

To get things started I would just like to get you to introduce yourself.

Mr. Robinette: My name is James Wilson Robinette. I was born at 17 Reynolds Street in _____ County, which Reynolds Street at that time was on the verge of Cumberland, Maryland. It wasn't part of the Cumberland. That was 12 June, 1920. The earliest thing I can remember, I was about 3 years old and I ran away from home. My mother was right after me, but I could run faster than she could. I ran about three blocks and saw a big smokestack and it scared me and I turned around and came back and she grabbed me. That was the last time I ran away from home. I went to school at Eastside Elementary School, grammar school, or whatever you want to call it. It was across the street. I started there in 1926. My first teacher was Mrs. Hubbs. She was a friend of my eldest sister. So I was under a pretty tight reign. I was living across the street and everybody knew. My grandmother died in 1931. She had lived on Marilyn Avenue in Cumberland. When she died my mother inherited her property and we moved there. I went from November 1931, which was when we moved, to Marilyn Avenue School and that was all it was. I remember I was in the 6th grade at the time. I remember a teacher was also the principal and she was a regular teacher. I can't recall her name right now, but she took us on different trips to see various things around the town. She took us to the dairy one time where they brought in milk, Queen City Dairy, and processed the milk and so forth. Of course everybody got a little jar of chocolate milk. One time she took us to the tannery where they tan hides. They showed us how that was processed. Another time they took us to a meat packing place and I thought it was very educational.

Did it change your outlook on meat?

Mr. Robinette: No, the thing people don't understand is back in those days, most of the meat processing really was done at the farms. I can remember that this time of the year was butchery time. The first hard frost was what the key was. People gathered in and your friends and neighbors and they had rotating going from one farm to another. My parents both grew up on a farm. My grandfather still had a farm when I was a kid. This was part of living. You did your own butchering and you went from one farm to another and helped out. Some people were good at dissecting a hog and nobody made a big federal case out of it because it was life. Most people now get all of their meat in plastic. Go to the store and buy it. Well, you didn't do that when I was a kid. My grandfather had a smokehouse. He smoked his own hams.

Did things change for you during the depression?

Mr. Robinette: By the time I was born, my father had been employed at the post office for some 14 years and he was Superintendant of the post office; station A. They had the main post office and then the station; station A and he was Superintendant down there. It was a good job considering what other people were making. During the Depression, let's put it this way, my grandmother died and left this house we moved to and also some rental property. We had six houses that were rental property and that brought in rent in addition to my father's salary. The fact is, in 1932, my father bought a new car.

So you guys were actually prospering.

Mr. Robinette: Well, we weren't prospering, what I would call prosperous, but other people were much worse off than what we were. We were living at Marilyn Avenue backed up onto the B&O Railroad. Marilyn Avenue was here and our house was here and then they had B&O Railroad.

That was a nice piece of property then.

Mr. Robinette: Well, yes. It was a solid brick house. It was not a brick house like this house. This has a brick facing. This had walls on it like that.

Were you here up until the start of World War II?

Mr. Robinette: Yes, I was there from...well I went to school in 1938. I went until January I believe it was. I went a year and a half to college at Frostberg, which was 12 miles up in the mountains. Then I got a job. I got several jobs but they didn't amount to much. Then I got a job with Aberdeen Proving Ground. I went there to work in June 1940 and stayed there until 1 July 1942. World War II had started in December of 1941.

Do you remember Pearl Harbor being attacked?

Mr. Robinette: Oh yes, I was working at Aberdeen Proving Grounds going into Baltimore and had gone to the movie. I came out of the movie and went to the drugstore to get a Coke. They didn't have them in the movies then. Everybody was crowded around the radio and they were talking about Pearl Harbor and nobody knew where in the hell Pearl Harbor was. People weren't that well versed. If you talked about Hawaii they knew where it was but they didn't give out much information to it. I heard it on the radio when I came out of the movie. It was a Sunday afternoon. In July of 1942, I quit there and I went down and registered for the draft. I went down to Baltimore and that was where we had to go for medical examinations. They had an armory down there and you went down and processed through; hundreds of you went through. They took a bus load from Cumberland and went to Baltimore. I was rejected because I had trouble with my left eye. It was what they called floating. It would turn out.

So this was at the recruiting station?

Mr. Robinette: Recruiting was out; it was a draft. You had to go through the draft. I had registered and gone through and they rejected me and I was put in...1A was you were going; 1B I think it was. I went back to the Cumberland and then they came out with something. I don't know what it was, but they were taking some of the 1B people. So I went down and volunteered. I went to the draft board and volunteered to be drafted again. I didn't have to go, I went.

You just wanted to serve?

Mr. Robinette: Yes, I wanted to serve. You don't understand the pressure. Everybody was in the Army or the Navy or someplace. The only thing at that time was Army, Navy. The Marine Corp. was part of it but there wasn't any Air Corp. They had Air Force, they had no Air Corp. So I went down and I passed on that thing. That was on the 14th of September 1942. They gave us two weeks leave and we had to report to Fort Meade, Maryland. We went there on the 28th and of course they issued uniforms and they took our clothing and put it in a box and shipped it home; civilian clothing. My introduction at that time was to the Army. I was one of about three or four that was given a scrub brush and a bucket of water and had to get out and scrub the porch on what was the library. Why? I don't know. When somebody tells you to do it, you do it. So I did it. After processing, which was shots and all the crap and so forth, they put us on a train and sent us. It took us about three days to get to San Antonio, Texas. We went west as far as the Mississippi River and then we went down and went south through Alabama. It was evidently the back part of Alabama because it was the poorest thing that I have ever seen in any place that I have ever been. All day long the train just wasn't going fast. None of these things went fast. But it went on practically all day riding down through there and I don't think I saw five houses with paint on them. Everything was weather board, like the inside of that fence. It was just wood. I had never seen anything quite like this. It was beyond my scope of way of living. I went to San Antonio and they took us off the train and bussed us to Camp Bullis. Camp Bullis is about 20 miles; I believe it is south, of San Antonio. It is the most God-forsaken place that you have ever seen. It is rock and no grass; about the only thing you could find out there was cactus. They had ____ tents set up in streets. Our street went down the side of a hill and then came the rains. I never seen it rain like it did down there. The rain came down and put about that much

water on the company street going down between the things. A couple of things I remember about that are we had a lot of training and we had to learn all the rules and regulations of being a soldier and so forth; memorize it. They had a theater set up on the side of the hill and again, when it rained, the water came in the back door and went down to the stage and split and went out both sides. That was interesting. You were sitting there on a bench and the water was coming down. I can remember two things that I learned there: 1) we had a medical officer there teaching us how to keep ourselves clean in war time with a minimal amount of water. He told us to start with our face and wash down and then start with your feet and wash up. "Feet are very important!" he emphasized. Then he got a big shit-eating grin on his face and he said, "and then you wash_____." Another time we had a film on sex education, I guess it would be. It showed the end results of advanced syphilis. Back in those days it was a big thing. They showed pictures of people with advanced syphilis and you came out of there and you swore off, never again. Then I got pneumonia. We were taking basic training out there. I was assigned to this company that had a three striper who was acting first sergeant. They had numerous PFC's that were acting as sergeants. We were assigned to the 2nd Division. The 2nd Division had been at Fort Sam since the first war. So all of these people had been in the Army five or six years at the minimum. We were the first recruits that they had to fill up the division. We were looked upon about like pond scum. I got pneumonia while I was there and they took me into Fort Sam to the hospital and put me on the pneumonia ward. I noticed that when I woke up in the morning that there would be a lot of empty bunks.

This was in a hospital?

Mr. Robinette: In the hospital. If people were in them at night they weren't discharged. At the hospital, they don't discharge you at nighttime. It dawned on me that that was not right. I was pretty well out of it. The nurse put a needle in my right arm to put in saline solution. Other than that they weren't doing much. I woke up and my arm was swollen like that. She had run the needle through the vein. Instead of going in the vein it went through and blew up my arm. I started screaming so she and....she was a Captain, this nurse and supposed to be head of the ward. I started screaming and a medic and the nurse came. I said, "Look what you have done!" She took it out and said, "Well I will put it back in." I said, "No, you are not." I had been working at Aberdeen Proving Ground, which was Army and had enough knowledge. One time I had an occasion to go over to the hospital and I knew how the situation was. I said, "I want to see the medical officer of the day, now!" Of course this was unheard of, of a private talking to a captain like that. It wasn't long until the medical officer of the day came and said, "I understand you want to see the medical officer of the day?" They wear an armband like and MP but it says MOD on it. I told him what it was and what had happened and I said, "I know what my problem is, I am constipated." He sent two orderlies in and gave me an enema. A couple of days later I was out of the hospital. If I hadn't of raised hell I don't think I would be here today. But just the fact that I knew what to ask and it scared the living crap out of them when I asked for the medical officer of the day.

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