

Wilfred Koontz was born at home on March 10, 1919 where he lived with his parents on a farm near Unionville, MD, until he was drafted in 1941 at the age of 21. He served 41 months in the Aleutian Islands, AK, and 9 months in Germany. He was discharged on November 9, 1945, attaining the rank of Sergeant. His decorations include: U.S. Army Good Conduct Ribbon, WW II Victory Ribbon, American Campaign Ribbon, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon with Bronze Star, American Defense Service Ribbon, and the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Ribbon with Bronze Star. Wilfred is the oldest member of American Legion Post 171 in Damascus, MD, and is also a member of VFW Post 10076 in Mt. Airy, MD.

Wilfred's story in his own words: "Before I was drafted, I worked for the Sales & Service department at the John Deere Farm Machinery Company in Unionville, MD. The first day upon entering the Army I was put on a bus from Frederick, MD to Baltimore, MD, then on to Fort Dix, NJ for indoctrination where we received "many shots"! We did not sleep that night! After New Jersey we were sent to Camp Cross, SC where we completed our training. Our company then went to the 71st infantry regiment at Ft. Dix, NJ for a short time. We then took a convoy South to Camp Claiborne, LA where my group was loaded onto trains for Ft. Lewis, WA. At Ft. Lewis we set up guard because this was right after Pearl Harbor, and the country expected the Japanese to strike the West coast at this point.

We left Seattle and arrived at Ft. Richardson, AK in July 1942. Ft. Richardson is very close to Anchorage. After being equipped for the Arctic we landed on Adak, AK, at that time an uninhabited island in the Aleutians. During my 40 months there I spent time on Semya and Amchitka Islands building airplane runways and standing guard duty. I can still recall Japanese planes coming in and bombing the runways, and how cold it was in the Aleutians. For amusement, we would shave our heads just for something different to do. We'd get a six-pack or case of beer each week, but I never drank much, so I would sell my beer to the other guys, and then send the money back home.

There were times when I felt that I wouldn't make it home. One time we got tied down on the island of Attu in the Aleutians. We had already taken the island but we had to clear the Japanese out of their holes. It took a couple of months, and it was a dog-eat-dog fight. Nobody wanted guard duty because the Japanese were very good at sneaking down in the middle of the night, first cutting the throats of the guards on the beach and then the men who were sleeping. I didn't know any better so I just did my job! The Japanese would commit suicide and women would jump off cliffs with their babies because they didn't want to surrender. We would hold the Japanese prisoners in a big pit then put them in a big u-haul flatbed and haul them down to the beach to get rid of them. It was not a pretty sight; it took a couple of months to clear them off the island. It was terrible work!

Free time was non-existent. Food was strictly C-rations, open a can for breakfast, open a can for lunch, and open a can for dinner. For quite a while we slept on the tundra, and that's where we ate our C-rations. After awhile we got 8-man tents. We first dug holes in the ground and then set up the tents in the holes we had dug. By then we got some real good food - powdered eggs, and ate them until we got sick because we hadn't eaten

anything but C-rations until that time. We did not celebrate any national holidays during the entire time I was in AK; it was simply living one day to the next.

We were on a ship scheduled to go to Kiska Island to participate in the invasion and to relieve the combat troops who were there. We had already lived on the islands for 2 years so we were considered Alaskan scouts. We had been scheduled to land but the Japanese had already evacuated by submarine so we saw no combat there. So that's when we came back to the states for redeployment to France, and later Germany.

When the Pacific war ended I had already been transferred to Bad Ems Germany living in Normandy in a castle on the Rhine River. I was still in the 159th infantry regiment but attached to the 106th Line Division. We landed in France and advanced into Germany with the 106th Line Division with our ammo trains and so forth. As we were marching North, we were continually swamped with German soldiers surrendering. Our unit then became a guard center, where we put the prisoners in an enclosure, installed machine guns and mortars to surround the prisoners. My future brother-in-law was bayoneted by a German prisoner, and lost an eye.

The day I arrived back in the US a friend picked me up at Camden Station in Baltimore, and he took me to Ft. Meade to be discharged. Back then my parents didn't even have a telephone and there was no way to call anyone to tell them I was home, so you either hitchhiked or found some other way to get home. It was hard to get around in those days back in the 40's. In the days after leaving service I laid around for awhile then went to Ft. Meade helping to separate troops from the service because I was one of the first to get out. You see, I got out on the point system, but I was not married so that kept me in longer than a lot of boys who were married. We drove buses and met the trains and brought the soldiers back to Ft Meade for discharge.

After I left Ft. Meade my first job was driving a truck, then was moved up to dispatcher. I left that job and went to work at the Roby Mills General Store in Damascus; Brown Williams was running it after he bought it from Mr. Roby. I then went into painting with Gilmore Hurley. After that I worked for KC Engineering Company in Rockville MD for about 4-5 years, after which I worked at Walter Reed Army medical center as a firefighter for 5 years. I then went into business for myself and bought Bailey & Koontz Appliances, which became K&K Appliances, in Damascus. I sold out in 1976 and have been retired since then."

Additional Questions & Answers:

Q.What skills and lessons did you learn in the service?

A. Mostly I guess to live with other people was one of the best things. Also, how to get along with my fellow man because we had to live so close.

Q. In combat were there specific things that stick out in your mind?

A. Nothing jogs my memory; pretty much routine, played cards and did what we could to pass time.

Q. Who was your best buddy?

A. My best buddy was Frank Gogolla, our No.1 gunner. He lived in New York, and we were great friends. I was in upstate New York some time ago and couldn't find any Frank Gogolla so I assume he's passed on.

Q. Did you have any heroes, or someone in particular you looked up to?

A. No heroes.

Q. What influence did the Army have on your life?

A. Even though I grew up on a farm those were hard days. The Army, taught me to work hard in civilian life and succeed.

Q. Why did you join veteran's organizations?

A. Because when I came to Damascus everyone I knew joined and thought it would be nice fellowship, know the community, and keep in touch with everyone in the area.

Q. Did you leave a girl behind?

A. Yes, my wife Margaret; I came back and married her.

Q. Did you use the GI Bill?

A. No

Q. Who was it that you most that you counted on?

A. I had a squad, and I was in a battle in the Aleutians, and I depended on each man to do his job. We relied on each other, and had to count on each other to live through the battle.

Q. What was your most happy moment other than the end of the war?

A. Nothing happier than getting home.

Q. How were you treated at home after the war? Was there a parade?

A. Not much recognition back in those days, we sneaked in, and went back to work. I grew up in Unionville, MD. I just wanted to get away from the war and get on with my life.

Q. Did the government treat you fairly after the war?

A. I guess they did. They didn't give me too much, but they didn't give me anything I didn't deserve. They had the GI Bill but I didn't want to use it, I wanted to do it on my own.

Q. What is your strongest memory, what stands out most, what moment?

A. German troops surrendering. They were lined up to be counted, and if one fell he would be picked up by his German buddies, and once he was counted they let him fall back down. That was hard.

Q. Sum up military service and what it means to you today.

A. Military service is a great tool to teach men to become great citizens. I traveled to many countries and I saw a lot of things that I never knew existed. During my travels I became more educated and more streetwise. I would not trade my experiences for anything but I would not care to do it again.