

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS  
An Oral History Interview with  
Richard Marquardt  
1939-1950s  
Interviewed by Elaine Harmon, NPS  
August 10, 1980  
Transcribed by Mary Rasa 2011  
Editor's notes in parenthesis ( )

EH: This is August 10, 1980 and I am Elaine Harmon. I am sitting in the (Sandy Hook) Museum and we happen to have a gentleman wander into the Museum by the name of Richard Marquardt who lives in now in Roselle, New Jersey but he grew up in Irvington and for many years came to Sandy Hook as a fisherman. And he has very good recollection from 1939 when he was four years old up through the '50s. But one other interesting fact about him is that he was here for nine days as detached service from Fort Dix because Fort Hancock was used sort of as a representative example for training, a certain part of their training course. So, we would like if you would take some time out with us. If you would tell us what it was like coming here when you were four years old in 1939. What do you remember?

RM: I remember, the first thing I remember was the military procedure that we were approached as we came out to Sandy Hook to go fishing and how strict all the regulations were. It was spotless, it was clean compared to...it is pretty clean now but compared in those days I mean, there was no such thing as seeing beer cans or beer bottles laying around or cigarette butts or anything else.

EH: Right.

RM: And it was really nice and it was a real pretty wildlife area so it was really great.

EH: What were the hours that you were allowed to come in?

RM: They let us come in I can remember from seven in the morning to six at night.

EH: And what were the boundaries that you were limited to?

RM: We were allowed to fish then two jetties up. And we could walk up to the center Guardhouse and that's as far as we could go.

EH: That's the Ranger Station today.

RM: Right. Right.

EH: Right. You talked about a third jetty. Where was that?

RM: It was a smaller third jetty. I believe it was taken away. It was a smaller jetty it went out maybe forty, forty-five feet. It was a smaller rock jetty.

EH: South of the existing ones?

RM: South. Yeah, south of the existing ones. Whether they took the rocks out and filled it in with sand or put the rocks up on the retaining wall. I remember the Army vehicles, the old Army vehicles and the heavy equipment that was there.

EH: When you talked about MPs (Military Police) meeting you and checking constantly, what was that all about?

RM: Well, they just come over and ask you how everything is going, you know, and so forth and they would ask us for I believe we had to get a pass, a written pass also which we kept in the car. They asked us how the fishing was going, just passing the normal time of day because it was pretty boring for them to walk back and forth on the rocks all time.

EH: Right. What was the main fishing? What fish were you after?

RM: Early in the morning we used to catch, went fishing for the stripped bass. And then as the water warmed up towards summer time we used to go fluke fishing. And we used to catch a lot of (inaudible) fish out here and kingfish, kingfish also. And in the fall, we used to fish on the bayside for flounders.

EH: What was the prime fishing hole? Was there a terrific spot?

RM: Well, the best one which I was always told about and I'm waiting for them to open up the end of the Hook. Is right off the end of the Hook in the (Sandy Hook) Channel. Yeah. There is some terrific fishing out there because of the drop off and over here in a few of the Coves when you first come in on the left hand side. In fact, there are some gentlemen fishing there the other night.

EH: Was there anything that really happened here that you remember in your fishing days? Not in your, I'm talking about your Army days later on.

RM: No.

EH: Was there anything really quite outstanding?

RM: Not really.

EH: Did your dad take you and the whole family or was it...?

RM: No. It was just my brothers and myself and an uncle because you weren't allowed to go swimming or picnicking out here. There was none of that.

EH: No swimming?

RM: No swimming at all. And the only time you could go in the water was when you had, you know, a surf rod and you could get your knees wet and that was about it. You weren't allowed to go swimming or anything like that. No eating on the beaches and no fires.

EH: No fire, no food.

RM: Right. Right you had to eat back in your car. You couldn't bring anything but fishing gear out to the beach.

EH: What, did people have an image of Fort Hancock in those days? Like a very secret place from what I hear?

RM: Oh yes. Very, security was very tight, very tight security.

EH: What were the years again that you were here off and on visiting for fishing? Did you say 1939 through...?

RM: Well, when I was younger, 1939. During the War you weren't allowed at all. You couldn't come out here at all. And I remember coming out here starting around 1947. '48, '49, 1950, '51, '52, '53 and then I graduated school and got drafted and this was right at the end of the Korean Conflict. (inaudible)

EH: Right. You were here you were saying in 1954 as part of a Fort Dix training.

RM: December.

EH: What was that like? It was December, okay.

RM: We came out for, it was more or less a how should we say, nomenclature. Just to be brief on the operational systems of the missiles and the firing procedures and then we were sent back to Fort Dix.

EH: You said you lived at the temporary structures at the south end. Which we looked at the map and said was S-333.

RM: Yeah.

EH: And you probably ate in them mess hall of Building 57.

RM: Right. Right. Right.

EH: From what you remember. What was it like?

RM: It was Army style. Your breakfast in the morning was served at 6 o'clock in the morning in metal trays and old fashion Army style eating.

EH: And were you just on like cots, very makeshift type of...?

RM: No. Our bunks were nice. They were double decker metal bunks, mattresses. There was two persons on the bunk, you know, bottom bunk and top bunk. And we had footlockers and wall lockers.

EH: So, it was comfortable. It was not...?

RM: Very comfortable.

EH: It was not anything that was very helter skelter....

RM: No.

EH: Type thing.

RM: In fact, it was very quiet out here except when sirens would go off and they had an alert. Things like that then, things got pretty hectic. Everybody was running all over the place.

EH: What was the alert about? What was that?

RM: The alert procedure?

EH: Yeah.

RM: I guess can I give the procedure on tape?

EH: Yeah. I guess so.

RM: Well, when the sirens would start to sound you had your three steady constant blasts which would mean stand by alert. And they had a red alert where the missiles would actually come out of the ground, you know, the horns would be blasting away and you would go to your positions on the missiles and you would watch the whole thing as it was going on. And they would go through the whole sequence, the whole firing sequence except firing the missiles.

EH: How often did that happen in the time you were here that they had an alert or red alert?

RM: Well, the alerts was about five or six times.

EH: That's quite a lot for the few times you were...?

RM: The missiles used to come periodically during the day they would bring them up and go through procedure and bring them back down and cover them up in the small pits that they had, not silos they were more like a trench style, big doors and they came up in sets of threes and sixes.

EH: Threes and sixes in a formation like pattern.

RM: Mmm hmm.

EH: What was the fire drill you talked of? Was that, you said there were fire drills out here?

RM: Right, we had fire drills in case the barracks caught on fire or anything like that we were trained in that procedure too. How to get out of the buildings and so forth.

EH: But you said that the fire escapes were all wood.

RM: Yeah. The fire escapes were made out of wood.

EH: So, everyone thought it was kind of ironic.

RM: Right. That's the way the Army made their barracks. They were all made out of wood. Even down at Fort Dix the barracks were made of wood and the fire escapes were made out of wood.

EH: Out of the missile era (noise disrupting interview) was there anything outstanding that you can think of that you know as far as was this considered very impressive equipment?

RM: It was.

EH: At the time.

RM: It was very sophisticated equipment. Very impressive and it was a deterrent because the missiles that were here had a pretty good range. And the newer ones the advanced ones that came out later on, was fantastic. The altitude was over 150,000 feet over the range of 100 miles. That was the newer missile. The older Ajax that were out here they would fire up about 45,000 feet and a range of up to maybe 50-60 miles.

EH: Were you given a lot of information or were you withheld a lot of information?

RM: We were withheld a lot of information. We were out here for only one purpose and they fed us just as much information as they wanted us to know. Basically to see what it was like and the process of going through a couple of drills but we couldn't get inside to

where the radar domes were or anything like that. That was out of our league. And we did enjoy some swimming too, some wave action on our first trip out here. It was early December, but we had a couple of warm days and we went in the water a little bit. The water was in the upper forties. We went for a lot of walks out here and marches. They took us on the grand tour of the whole place.

EH: What was the grand tour? It was conducted by the Army?

RM: By the Army, yes. They took us on a tour of all the buildings.

EH: In those days was a lot of it...?

RM: Still the way it is.

EH: But in much better condition.

RM: Well, yeah it was in better condition you know it was well policed and kept because people who were stationed out here had a lot of free time and they were on details like painting details and policing the area and stuff like that.

EH: They had so many soldiers with time to devote to upkeep.

RM: Right.

EH: Which we don't have now.

RM: Right. And they allowed us to go fishing here. Special services had equipment, surf equipment that we used to use.

EH: So, you were allowed to go fishing anywhere then?

RM: No. In certain areas.

EH: Oh, I see but a greater boundary than when you were a child?

RM: Yeah. Right. We couldn't go up by some of these blockhouses. We had to stay away from there.

EH: What do you mean by blockhouses?

RM: The concrete structures over on the bayside where they used to have the old motor station. They used to shoot out this way back where the boy scout camp is.

EH: That is Kingman and Mills and there is one other on the bay which is Arrowsmith. So, those were considered off limits?

RM: Off limits, yeah.

EH: That's very interesting. From Fort Hancock you which was part of your Basic Training you went to Fort Myers, Virginia, Fort Lewis, Washington. You spent a lot of time in Alaska.

RM: Nineteen months up there.

EH: That's a long time. (laughter)

RM: That is.

EH: And then back to Fort Lewis and then back to Fort Dix being discharged. But is any of the time that you spent something outstanding? You know, was Alaska sort of the most exciting?

RM: Fantastic.

EH: Part of it?

RM: It was really fantastic. It was really great.

EH: And what was your rank? What were you?

RM: My rank?

EH: Yeah.

RM: I went from private to PFC (private first class) to corporal to sergeant. I was discharged as a sergeant.

EH: And did you have, you know, a specialization of any sort?

RM: No.

EH: It was just all around.

RM: Just all around.

EH: Infantry though.

RM: Specialized in heavy weapons.

END OF INTERVIEW