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Reverend Ed Carroll January 20, 1992

Lael Morgan

Series: Lael Morgan Collection interviews

Reverend Ed Carroll said it wasn't too unusual for the chaplain to take meals in his tent alone because the chaplain is a counselor and a spiritual leader. The men viewed it as segregation. He said he did not protest about being excluded from the officer's mess tent. He told the colonel that the men were hurt by the fact that he was excluded from the officer's mess. Colonel Schilling said that he would be allowed in the officer's mess tent. He said he thinks this is the first challenge to segregation in the Army. They left Alaska and the highway and went to St. John and Dawson. At Camp Claiborne in Louisiana there was strict segregation. There were no Black officers in the officer's mess or the officer's club. When the 95th Regiment got there he went to the officer's mess with Colonel Schilling. He thinks he was the first Black officer in Claiborne to eat in the officer's mess.

Ed Carroll said the 95th Regiment was chosen to go to Europe after they returned from working on the Alaska Highway. They trained at Camp Claiborne for a few months. He had sent for his wife to come down to see him. They were an engineer outfit and they were to go to Europe to build installations for the invasion party. They got on the boat and the minute they got to Liverpool the Commanding officer, Colonel Thompson, had a regimental meeting. He said now they are in England and there weren't any Black men there so he wasn't sure what would happen in terms of social relationships. Carroll said he always used the technique of community contacting the religious leader wherever they went. He resented the fact that the first people you see when you come into a community were the prostitutes. So he went to see the religious leaders. He was able to talk to them about the Black man in America and how they were trying to overcome racism. He organized church parties. They were in southern Wales. They followed a French-Canadian outfit who had made a terrible reputation. He said because of his contacts the people were taking soldiers home and introducing them to their families. They tried to do their best about sex education. He said they were very conscious about the venereal disease problem. They worked with the medical officers and talked about using protection. They did the best they could. He said it is hard to talk about the moral life of the soldiers. A lot of them had relationships at home. He was pleased with their conduct. He didn't hear about any pregnancies happening. He said when they got to Alaska there was a situation with a soldier dating a local. He was accused of taking advantage of the woman. He talked with the soldier and believed that the woman had dated another person before him. It turned out the woman was a prostitute. The soldier was court martialed. Carroll said he gave a character witness and the soldier got off. This was in Fort St. John. They were up on the Alaska Highway for about eleven months. He was based in the headquarters. He traveled the road with his recreation equipment. He brought records. He did get a lot of books from the Red Cross and records.

Morgan asked him to talk about the Siginna Chief Bridge. Carroll said that experts predicted that the bridge could not be built under a fortnight because of the lack of the proper type of lumber and other factors. One of the soldiers was from Virginia and recognized that there was good wood in the forests. They took a portable sawmill and cut the wood for the bridge. Within a week they were finished. He had a celebration and dedicated the bridge. This attracted the correspondence group. He talked about Walter Simon.

Morgan asked him how cold it got when they were in Alaska. Carroll talked about having an interview and it was reported to be 75 degrees below zero.

Morgan asked about the dedication of the Alaska Highway. Carroll said he had a piece of the ribbon from the dedication. He said it is hard to remember.

Morgan asked him if he had any memories of the Alaska Highway. Carroll said he remembers going out on the trapline with one of the Indians. He had a chance to meet people along the line. He had never seen trapping. When they first got up there it was spring thaw. The muskeg was exasperating. After they got up there in November he had a Thanksgiving service. He had a brass quintet including Irving Smith and Trent [Richard]. He was giving his sermon of thanksgiving and he saw the looks on their faces and he was trying to perk them up. As a chaplain he hopes he served them as a helpful counselor. He was looked upon as many things including mama and papa. He had a good training as a pastoral counselor. He helped them get out a lot of their frustrations.

Morgan talked about his parents and said he had a chance at education that a lot of soldiers didn't have. She asked if he had spent much time with people who couldn't read or write. Carroll said not too much. Most of the soldiers were from Baltimore. Some of them were teachers or had had some teaching education. Their regimental clerk was one of the top teachers at a teacher's college. A lot of the soldiers were illiterate. The 95th was a Black engineer group. He said the educated guys started to look down on the uneducated guys. This was dividing them. He didn't like that and believed that they needed to help one another.

Morgan asked what WWII and the military meant to him. Carroll said he was encouraging a lot of the men to apply to officer's training. The highest officer they had was a warrant officer. Carroll was told that the applications were not being sent off. Carroll wrote a letter to Bill Hastings about this. They were investigated and then the applications went through. Carroll got in trouble because he did not do things through the chain of command. His superior said he did violate the rules, but he did it for a good cause and recommended that he be transferred. Carroll was transferred to the 507th Battalion in Scotland. He was happy to get to Scotland. When they got to England the colonel thought that Carroll had stirred up the men. When the colonel was relieved he gave Carroll an unsatisfactory rating. When you get that kind of rating you have to show reason why you shouldn't be thrown out. That is when his superior came around and recommended that Carroll be transferred. The commanding officer was the editor of the Detroit News. He talked about running into one of his professors from Yale when he was in Scotland. He talked about Sgt. Riley who was a baritone and a concert in Wales.

Morgan repeats Carroll's experience in the 95th. Carroll said he was involved with a regiment that took part in the Normandy invasion and he later ran into the troops from the 95th. The 95th was building roads behind Patton. He talked about Major Martin Hayden.