

VOICES OF 1968

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

University of Delaware Library, Museums & Press

TIMESTAMP DOCUMENTATION

Notes from Kennard R. (“Ken”) Wiggins, Jr., interview

Interview Date: Friday, May 11, 2018, 3:30 pm

Interview Location: One-Button Studio, Morris Library, University of Delaware

Interviewer: L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin

Note taker: John Caldwell

Time (H/M/S) Topic/Notes

- 00:00:00 Introduction with names and location of interviewers and interviewees
- 00:00:30 **Where were you in 1968?** Wiggins as a student at the University of Delaware. Remembers living on East Main St. in Newark during the fall of 1968 (lived in 8 different places as an undergraduate). Art major.
- 0:01:45 Did not do a lot of student activities, had to pay his way through college. Worked part time on the graveyard shift at the Newport Du Pont chemical plant. Wiggins rode his bike to/from work. Based on his memory, tuition at the time was around \$150/semester.
- 00:03:20 Wiggins graduated from high school in 1964, began at the University of Delaware in 1966. Started as an undeclared student. **Mandatory requirements:** liberal arts requirement; struggled with the foreign language requirement; mandatory course on the history of Delaware with Dr. Munroe; mandatory ROTC for male students. For him, ROTC wasn’t difficult because Wiggins was a member of the Delaware Air National Guard (DEANG). Flunked out of his first undergraduate course, was of draft age, able to earn a spot in the National Guard.
- 00:05:22 ROTC Walk-off. Agreed with SDS and others that mandatory ROTC was not a good idea. Many reasons for not wanting ROTC on campus, depending on the student: some students objected to the war, others felt that the Army had no place on a college campus. Meeting with Ray Ceci, George Wolkind which Wiggins attended to disrupt ROTC parade. Parade field for ROTC was located in 1968 where Amy du Pont Music Building is located in 2018. Wiggins’ role was to drive by in his VW van, which was painted like “flower power,” and honk the van’s horn which was the signal for the walk-

off. Only a handful walked off, a group also walked on. In coverage of the incident, it was reported that a VW van “sped away” from the scene; Wiggins “didn’t speed!” While the demonstration was a failure in the moment, it worked in the long run as the University did drop the requirement for ROTC.

00:08:25 Wiggins was not a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), but was friends with members. Knew and had friends who fled to Canada to avoid the draft, had friends who were sent to Vietnam. In order to avoid the draft, Wiggins tried to get into the National Guard. Initially waitlisted, Wiggins tested very well, and four positions open, all of which were for engine mechanics. Saw Guard as a compromise, an honorable way to serve without having to go to Vietnam.

00:10:33 Was sympathetic with those who protested the war, attended teach-ins, but was not overly active in anti-war movement. Went with Tom Daniels to marches in Washington, D.C. Remembers lots of people on the National Mall. Time on the Mall was a lot of milling around and talking with people, remembers driving to College Park and picking up more people. Doesn’t remember a lot of details about specific speakers.

00:11:25 Phoenix House, located at 20 Orchard Road, was a coffee house in Newark where members of SDS and other like-minded people (UD students, faculty, members of the community) would meet. Wiggins lived at the Phoenix House, rented a room for \$20/month. Run by Presbyterian minister Bob Andrews. Friday and Saturday nights, would have folk music and poetry readings, selling coffee and food. Wiggins worked as a coffee house manager at the Phoenix House for a while. There was a meeting room upstairs where SDS would hold events.

00:13:20 Not involved with *The Heterodoxical Voice*, but does remember reading the publication. Can’t say for sure, but believes that it is likely that staff worked on the *THV* at the Phoenix House.

00:14:00 Teach-ins, many were hosted at the Phoenix House. Attended a few of the discussions, but does not remember anything influential from the teach-ins or any of the readings from the time.

00:14:55 **Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination and aftermath:** When he joined the DENAG, he did not want to wear a helmet and carry a gun, even though it was issued to all members. Remembers being called by Sergeant, notifying him of his activation. Assembled at New Castle Air Base. Went into Wilmington on trucks up the newly constructed I-95, remembers seeing pillars of smoke and the aftermath of the “city in flames.” Was stationed at the Armory on 12th and Du Pont, near Little Italy. There were hundreds of Guardsman, from both the Air National Guard and Army National Guard.

00:17:00 As the night went on, there were periodic call-outs, 10-15 people at a time, forming squads to guard critical infrastructure across the city, e.g., AT & T building that was a key center for East Coast communications.

00:18:08 Two volunteers were requested, Wiggins volunteered with his friend Tom Naylor, who was also a mechanic. Employed as shot guns, driving around with captains in station

wagons, dropping off food to guard stations across the city. Did this duty for several days, allowed him to see a lot of different places in the city.

- 00:19:00 During the afternoon, members would train at the Armory. Guardsmen lived at the Armory, were not able to leave. Drinking at night when off duty. Stationed near Little Italy, heard a lot of bravado talk from men in the community talking about their ability to “take care” of their community if “those folks” tried to start trouble in their neighborhood.
- 00:20:30 After two or three nights, starting showing stag films from 1930s smuggled “over the wall” from Little Italy; eventually grew to a regular showing of more recent content, paid entertainment for the Guard while they stayed at the Armory.
- 00:21:35 Evening patrol, curfew in effect. Remembers once, on patrol near Rodney Square, stopped a vehicle, which pulled up next to the patrol car with African American passengers. Guard pulled weapons on the car, turned out to be a woman in labor. Guardsmen escorted her to the hospital.
- 00:22:30 Most of the Guardsmen were 18-22 years old, around his age. Reserve/Guard members tend to trend older than active duty military. His uncle was stationed at the Armory with him. Multiple family members in the Guard. Stationed at Armory for 3-4 weeks. Also spent a couple of weeks stationed at the Dover Armory. Wiggins wasn’t sure why they were stationed in Dover. Spent time in the Armory doing the same training activities in Dover as in Wilmington.
- 00:24:00 Never received training for handling a situation like Wilmington. After Wilmington, Guard received regular civil disturbance training during the summer. In lieu of guns, should have had batons, shields and body armor to control the situation. “No business with guns” in that sort of situation. People have learned a lot since then.
- 00:26:00 Did not observe riot conditions while he was in Wilmington, incident had ended by the time he arrived, but saw evidence of destruction, broken windows but little or no blood. They were an army of occupation to prevent a resurgence.
- 00:27:15 Released from duty after 5 or 6 weeks. Continuous patrols continued. “Rat patrol” was a volunteer-only duty for extra money to continue street patrol in Wilmington. Rat patrol continued up until the inauguration of Gov. Russell Peterson. Wiggins never volunteered for this duty.
- 00:28:35 There was very little sympathy for the rioters from Guardsmen, who fostered a very “law and order” attitude. This sentiment (“law and order”) was the platform Nixon ended up running on. Between the Guardsmen, there were no intellectual discussions about Martin Luther King, this was seen as a local matter. Members of the Guard came from the community, attitudes reflected those of the community.
- 00:31:00 He remembers being glad to be out of the Armory. Friends were curious about what he saw in Wilmington.

- 00:31:55 Reading *The Heterodoxical Voice* and its coverage of Wilmington, found it “turgid,” “dense,” and “full of doctrine.”
- 00:32:55 **Changes on campus:** Girlfriend lived in Smyth Hall, was not allowed in and had to ring the bell at the front door. Girls had a strict curfew on campus. By the end of his time as a student, there were co-ed dorms, the curfew had ended for female students, and students were generally treated more like adults. The ROTC requirement had also ended.
- Foreign language requirement stayed in place. Tried a number of languages, ended up taking four semesters of German at the University of Maryland and had the credits transferred to UD, finally graduating in 1992.
- 00:35:55 1968 was a momentous year, with a lot of big forces moving at the same time. Student riots in Paris. Dr. Ennis . (Robert B. Ennis?), art history professor, made a comment that Wiggins still remembers: “Last time anything like this happened was 1776.” It was a time of revolution, and everyone knew it.
- 00:38:15 Relationship with the Tammi family. Took the bus with Lea Tammi (Leo Tammi’s sister). Remembers the Tammi Egg Farm; his mother bought eggs from them. They were neighbors, Wiggins grew up in fairly rural area of Newark near Sunset Lake Road. Had an outhouse until age 12.
- 00:39:55 Spent 10th and 11th grades at Newark High School. School district split his class, half staying at Newark, he graduated from Christiana High School. Splitting of class was a traumatic experience. Harvey Folk and Pete Heuberger, best friends on the wrestling team, went to different high schools after the split, met in the state wrestling championship. Folk won the match.
- 00:41:30 Was aware of racial issues on campus. Proud that his high school was integrated; he knew some African American students in high school, but the friend groups were not overly integrated. Remembers the n-word a lot growing up, but has spent most of his adult life “moving away from that.” Similar situation in college. Had Arab friends (Sami Bandak), but there was very little interaction between black and white students.
- National Guard and military was integrated, in his professional career had friends and associates who were African American. Worked in recruiting, made it a point to attract minority members to the armed forces.
- Civil War has never really ended, racism alive and well. Dismayed at the lack of progress that has been made over the last 50 years, disappointed that the country can’t do better.
- 00:45:35 Closing remarks/thoughts. MLK has a new meaning for him now.
- 00:46:42 End of interview