

9. Dorman Elmo Wiggins

By

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World War II brought unprecedented incentives for farmers and others to leave their occupations and seek employment in the larger cities. Even small towns felt the impact of the war industry. In 1940 the population of Charlestown, Indiana where I graduated from high school was 900. It soon mushroomed to 13,400 in just a few years during the construction and operation of the Indiana Army Ammunition Plant, a huge complex stretching for miles on the Ohio River that produced smokeless gunpowder. There were even plans for a rocket plant several miles east of the powder plant.

In addition, the war offered opportunities for many young men and women to get specialized training and travel to many different parts of the world. Dorman Wiggins was quick to grab the opportunity that military service accorded him, and by all accounts, he was very successful in that career.

By 1939, Dorman was living in Owensboro, KY. A note in the August 13, 1942 *Owensboro Messenger* (p. 14) says that he was “. . . formerly employed by the Red Cab Company in Owensboro.” Owensboro was the closest large town to both Muhlenberg and McLean Counties, and it drew both him and my mother to it for employment.



Dorman Wiggins about 1939 wearing his Red Cab hat

Mom worked as a housekeeper at the home of Wilburn and Willie Lee Basham, where she also lived and cared for their daughter Glenda. A note in Mom's autograph book reads, "May 21, 1940 Owensboro, KY. Dearest Patsy. Always remember, I'll always be in love with you. Your future husband, DEWiggins". Patsy was the nickname the Wigginses used for Mom. No one on the Dennis/Bolton side called her that.

Dorman enlisted in the Army on August 1, 1940 and married Nell Bolton on November 30, 1940. He was stationed in the Army Air Corps at Ft. Knox, KY, where I was born on September 15, 1943. Two years later they were divorced, and Dorman and Geraldine Carroll Beck, a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC), were married at Marianna Army Air Force Base, Jackson County, Florida on September 22, 1945. They had two sons, Dwight Ellis, born in 1947, and Lee Carroll, born in 1952.



Dwight and Lee Wiggins

Dorman advanced in the non-commissioned officer ranks. By July of 1943, he was a technical sergeant, and his service had already taken him to at least 8 countries by that time. Dorman and his cousin, James Tucker, had always been interested in radio technology, and this apparently led him to find a niche in the service as a radio navigator. However, Dorman really wanted to be a pilot, and a note appears in the January 24, 1944 *Evansville Courier and Press* newspaper that Tech. Sergeant Wiggins had reported to Keesler Field, Mississippi to begin training as a pre-aviation cadet. "At the end of the 28-day period, he will be sent to a college or university for five months of additional work preparatory to becoming an air cadet." (1) But Dorman had rheumatic fever in 1941, as noted on his 1949 reenlistment papers. He spent a long period of recovery at Hot Springs, Arkansas. Mom said he developed rheumatic heart disease as a complication from the rheumatic fever, and this apparently disqualified him from pilot training.

Dorman served in the 73rd Observation Group (aka, 73rd Tactical Reconnaissance Group). Wikipedia indicates the 73rd was part of the Aleutian Campaign during World War II:

The squadron moved to the new Elmendorf Field, near Anchorage, Alaska on 14 March 1941. It was one of the first Air Corps units assigned to the Alaska Territory. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the squadron flew anti-submarine patrols over the Gulf of Alaska. When the Japanese invaded the Aleutian Islands in June 1942 the squadron was reassigned to Fort Glenn

Army Air Base on Adak Island. It began flying combat missions over the captured islands of Kiska and Attu Islands. (2)

Grandad Wiggins always said that Dad would never tell him anything about his service in World War II. That was confirmed by his colleague, Ben Candelaria, who replaced him in Bremerhaven, West Germany where Dad was transferred in the 1950s. Mr. Candelaria wrote to me in 2011 that Dorman “. . . was very close mouthed about his personal life and trying to get any information from him was like trying to get blood out of an onion!” [We say “turnip” in Kentucky.] He also said that Dorman had a temper, which was evident on one occasion when they were attending a function in Bremerhaven. Someone stole Dad’s military raincoat either accidentally or intentionally. “Bud took off like a shot and we never knew how he determined who the culprit was, but he returned with his raincoat.” (3)

The Department of the Air Force was created on 18 Sep 1947. To oversee intelligence operations, the US Air Force created the Air Force Security Group under the Directorate of Intelligence, Headquarters, US Air Force. Later it was designated the US Air Force Security Service (USAFSS). In 2011, I corresponded with an Air Force colleague of Dad’s and learned that “. . . it looks like your father was involved in the initial actions taken in 1950 and 1951 to form and deploy the 3rd RSM (Radio Squadron Mobile) . . . and its detachment . . . to Adak, Alaska.” (4) That activity took place at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, TX. Grandad and Mamaw visited during the time when Dad and his family were there.



Gerry, Eura, and Orban Wiggins at the Alamo

Dorman early on showed both an interest in military history and a talent for music. The *McLean County News* of March 28, 1930 includes the information that a fifth -grade report he wrote on the World War was one of the two best in the class. The same article notes that he won second place in the fiddlers’ contest at Guffie. “Dorman is a wide awake boy who shows prospects of becoming a real musician.” (5) The instrument was passed on to me. It was the first violin that my son Alan played starting in the fifth grade, and he now owns it. A 1930 article shows that he played a violin solo in the Beech Grove school

music program. He was also a guitar player, and I have a recording of him playing a solo version of the *Twelfth Street Rag*. (6)

Dorman's life in the decades after World War II was filled with travel. He reenlisted for 3 years in November 1945, then again in November 1949 for another 3 years when he was stationed at Brooks Air Force Base in Texas. While at Brooks in 1950, as noted earlier, he was involved in the transfer of the 3rd Radio Squadron Mobile to Alaska and had to travel to San Francisco for embarkation to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage Alaska, and ultimately to Adak, Alaska. It was during this period that he was promoted to Master Sergeant on November 17, 1950. He returned to Brooks AFB in early July 1951.

The commanding officer of his detachment, Colonel John C. Conlin, Jr., had this to say about his Alaska service:

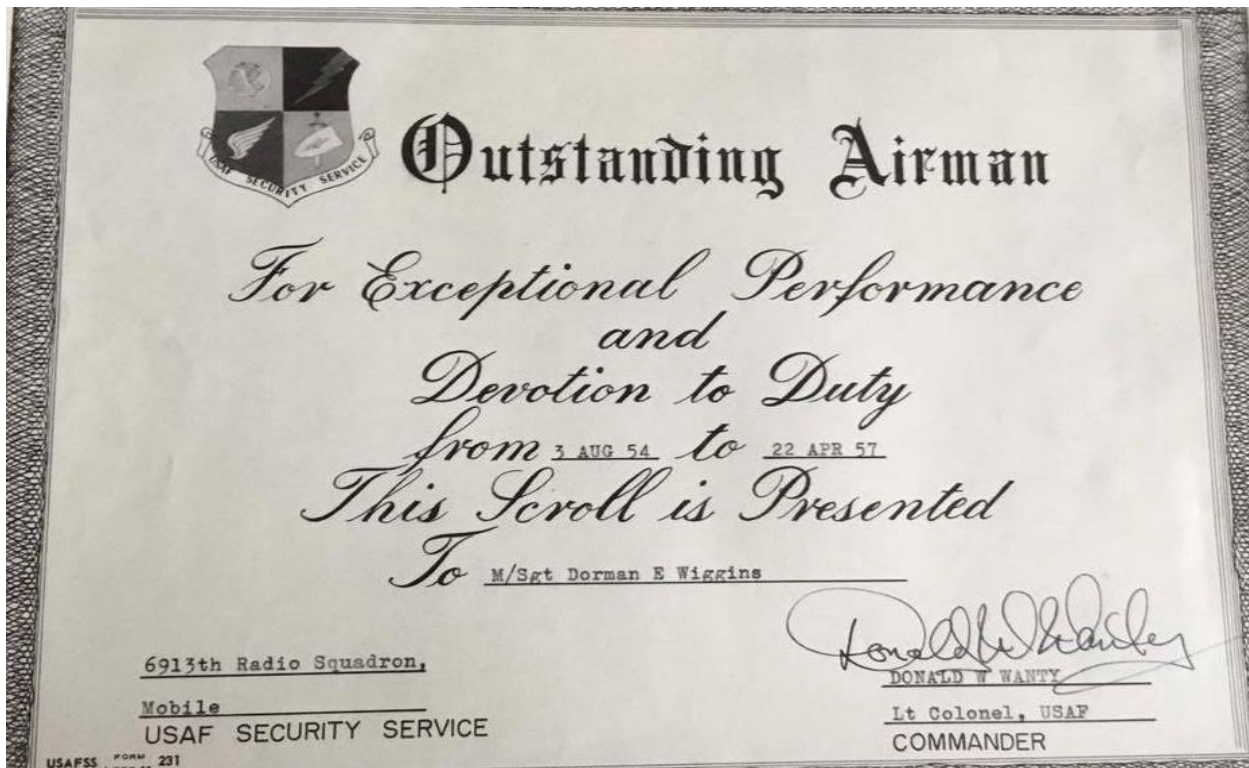
I wish to commend Master Sergeant Dorman E. Wiggins for the outstanding performance in his duties while assigned to Detachment 31, 3d Radio Squadron, Mobile. While performing his duties as Non-Commissioned Officer in charge of Operations he has acquired the respect of all persons associated with him. His judgement and initiative has (*sic*) been exemplary and very worthy of commendation.

Master Sergeant Wiggins is an excellent Airman and possesses the qualities commensurate with those of his equal rank. His abilities as a leader is (*sic*) excelled by few and he has set an excellent example for his subordinates to follow. Master Sergeant Wiggins is a credit to the Air Force and he would be a definite asset to any organization and its commander. It is with deep respect that I commend Master Sergeant Wiggins for a job well done.

When Dad reenlisted in February 1952, it was for an indefinite period. Another Colonel, Gordon W. Wildes, wrote in March 1954 a letter attempting to forestall another overseas assignment for him, saying, "Wiggins is of such stature that we can't lose both at the same time." [referring to Dad and Captain Benson for whom he was an assistant.] Col. Wildes was Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, HQ USAF, during 1953 and 1954. He was the official in charge of the entire US Air Force Security Service, according to a message from Ben Candelaria in 2011. Mr. Candelaria wrote,

It is possible that the reference to "defer his reassignment" applied to your father's upcoming assignment to the 41st RSM in Bremerhaven, Germany. He arrived at the 41st RSM for duty in early August 1954, according to a document in my files. Capt. Benson arrived at the 41st RSM at about the same time (or, perhaps a few months later). (3)

Gerry, Dwight, and Lee accompanied him on the tour in Bremerhaven, Germany. Dad received the Outstanding Airman award for his service in Germany.



By May 1959, Dad and Gerry had bought the house at 3352 36th Avenue South in Minneapolis, but his overseas duty was not over. On February 19, 1959, he was ordered to report to Karachi, Pakistan. Lt. Colonel J. L. Spooner, Commander of the 6937th Communications Group, USAF, noted that Dad served as the NCO supervisor over all operational flights from March 19 to October 30, 1959. He said, "The success enjoyed by this organization in accomplishing its mission was in many cases directly attributed to your ingenuity, knowledge, outstanding technical skill, and leadership. . . . Your emphasis on team spirit and cooperation was a key factor in the success of this organization."

In the spring of 1960, Dad was ordered to leave for Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, arriving on April 17, 1960 for a 36-day assignment whose ultimate destination is unclear from the special order. He left active service on November 3, 1961, with 21 years and 6 months of active duty in the Air Force. I once asked him why he retired with such an odd number of years. He told me that in the latter half of 1961, he could see where things were headed in Viet Nam and he wanted no part of it.

I am thankful that I had a chance to get to know my dad during my adult life and to become acquainted with my half-brothers, Dwight Ellis "Butch" Wiggins and Lee Carroll Wiggins, and their families. Reading through Dad's military service records gave me a good deal of insight into the type of person he really was.



Dorman Wiggins About 1958

1. "Wiggins receiving aviation training." *Evansville Courier and Press*, January 24, 1944, p. 10.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/73d_Special_Operations_Squadron See also: <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180724-the-us-island-that-once-belonged-to-russia>
3. Mom apparently also had a temper, as Aunt Elizabeth Dennis wrote in her autograph book on May 30, 1938: "Nell is mighty nice. Be a sweet little girl & don't have so much temper. You will be much sweeter. Your Aunt Elizabeth"
4. Personal e-mail correspondence with Ben Candelaria, 14 August 2011.
5. *McLean County News* (Calhoun, KY), March 28, 1930, p. 4.
6. WWII recording of 12th Street Rag: http://hoosierpewter.com/WBS/Twelfth_Street_Rag.wma.

The most recent version (5/1/2021) is at: <https://hoosierpewter.com/WBS/WBS-0009.pdf>