

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Clifford Morgan, 66th AA, 1955-56
Interviewed with Thomas Greene NPS intern, Monmouth University
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Transcribed by Samantha Mass NPS, 2008



Clifford Morgan, 1955 at Fort Bliss, TX



Clifford Morgan, right, at Fort Hancock, 1955



Photo taken by Mr. Morgan of the radar trailers in their temporary location in front on 9 gun battery, 1955.

Greene: This oral history interview with Clifford Morgan and is taking place on April twenty-fifth 2003 at the Fort Hancock History House on Sandy Hook New Jersey. I am Thomas Greene, an intern from Monmouth University. I will be conducting the interview.

Greene: Good morning Mister Morgan. Thank you for taking the time out to do this interview with me.

Morgan: Good morning, Tom.

Greene: Okay, I'd like to start out by asking some, general background questions. When and where were you born?

Morgan: I was born in the Midwest; I guess you would say, in North Dakota. In Williston, North Dakota in 1934.

Greene: And, what was your schooling like? Like where did you attend high school and graduate from?

Morgan: Well. I started in Williston North Dakota in a country school. In fact, a one room country school. 'Cause we didn't live in this town, we lived outside of the town. My father was a coal miner and I completed my high school in Montana because we were actually right on the border and my father had been a homesteader in Montana and had owned land in Montana. So I completed my high school in Westby, Montana.

Greene: Before you started working at Fort Hancock, were you aware of any other relatives, such as your father or grandfather who had served in the military previously?

Morgan: As far as I know, my father never served in the military. One of several of my uncles did, but not my father.

Greene: Okay. How did you initially become involved at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: I was regular Army. Two year. And after basic training, or maybe during basic training they gave us a choice of selecting what we felt we'd like to get involved in. And so I selected technical or electronics and I ended up at Fort, I was at Fort Leonard Wood, but I ended up at Fort Bliss, Texas and I was trained for the 90mm guns and of course that was in preparation to sending us to Sandy Hook. Fort Hancock for further training.

Greene: And what was the starting and ending date that you were here? Do you recall?

Morgan: Well, its not quite that clean cut, but the starting date was in 1955 and since this was a armed battery was located here only for training we were transferred to Nyack, New York when our permanent battery was completed up there. So part of the time was spent at Nyack, New York up on top of the Palisades.

Greene: Did you know anything about Fort Hancock or Sandy Hook before you came here?

Morgan: No, that's very interesting that you ask that because the army doesn't always tell you exactly where you're going. They may have told us in their orders that we were going to Fort Hancock, but we had no idea where it was. We knew it was in New Jersey, that's all. In fact, we were riding on the back of a six by six truck, a bunch of us regular army guys being brought down here when we arrived here and we were observing the countryside, probably coming down Route 35 and we noticed we were close to the shore because we saw the rushes and the inlets from the bay and whatever it was and suddenly we were here and we crossed over the bridge and wow, we were practically on the beach. We were on the beach.

Greene: Did you know anything about the types of jobs or tests you would be performing before you arrived at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: Yes. I don't remember exactly, but we had been training, as I said, on the 90mm guns. Which of course was artillery. And those guns were aimed and the range for the first of the shells, I believe, was set by electronics in those days. So they had gotten modernized a bit and we knew we were going to be involved in something like that.

Greene: What was your rank or title when you were at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: My rank when I left, remember I was only two years, was specialist three, which is the same as a corporal.

Greene: And what were the official unit and department you worked for?

Morgan: It was the sixty-sixth AAA missile battalion.

Greene: And what did you do in this battalion? What were your jobs?

Morgan: We were trained as radar operators, as computer maintenance and operator. We had three radars involved in tracking the target. And actually it was two radars tracking and ranging the target and another radar tracking the missile. And we also were quite involved in calibrating the antennas, the tracking antennas. This was done every day. And also we had emergency power generators which we had to man and we had to maintain. Because we were stand alone. We didn't necessarily need outside power to operate. So we were, each crewman was pretty much trained in all those jobs. We could do any one of those jobs.

Greene: Did you enjoy this type of work?

Morgan: Oh yes, I did.

Greene: Do you feel that what you learned here aided in your future life or your future work?

Morgan: Absolutely. I had had a little bit of work with electronics before I went in the service. And yes, I did end up working with electronics and electrical equipment all my life since then.

Greene: While you were at Fort Hancock were there any alerts of potential enemy attacks?

Morgan: I don't know if there were actual alerts, but there certainly was the impending possibility and we were active and we were ready and able to go into operation at any time if it ever was required.

Greene: What building did you work in when you were at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: We worked...our actual work at Fort Hancock; our equipment was situated just north of nine gun battery. And we lived temporarily in one of the old wooden barracks, probably for a month or two and then we were placed into a more permanent, our permanent barracks while we were here, which was the old hospital, building 74. We also had a excellent mess hall and as I recall pretty good cooks and we ate there as well.

Greene: Were you working with civilians or military or a mixture of both?

Morgan: All military except for possibly two civilians that worked in the maintenance van taking care of the major repairs of our equipment.

Greene: Do you recall the buildings you lived in and ate in?

Morgan: Do I recall the buildings?

Greene: Yes.

Morgan: Yes. As I said I, we lived in a temp temporarily in a wood, one of the old wooden two-story barracks; which as regular army we were already familiar with from basic training. And it wasn't too fancy. The hospital building, building 74 was a very nice building and we enjoyed it very much.

Greene: What social and recreational activities did you take part in while you were at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: Well, we were right on the beach and as soon as we could get leave the first thing we did was get off base and mingle with the summer time crowds (LOL) on the beach. In fact myself and a guy from Louisiana, who should've known better and I guess I should have two but, we got one of the worst sunburns of our life being out here under one of those hazy days. We didn't know about the haze that hangs over the Jersey Shore in the summer time.

Greene: Did you ever attend any theatre or dances, or sporting events?

Morgan: We had a movie theatre and of course, as I said, as soon as we could get leave time we went to Asbury Park especially because Asbury Park was in those days was very good and had the boardwalk and the amusements and the movie theatres down there.

Greene: Were you able to attend religious services while at Fort Hancock?

Morgan: Ah yes, absolutely. They had the church here. Several denominations I believe.

Greene: And you said you, you just said you attended the beach while you were here. Do you, do you remember which beach it actually was?

Morgan: Which beach?

Greene: Yeah, or all of them? (LOL)

Morgan: (Laughing) Well, except for some walks on the beach, and I remember one of the guys was in the archery and he finally brought his equipment down here, we did go on the beach here at Sandy Hook which we had as much beach as we could possibly ever want. But I think we were looking for female company. So we were off base at, just outside the gate as a matter of fact. The gate was restricted in those days and the public couldn't come in here like they do now.

Greene: Did you ever take any excursions to New York City and if so did you go by boat or train or car or bus?

Morgan: Interesting that you ask. Yes I did, I was able to purchase an automobile while I was here and one of the first trips, and remember I was from the Midwest, I had never visited the East. We took off , “We’re gonna go to New York.” Myself and two or three guys. Unfortunately we didn’t have much money and we weren’t prepared for the tolls. Even in the fifties there were bridge tolls to get into New York. I think we got on to Staten Island and realized we weren’t going to have enough money and we turned around and came back.

Greene: Did you know of any servants, minorities, or women who worked at the fort in either civilian or military jobs?

Morgan: One of our crewmen was a man of color and he became a very good friend. And I believe he ended up living in the area.

Greene: Would you consider this a fun or a boring place to be living and working?

Morgan: It was a fun place. I was very interesting to me because I had never been to the Jersey Shore or even the West coast and it was, it was fun and it was enjoyable.

Greene: Did you ever have anything especially humorous or funny events happen to you while you were here?

Morgan: Well as I’ve already reiterated, the attempted trip to New York, the sunburn on the beach because we did meet females and me and the guy from Louisiana spent the whole afternoon hanging out with them and we didn’t realize we were getting a sunburn. And it didn’t end there. We suffered for about a week afterwards. Other than that, well there were many other things, but those were the main ones.

Greene: If someone came up to you and asked you today what stands out most in your mind about your time at Fort Hancock, what would you tell them?

Morgan: Oh, let me think. One of the things were the vast history of older fortifications. And the history of Fort Hancock in general. And the Officers’ Row. And also the fact that it was the Jersey Shore and we landed here and spent most of our time here that first summer. And that was very notable to me.

Greene: Now, from reading about your background, you worked with the NIKE missiles. Can you go into that a little bit?

Morgan: Yeah, well I was a crewman. Our stay here was temporary ‘cause my, my, battery was to be stationed at Nyack, New York. But we we took training here first. And we were trained by the first crew of NIKE crewmen, on the job training, who had been thoroughly trained. And most of them were college graduates. Quite knowledgeable

people and quite competent as I might say. I enjoyed my time here. It was an entirely different kind of army duty. We did have to put...be on duty. Part of our crew had to be on site and on duty at all times; weekends, everything. Holidays. Of course we split it up and you had leave time, but probably not as much as you could have because we were actually active, ready, and able to defend our country.

Greene: Did you make a lot of friends while you were at the fort and if so did you keep in touch with any of them over the years?

Morgan: I met a lot of good people. I mentioned a few already. We were, we were friends for a time, but over the years we've gone our separate ways and I've lost contact with everyone of them. In fact I recently, knowing I was going to do this interview, I recently tried to locate some of the old buddies, but I haven't found anybody yet. Maybe as a result of these interviews I'll come up with some names.

Greene: Do you think its important for children of today in their history classes to learn about what went on here, at Fort Hancock and on Sandy Hook?

Morgan: Why sure, why not? Its certainly a part of our history. And it just adds to a long chain of, military defense history here at Fort Hancock.

Greene: And I guess with my final question if you could say just in a few words what, just reiterate what Fort Hancock and you time spent here meant to you.

Morgan: Well, what did it mean to me? First of all I was pleased that I chose military electronics. I didn't know I was going to get into the NIKE system but I, I think it was a rewarding experience and I'm glad I did end up in it. And it helped me in my future work.

Greene: And you would never trade this experience in for anything in the world?

Morgan: Well (laughing) I wouldn't say that, but it completed my military duty which was the objective when I volunteered with the draft to go into the army in the first place.

Greene: Okay. Thank you for taking the time out to do this interview with me, Mr. Morgan. I learned a lot and was very informative and I'm grateful that you did it with me. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.