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Richard Trent

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Lael Morgan, interviewer

Series: Lael Morgan Collection interviews

Richard Trent talks about where he was born at Crafton, Pennsylvania. He was one of eighteen children. His parents died when he was young. They were brought up in a town of many ethnics. They were the only Black people in the town. He was taught to be respectful as well as to be respected. His father was a coal miner in West Virginia and southeastern Pennsylvania. Three of his brothers went on to college. When the war broke out he had been out of high school. He went down to register at the Air Force with his friend. They were ignorant to the fact of segregation. His friend went into the Air Force, but he wasn't called up. He went to the draft board. He was told that he had to go to a black outfit and his friend would have to go to a white outfit. He said it bothers him still today. He was told that he might be drafted in a few weeks or he could enlist immediately. He wasn't asked about his qualifications or what he wanted to do in the military. His town mayor threw him a big party and they were concerned about him being sent to the south. He was ignorant about prejudice. He was about twenty at the time. His mayor talked to him separately about the limits on Blacks in the South. He talked about a comment from the doctor during his military physical exam. He talked about his grandparents and how they came to the north. His parents met in Cumberland, Maryland.

He went into the Army and went to Fort Belmar. He was in the 95th Regiment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He was a trumpet player and joined a band when he was at Fort Bragg. He stayed with the band for a year and a half. He ended up buying a guitar. He learned how to sort mail and they made him a mail clerk. He was the bugler and played taps. He was also a sign maker. He trained to handle a rifle and made marksman.

Morgan asked him about his job with the Alcan. Trent said on their Alaskan trip they didn't know where they were going. They had just finished maneuvers. After being transported by but they got on a train and went north to Michigan, Minnesota, the Dakotas and ran along the border. The rumor on the train was they were going to build a highway to Alaska. They continued up to Dawson Creek. He said they were on an old train on old tracks. They started at Dawson Creek to cut the highway. They used logs to get a solid roadbed after they had dug out the dead vegetation. They might have to dig down six feet. They proceeded up to Moose Jaw and just south of Whitehorse. They had crews going ahead of them removing stumps. There were crews that would level the surface and a scoop crew. They scoop crew removed the muskeg. His crew would come by and lay crushed stone. He ran a stone crusher and a smaller tractor. He got along well in the service. They were staying in tents until they came back to Dawson. One time they were building a bridge across a ravine. He was working in the cold and ended up with frostbite.