

RW: No I never joined the American Legion or VFW or any of them. I don't know, I just... I think it is depressing to hear what a lot of them went through. I read a lot of books about the wars but ...

Sean: Veteran's Day is coming up. What does that really mean to you as a veteran?

RW: I think of all those guys who served especially my uncles and they all made it home and I think of all those guys who lost their lives and I think for what you know like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.... I had a friend who was on the Arizona that I met after when it got sunk...interesting story is that around 2002 he was in a nursing home and his wife received his wallet, watch and a dollar bill recovered from the Arizona that had been sunk...She framed the dollar bill. He use to tell stories about the Arizona, they got attacked, they were all in their bunks asleep.

Sean: do you know how they identified the wallet and watch?

RW: His wallet had his name in it. He was living down in Florida at the time and we had a winter home down there and we became friends and he would tell stories about the Second World War. I often think of those guys. When I got out of the Army I drove a bus for Yankee Trails and do a lot of trips to Washington D.C, and go to the tomb of the unknown soldier and see where my uncle was buried in Arlington but I was impressed with the changing of the guard and all. Very impressive. The memorials are moving and something to see.

Sean: I see you are reading a book on WWII.

RW: I read everything but I enjoy learning about the wars- WWII, Vietnam, Korea etc., not so much the Civil War. I am just not interested in reading about it. But I am interested in Iraq and Iran dying over there and for what it bothers me.

Sean: I can see that. Understandable.(nod agreement to each other somberly) Do you have anything you would like to share a story or interesting experience?

RW: When I was stationed at Pine Camp we went up to the town of Wattington above Watertown with a friend who had a car and we met some people up there in fact that is where I met my wife and we have been married for 61 years. On the way home I was driving and I fell asleep at the wheel, crashed the car and broke my collarbone and the Army came up to get me at the hospital they flew me in a hospital ship to Governor's Island Fort Jade in New York and was there for 2 months and then they sent me back to Camp Drum.

Sean: Did you get into any trouble with the Army?

RW: Yea I got into trouble because they didn't know where I was .They marked me AWOL for 2 days.

Sean: In conclusion, how did the army affect your life as a whole?

RW: I think the Army made me more disciplined. My brother was in the Navy he used to say to me... my shoes were always shined.(laughs) my clothes neat. I am very prompt. More disciplined. When I drove a bus the same thing. And that is all