

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**ROBERT E. CLAMPITT**

Infantry, U.S. Army, Post-WW II, Korean and Vietnam War.

1995

OH  
113

**Clampitt, Robert E.,** (b. 1928). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

Clampitt, born in 1928 in Terre Haute (Indiana), moved to Madison with his father after his parents divorced. He recalls turning on a radio to listen to Jack Benny when a news broadcast interruption announced the Pearl Harbor attack. Clampitt mentions his reasons for enlisting in the Army in 1946. Clampitt describes his experiences and impressions of his induction at Fort Sheridan (Illinois), basic training at Fort McClellan (Alabama) and intelligence school at Fort Riley (Kansas). He describes the trip to Italy and his experiences serving with the 88<sup>th</sup> Division in Italy along the Yugoslavian border. Upon his return, Clampitt left active duty and joined the 84<sup>th</sup> Division Army Reserve. He talks about getting married and going back to school using the G.I. Bill before mentioning his reasons to return to active duty. Clampitt was assigned to the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and sent to Korea. He talks about working in the intelligence shop and with Operation Little Switch. Clampitt mentions one training incident in Korea where they were surrounded by Korean guerillas and Communists who set the woods on fire around Clampitt's unit. Clampitt describes good training in Hawaii and his assignment to 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Ft. Riley (Kansas). He talks about being an ROTC instructor at the University of Illinois in 1957 and compares it to how he was treated while working in the ROTC department at the University of Wisconsin during the Vietnam War. Clampitt, now assigned to 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Germany, describes working in Berlin along the border, how he could identify Russian officers and a conversation he had with an East German border guard. Clampitt discusses why he volunteered for Vietnam and his job as an advisor to the 52<sup>nd</sup> ARVN Ranger Battalion. He reflects on the Army's goals in Vietnam and comments on the tour of duty rotation. Clampitt describes working for University of Wisconsin ROTC department during the Vietnam War. He returned to Vietnam in 1968 and describes working at Military Assistance Compound Vietnam (MACV). Clampitt recalls differences between two different Vietnam provinces and the effectiveness of the Phoenix program. He comments on the VC defectors and the effects on moral caused by the way the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam. Clampitt's final assignment was at a correctional training facility after which he retired and talks about post military employment and joining veterans groups.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Clampitt (b. 1928) served in the 88<sup>th</sup> Division with the Army of Occupation in Italy, Company K, 34<sup>th</sup> of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during the Korean War and as an advisor in Vietnam with 52 ARVN Ranger Battalion and S2 for the Phoenix Committee. He retired in 1971 and became a police officer for 17 years before retiring from that in 1990.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.  
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 1996.  
Transcription edited by Jim Erwin & John McNally, 2007.

## **Interview Transcript:**

Van Ells: A brief introduction for the transcriber and we'll get going. Okay. Today's date is August 15, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Robert E. Clampitt—I had to get the “E” in there—of Madison, a veteran of the tail-end of World War II, Korea, and the Vietnam War. Good morning. Thanks for coming in.

Clampitt: Morning.

Van Ells: Quite a distinguished career. We'll have a lot to talk about I think. I suppose we should start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Clampitt: Well, I was born in 1928 in Terre Haute, Indiana. Spent my first five years of life in Terre Haute and Bedford and my parents were divorced and they had split custody so my dad moved to Madison. I went to school here and spent my summers in Indianapolis. Got the worst of it weather-wise that's for sure.

Van Ells: Yeah, winter in Wisconsin and summer down there. I suppose that's true. So, at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, you must have been like in junior high or something. You were pretty young.

Clampitt: Yeah, I was an eighth grader.

Van Ells: Eighth grade.

Clampitt: Or ninth. Eighth I guess.

Van Ells: Do you recall the incident? And do you recall what you thought?

Clampitt: We had been out, the family, somewhere. I think we went out to dinner and a movie that day and we got home in the evening so we didn't hear about it as early as everyone else. I turned on the radio and, going to listen to Jack Benny, and there was a news broadcast interruption. I remember that. It said planes had attacked Pearl Harbor, definitely had been identified as Japanese, and then it went on and gave a few things like that. Then my step-mother, as in all cases she seemed to think it was my dad's fault somehow. I know at school we were all agog the next day. That was Monday. And we went down to, I think it was, when did Roosevelt make these speech?

Van Ells: That was the next day I think.

Clampitt: It was Tuesday I believe. And the put the whole school down in the auditorium at East High and we listened to Roosevelt's speech.

Van Ells: Now, you were still fairly young but did you think that this was going to have an impact on your life in some way? Did you even think in those terms at that time?

Clampitt: Well at that time, you know, at that age you still think war is like the movies and my biggest concern was, gee, it will be all over before I can get in the service.

Van Ells: So, how did your life change as a result of the war?

Clampitt: Well, I think it gave us a little more focus in high school. We didn't have the usual shenanigans and of course nobody had cars in those days. Half the grownups didn't have cars; none of the kids did. And we had war bond drives at school and things like this. I think it was an all focus here like the whole country.

Van Ells: Now, as you got a little older and you got closer to the military service age did that change the way you looked at things perhaps?

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: In what way?

Clampitt: Yeah. I had a cousin killed in New Guinea in 32nd Division. He was in the Wisconsin National Guard when he had enlisted then was put in the 32nd. And we'd see each succeeding graduating class going off to war and a guy that sat next to me in the high school band got killed in the Ardennes so you finally realized you know, it's, everybody isn't Sergeant York, that people are going to get killed.

Van Ells: So, you actually entered the service, gee, not till 1946.

Clampitt: Yeah. That's why I say I'm technically a World War II veterans 'cause the war didn't officially end until December 31 so I did get the World War II Victory Medal and the Army Occupation Medal in my first hitch.

Van Ells: Yeah. So, I'll talk about your enlistment in a second but I'm interested in where you were and what you were doing when the war ended. VJ day was just yesterday, the anniversary.

Clampitt: Yeah. I was spending my summer in Indianapolis and went downtown. My cousin Betty was home on leave from the WACS and we went downtown Indianapolis to celebrate and the streets were just jamb-packed. Somebody ran over my foot with their car.

Van Ells: That's something you remember I'm sure. So, when you actually entered the service, you volunteered. For what reason? I'm interested why you volunteered at that particular time.

Clampitt: Uh, several reasons. One, I could still get the G.I. Bill rights and I thought I might go to college. But on the other hand, the situation at home was just intolerable. I wasn't getting along with my step-mother and I wasn't getting along in school and I finally, the hell with everything.

Van Ells: So to get on with things basically?

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: Now, there were, the military, well I guess there was still occupation going on but there was a lot of demobilization going on and I'm interested to know if you had any sort of barriers or problems getting into the military. They were trying to down size.

Clampitt: Not a bit. In fact, they were having a big recruiting drive because there were so many guys going home they didn't have enough to even make their basic commitments to the occupation in what they had. Especially they were short of NCOs and officers. In fact, stupid me, I turned down a chance to go to OCS after basic 'cause I didn't want that five year commitment that an officer had to take. Oh, I'm going to do my year-and-a-half and get out.

Van Ells: And now the rest of the story. So, describe your entry into the military. You had to go get a physical somewhere. You had to go to a recruiter I'm sure. Go get a physical and go off to basic training. If you could just walk me through those steps.

Clampitt: Well, I enlisted here in Madison on my 18th birthday but they let me stay back for two months to finish high school. And my dad was not happy about this, or my mother, 'cause they wouldn't sign for me to go in the Navy at 17 when the war was still going on. So we took a train out of Madison, Chicago Northwestern, and went to Milwaukee and changed trains there and went to Chicago.

Van Ells: Fort Sheridan?

Clampitt: No, downtown Chicago. And they put us up in a, I think it was the Dearborn Hotel down on Dearborn Street just off the Loop, but they had a room upstairs that the Army had leased. It was like a barracks or something. And because we had gotten there too late to be inducted that day so we just stayed there and went around, walked around the town at night and came back. Some of the guys got drunk but I didn't; I didn't drink yet. And we had our first military breakfast there; powdered eggs and ...

Van Ells: The first of many.

Clampitt: Yeah. Said, "God, this how they eat?" And then we took the North Shore, load us on the North Shore train, an older Urban Line, up to Fort Sheridan and then we got off there and ...

Van Ells: And started basic training.

Clampitt: Nope. We just got inducted there, took our oath of allegiance and when in the barracks, got our uniforms, got our shots, and a few things like that. VD movies. And some lectures on military courtesy and then we drew all this equipment and some things changed over the wars. At this time I remember the old horse blanket overcoat, the big wool one that was still individual equipment and later on that became unit equipment so you didn't have to carry them around and put that in your duffel bag and that filled up about half of it. And then you had to put in a blanket. At that time blankets were individual property. A blanket, and two summer uniforms, two winter uniforms, two sets of fatigues. They didn't issue too much in those days. Two or three pair of socks. No low quarters. If you wanted those, you had to buy those. And combat boots. It only weighed 125 pounds. And then when we had to catch the train, took the North Shore again to go back to catch the train in downtown Chicago, a regular train, we had to carry those stupid duffel bags from where our barracks was all the way to the North Shore station on the post. And like I said, I weighed 125 pounds and I think my duffel bag weighed about 100 pounds. It was a first of hard work. And then we took a train there and all those guys that enlisted, we were all in uniform and all, all in one car here. I remember we went to New York Central I think to start with. Big four route. We went through Cincinnati and Indianapolis and Chattanooga and I think we must have changed in Louisville or Nashville somewhere. I don't remember, yeah we did in Chattanooga, we changed trains.

Van Ells: And you're heading for Fort Benning? Or where were you heading?

Clampitt: Nope. Fort McClellan, Alabama.

Van Ells: And so that's where the basic training took place. Now, I was in basic training myself but 40 years later and in the Air Force so it's not necessarily compatible type of thing. One of the things I remember was there was a lot of screaming and yelling and a lot of expletives and insults and that sort of thing. Was that your experience?

Clampitt: Oh, yeah. I could, well, if I could digress a little bit—when I was a drill sergeant later on we had to make up the beds for the recruits. And of course it was strictly “don't do this and don't do that”, and no swearing. Of course, that was pretty well ignored. But troops came in, they were to find their beds already made, you know, the home away from home. But we came up there to shacks—that's what they were, tar paper shacks, not even these two-story barracks, just one story shacks, get one squad in each one, double-deck bunks, and people hollering and screaming. And we'd sat on the train in Alabama somewhere for God knows how long and got off after it got dark so we're seeing our new home here after the sun has gone down. Well, it's late at night 'cause this is summer. It must be after 9:00 or so. It's late in the evening. All the cadre men screaming at us and we had to go to the supply room. We had to draw a mattress, and a mattress cover, and a pillow, and a blanket, and carry that with all the

other stuff up to where our hut was. And being insulted every step of the way, you know. Quite a change from—you know, home didn't look so bad as I thought it was. But we never had sheets the whole time we had basic. All we had was the mattress cover and the blankets. They did give pillow cases but no sheets.

Van Ells: I suppose it was warm enough that you didn't need them.

Clampitt: It would cool off at night. Fort McClellan's up in the hills and you'd need a blanket at night usually.

Van Ells: Now, I'd like to jump ahead a little bit. You're kind of unique. You're the first drill sergeant I've interviewed so if we could jump ahead and talk about your experiences as one. Perhaps you could explain the logical of the reason behind this sort of discipline. Or is there one?

Clampitt: Well, I was one of the first ones. I went through the second class at Fort Ord in '65. The first class was the ones who were going to teach the second class. And I had given basic before. Once when I was in the 1st Division we were giving basic training in our regiment and I was, gave basic one other place too. Fort Riley also. So I had given basic training before but they decided that the basic wasn't professional enough and they weren't picking anybody for it, you know, just an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] in the slot and go there and there was no particular training for the people getting basic or anything. Basically, they were copying the Marine Corps with the drill instructors and some guys got to go to Marine Corps Drill Instructor school. I didn't. I would have like to have. It was an intensive course and then you learn all the things that you should have known and didn't know. Army training programs and purpose of everything, leadership, and so forth and so on. They were hand-selected. You had to have, they didn't want any stupes doing it, you know. I mean ...

Van Ells: Sure.

Clampitt: ... you're trying to give the guys a favorable impression of what they're getting into. It was very interesting training and although I think I threw one of the instructors once. We had a major up here that was going on and on about things I already knew and then he came up with a real good question. He said, "What would you do if you discovered that one of your recruits was a homosexual?" And I raised my hand and he says, "Yes, sergeant." and I said, "I'd move him into my room with me." And that was not the answer they wanted.

Van Ells: I'm sure it wasn't.

Clampitt: One thing that helped me through the Army, I've always had a sense of humor and I found a lot of majors and colonels have no sense of humor at all. Some people take this whole thing serious, you know.

Van Ells: We'll come back to this I'm sure. Going back to the '40s here. You finished your basic. First of all, what did your training consist of at the time? You have weapons training and military courtesy.

Clampitt: Yeah we had, the only intensive weapons training we had was with the M1 rifle 'cause we were taking infantry basic. And they had shortened basic to only eight weeks at this time. It really was too short. You got the rudiments, you know. Our tactical training was very poor. We had some but I thought it was very poorly done. Bivouac was only one night and everything had been condensed. Our squad training was terrible. We never had any platoon or company exercises. Really didn't seem adequate training to me. And I found out later it wasn't. That got proven in Korea when the eight basics got called out of Japan occupation to go to Korea. Frankly got the shit kicked out of them.

Van Ells: Yeah, eight weeks isn't terribly much. Now, how long was it between your basic training and the time you went to Italy then?

Clampitt: Almost three months because I ...

Van Ells: You had some sort of training, inter ...

Clampitt: Yeah, I got interviewed and I had a high Army qualification test score. It was high enough for OCS which I turned down. I think the basic for OCS was 110 or 115 and I think I had a 126 at that time or something so they wanted me to go to intelligence school and I said, "No, I don't want to go. All I want to do is be a rifleman." and they made me go anyhow.

Van Ells: To intelligence school.

Clampitt: Yeah. I was at Fort Riley, Kansas at that time, as part of the cavalry school. Actually I think somebody was looking out for me up there because it was a good school and—it was eight weeks long—then I took my week, only got a week's leave. So then I went to Italy. But 24 years later somebody going through my records in Vietnam says, "Hey, we need an intelligence sergeant and we don't have any school trained people." and someone went through my records, "Hey, here's a school trained man," so they came down out of the district RFPF advisor and says, "Do you want to take over a province NCOIC [non-commissioned officer in charge] for intelligence?" and I says, "Well, all right. I suppose I could. I don't really want to." and he said, "Well, you're going to do it anyhow. You're the only school trained man we've got." and I said, "That was 1946." you know. This was 1968. So, lucky I have a retentive mind. I didn't have too much trouble fitting in. Actually I was in an MI [Military Intelligence] slot. Supposed to have a school trained for military intelligence and a branch of that and I had a dud captain who was passed over—all his contemporaries were colonels—and he was gone all day doing whatever it is he did when he wasn't ...

Van Ells: This is in Vietnam.

Clampitt: Yeah. So I ran the whole “2” shop [S-2] myself.

Van Ells: What sort of training do you do for intelligence school? If you’re not divulging national secrets.

Clampitt: No, I don’t divulge any. A lot of things I did in Nam were classified and I still don’t let people know what those were. When I was working with PRUs, Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, on the Phoenix Program, it was all classified. And then I got back here and watched some local television and found out anybody that was in the Phoenix Program was a war criminal, according to the university.

Van Ells: Again, we’re jumping ahead. I’m interested in that sort of thing. In 1946 in your training, what ...

Clampitt: Had aerial photo interpreting and order battle.

Van Ells: I see.

Clampitt: ... ‘cause I had stereo vision and actually these stereo opticums and major shadows. By doing that you can determine the length of or what the building was from the time of day and stuff. It was pretty involved.

Van Ells: To try to figure out which enemy units are over there and what their strength is and that sort of thing.

Clampitt: Uh hum. From aerial photo interpreting. To me I liked order of battle better. That was a lot more interesting.

Van Ells: What was that?

Clampitt: That’s when you learn the enemy units and their histories and what their officers are known for. Some units are known as defensive and some as aggressive and things like this. I thought that was much more interesting. And that’s basically what I did in Nam when I got there. I didn’t do any aerial photo interpreting.

Van Ells: Now, in your training in 1946, was there an enemy that you were looking at? Or was it general?

Clampitt: We were already—Russia was already.

Van Ells: That’s what I’m wondering.

Clampitt: Yeah, we were.

Van Ells: This was before the Truman Doctrine and everything.

Clampitt: Churchill had already made his speech on the curtain of iron from Stettin to the Adriatic and at Missouri. And the Russians were, they hadn't blockaded Berlin yet but that was only a couple of years away.

Van Ells: So by this time already, when it comes to learning enemy units it was a focus on the Soviets at this time.

Clampitt: Yep.

Van Ells: Okay.

Clampitt: And even though I didn't get back in intelligence for many years I still read everything I could on all of these things and I overheard my company commander in Germany once talking about me to another company commander—and he says, “I got a sergeant in my company. If you need a class on the Russian general's staff ten minutes from now, he can give it to you.” And I felt, oh, that was nice. At least compliment.

Van Ells: Uhm, okay. So, you went to intelligence school and then you went overseas. Finally.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: This had to be the fall of '46 at the time.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: I always ask my subjects to tell me about their voyage overseas. We'll have to go through this several times. If you could just tell me how you got to Italy and where you went to.

Clampitt: Well, we took a train of course to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. And then we had several what they call “show down” inspections. You had to lay all your stuff out and make sure you got it. One isn't enough. They do it over and over. I don't know why. They had some idea that a soldier doesn't, likes to be kept busy, that we don't want to goof off at all. And we were there about a week. Brought our shots up-to-date. Then we had to go through lifeboat drill on dry land. They had training aids built up here, a wall, then it was like a ship's rail and the lifeboat, and you'd have to go down, and they had a cement pond that you landed your lifeboat in, then you had to go down cargo nets to them, in case your ship sunk. I thought that was kind of foolish with the war being over. They said, no, there's still a lot of loose mines floating around in the Mediterranean and Atlantic around Gibraltar. And then I, we went over on a troop

ship, I can't remember, it was the Muerer (sp??) or the Megs (sp??). I went over on one and back on one but now I forgot which is which. But I found it's absolutely the worst way to travel ever invented is a troop ship. The only thing worse would be a Roman galley. The only difference between us and them, we didn't have to row the boat. But it was terrible. And I got so sea sick. I was sea sick the whole time. I missed one lifeboat drill and I just stayed in my bunk I was so sick, and the sergeant that was in charge of us came down and gave me all kinds of hell for missing the lifeboat drill and he says, "The ship could have been sinking." and I says, "Better luck next time."

Van Ells: So, how long did this trip take?

Clampitt: About ten days. Troop ships didn't go fast.

Van Ells: Yeah. And you debarked where? Naples or Rome or something?

Clampitt: Uh, Leghorn.

Van Ells: Leghorn.

Clampitt: Or Livorno.

Van Ells: And you hooked up with the 88th Division.

Clampitt: Yeah. We stayed at Leghorn. They said we were going to stay overnight, they fed us a meal, we had some really crummy—"Reppo Deppos" [Replacement Depots] are known for being crummy anyhow—and just about the time we got set up to stay there all night, we had at least a quarter inch of water on the floor, we had to hang shoes up and stuff, and just got our bunks made up and some sergeant comes in and says, "Hey, change in plans. We're leaving tonight. Pack up." Go get everything packed up and went on down to the railroad station and got on a train to, we didn't even know where we were going, and they put us on a train and they had you going to the 88th Division. Well, okay, fine. And the train, we left at night so we couldn't see too much of Italy. In the morning they gave us K-rations to eat for breakfast. About froze to death on the train. It was cold. It was winter. It was interesting 'cause none of us knew any Italian and their heat thing said "calda" (sp??) and "freda" (sp??). Well, we thought "calda" (sp??) must mean ...

Van Ells: Cold.

Clampitt: ... "cold" and "freda" (sp??) must mean "hot." It was just the opposite. From Latin "freda" (sp??) "frigid" and "calda" (sp??) "cauldron" or whatever.

Van Ells: Like in French.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: So you learned that quickly I'm sure.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: Then you hooked up with the 88th. Now, where were they stationed at the time?

Clampitt: Well, they were along the Isonzo River, right along the old World War I battle ground, from the Austrian frontier all the way to the Trieste, manning a series of outposts.

Van Ells: What did occupation duty consist of? Was it "la dolce vita" in Italy as they say?

Clampitt: Well mostly guard duty and very little training unfortunately. I felt we should have had the most of the training. We had just road marches and go to the rifle range and qualification. But we had had familiarization training in basic training of all the weapons but not for record. And here still we didn't know anything but if I would have had to take over the 50 caliber or something if something happened, I wouldn't have known what to do with it. Or the mortar. We had very poor weapon training. And we learned your basic weapon and that was it. The mortar men learned mortars but no one else did. Then of course they've gotten over that now. You've got to be familiar with every weapon in a rifle company. You can't just ...

Van Ells: So, what were some of the concerns about occupation duty in Italy? Was it the rise in Fascism again among the Italians?

Clampitt: No but the Yugoslavs were constantly infiltrating our outposts and sniping at us. They shot down two C-46s and massed troops on the border. And we did too. And for a while there it looked like we were going to go to war. It was in the end of '46, mostly in '46, and then it calmed down for '47, and then again middle of '47 it started up again. Yugoslavs said that they wanted everything back that had been in the Austria/Hungarian Empire which included Trieste and Gorizia and all of Italy that they had gotten from Austria/Hungary after World War I. And they didn't want the frontiers, we were actually, supposedly sharing an occupation zone with the Americans on, British on one side and Yugoslavs, or the "jugs" as we called them, on the other. And they were going to get part of what we had but they didn't want to wait until the peace treaty was signed. They were constantly threatening to take it and massing troops on the border. You might want to take a look at this afterwards. The lead story here is on the 88th Division in Italy.

Van Ells: Oh, is that right? September 2, 1946, *Life Magazine*. I will take a look at that.

Clampitt: Well, I thought sure, you know, now that I'm a school trained intelligence man I would go right into S2 [Intelligence] section and I went up to 350 Infantry Rifle

Company to get interviewed and I thought, well, surely they're going to put me in headquarters company somewhere and I'll be an S2 sergeant—I was only a private but I'll get rapid promotion and an order to go into the—don't need any S2 people, got plenty of them, got a surplus of them. What we need is riflemen. We're short of riflemen and you've had infantry basic. So I thought, okay. And then he looked over my, "Oh, you played clarinet in the high school band?" I said, "Yup." He said, "Oh, you want to be in the band?" and I said, "Nope, I don't want anything to do with the band." I hated every minute of it. That was one of my parent's ideas, that you had to learn a musical instrument. I didn't want anything to do with it. And he says, "Well, you worked in the theater." I ushered. He said, "Do you want to work in the regimental theater, in the movie theater? We could use a projectionist." I said, "Nope, I don't want anything, don't want to do this. I'll just go be a rifleman. That's fine with me." So I went up to Company K, 350th Infantry. We were in reserve at that time. And a little later they started cutting down the troops just like they did in Japan. You know, we sent vastly under-strengthened units to Korea. From shore to battalion and every regiment. They cut our battalion out so I got sent to another company, Company K which was normally a third battalion company but it was in the second battalion. The whole third battalion as such was deactivated. And then I went up on the Morgan Line. This was a line of outposts. And we were on the farthest north one right on the Austrian/Yugoslav/Italian frontier. It was quite interesting up there. There's a lot of old fortifications from World War I. Tank traps and pill boxes. And we had been through Capretto (sp??) many times which is now in Yugoslavia but was in Italy then. It was where Rommel got his "Pour Le Merite" in World War I, big battle there. Basically, we were holding about the same positions the Italians had in World War I, along the Isonzo. And our outpost, we were a good 30 miles from headquarters, from the company, and we had a long way to get there, over the mountains, and we had communication, we had telephone and we had radio—one of those old ones where they cranked for the generator—and we had to check in I think four times a day on the radio to let them know we were okay. The telephone was never any good because the lines were always cut. They always, we had a lot of partisans in the area.

Van Ells: Oh, is that right? Yugoslavs.

Clampitt: Italian Communists.

Van Ells: Oh, is the right? Who I suppose were sympathetic with Tito's Yugoslavia.

Clampitt: Uh hum. So we were sniped at there but we don't know if it was the Yugoslavs or the Italians doing it. As I say, our phone wires were cut constantly. Sometimes we could tell who was doing it. If it was just a snip, a short section, it was probably the partisans. If it was half a mile or so it was some farmer rewiring his house.

Van Ells: It wasn't necessarily hostile action to do it.

Clampitt: Not always, no.

Van Ells: Did you get much spare time, leave, free time?

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: You were ...

Clampitt: Very little.

Van Ells: ... up on the line so to speak.

Clampitt: Yeah, very little.

Van Ells: How much time did you spend in Italy overall?

Clampitt: A year.

Van Ells: And then you went where?

Clampitt: Back home to be discharged. Camp Kilmer and was discharged there and then ...

Van Ells: So you were discharged?

Clampitt: Yeah. I tried out civilian life for awhile. Joined the Army Reserve and really was always planning on going back in some day. I really liked the Army. Some people hated it; I liked it.

Van Ells: What did you like about it?

Clampitt: I don't know. It's just kind of a sense of belonging to something. Maybe because of being shuttled back and forth. I was a divorced kid and never really having one place that was a home. We had two homes, supposedly, and all. I don't know. It just seemed like, I liked the organization and the buddies and belonging to an organization and belonging to something bigger than you are. Just seemed like a kind of life I enjoyed.

Van Ells: So you did try out civilian life for awhile you said.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Did you come back to Madison?

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Tell me a little bit about what you did. You mentioned you were interested in the G.I. Bill. Did you work?

Clampitt: Yeah. I came back, took, finished up some courses I needed to get into college at the old VoTech—chemistry and math and stuff—then I went a semester to Madison Business College to be an accountant because my career goal at that time was to be an FBI agent and I needed to be an accountant or a lawyer. I found out after a semester that I'm sure no accountant.

Van Ells: Now, as for the G.I. Bill, did that cover your expenses?

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: You had no problems financing your education. That wasn't a concern.

Clampitt: No. I was living at home. I think I probably would have finished but then I bought a car and I found out a car takes a lot of money to keep running, especially when it's ten years old.

Van Ells: Right. This had to be about '47 or '48.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: I suppose the car shortage wasn't as bad as it had been in '45 or something.

Clampitt: No, I had a 1940 Ford.

Van Ells: Yeah. 'Cause there were programs to buy a car for a vet and these kinds of things. That probably wasn't a concern for you at that point.

Clampitt: Then I thought I'd go back to school again and then I got a job out at Madison Gas & Electric. It paid well and so I worked there. I didn't particularly like the department I was in but I stayed there for four years. Got married. That makes an economic slave for the rest of your life. And the Korean War started just before I got married. I was in a regular inactive duty reserve unit, the 84th Division. It was a reserve airborne division. I went on active duty and went to jump school and got my airborne wings. Went to every summer camp and every time I went back with the military, I'm like, gee, I should be here. So I told my wife—and I had one kid then, too, by then—I said I'm going back in the Army. And I could go back with my reserve—I had made staff sergeant in the reserve—and I could, rather than enlisting, I took a two year active duty commitment. What they call voluntary recall to active duty. I thought our reserve unit would get called up and they didn't.

Van Ells: They never did.

Clampitt: No. So I went back in in '53 and about a year-and-a-half later I re-enlisted in the regular Army.

Van Ells: I see. I want to go back just a little bit. It's after the World War II part that I ask my subjects, did you experience any sort of readjustment problems back in society and did you join any veteran's organizations? Now, you had this window of about three or four years of civilian life so this might not apply to you but if you ...

Clampitt: I joined the VFW.

Van Ells: Right after the war.

Clampitt: Uh hum. It made my dad happy more than anything. He belonged. He was a World War I vet. I joined the VFW and was fairly active in it. I didn't have any trouble readjusting 'cause like I say I hadn't been in that long. The only trouble readjusting was living at home 'cause if you go back home—I couldn't afford not to live at home at that time when I was going to school—but your parents think you're still 12 years old no matter where you've been or what you've done, you know, and they want you home at night and I could, well, I don't come home until at least an hour after the taverns close. And all that kind of stuff.

Van Ells: Their little boy grew up. He had been overseas and ...

Clampitt: Yup. But now he's ...

Van Ells: ... that sort of thing.

Clampitt: ... supposed to go back home and be a little boy again.

Van Ells: So I could see where that, I actually had that sort of experience myself so I understand that.

Clampitt: Yeah. "Well, you're living in my house you'll live by my rules," that type of thing.

Van Ells: Yeah. So, you re-enlisted then.

Clampitt: Yeah. Get that big bonus.

Van Ells: You got a bonus to re-enlist.

Clampitt: Yeah. It was, I was thinking about going when it was only \$300 mustering out and \$300 re-enlistment bonus and then they came out with this huge, huge bonus of about \$1200 counting your mustering out pay. In 1954 that was all the money in the world you know. People were making \$3000 a year. I can remember once I thought, boy, if I could ever make \$5000 a year I'd really be on top of the world.

Van Ells: So you went back in in '53. Now this is as the Korean War is winding down. If you'd just describe your sort of re-entry back into the military. Did you have to go through any additional training? Or what sort of steps ...

Clampitt: I went through Fort Sheridan to be reprocessed and issued equipment and everything and then I went to Camp Attaberry, Indiana and I was supposed to take Basic again because they had found that guys who had been out or who had been in reserve weren't up to snuff. But I was a staff sergeant so they just gave me a platoon of Basic trainees and I took them through Basic. I learned as they did. Then after that I got sent to Oakland for overseas shipment.

Van Ells: And you went to Korea.

Clampitt: Went to Korea.

Van Ells: Did you get there before the war ended?

Clampitt: Just got there and it ended.

Van Ells: You had impeccable timing.

Clampitt: Yup. Went 24th Division and we were down in Koje-do [POW island camp] guarding prisoners. So I took part in the Operation Big Switch, the prisoner exchange.

Van Ells: Describe that to me. The Korean War is, I'm not as well-versed on Korea as I'd like to be so explain this Operation Big Switch.

Clampitt: They had had an earlier one when the war was still on, Operation Little Switch, and sick and wounded were exchanged. And this was the big exchange when we sent all—and the 24th Division handled this—and we had, were sent from Koje-do up to the Seoul area, Seoul and Inchon area, and we handled all the Chinese prisoners, brought in interpreters and stuff. Had to interview every Chinese prisoner to see if he wanted to go back to China. And a lot of them ...

Van Ells: And so you did these interviews.

Clampitt: The interpreters. And we did the administration work.

Van Ells: What did you find among the Chinese soldiers?

Clampitt: A lot of them, quite a few of them didn't want to be repatriated. They wanted to go, but the only chance, the only place they could go was Formosa and we had Nationalist Chinese officers there talking to them too.

Van Ells: So in a case like that what would happen to them? Would they go to Taiwan?

Clampitt: Yeah, uh hum. We had decided there would be no forced repatriation.

Van Ells: And the Communists said “fine.”

Clampitt: No. They weren't very happy about that.

Van Ells: I know there was some tension there.

Clampitt: They had the same thing after World War II. The Russians wanted all their people back whether they wanted to come back or not.

Van Ells: I see.

Clampitt: They didn't want to go back 'cause they knew they were deserters and knew what was going to happen to them. I think the Chinese were kind of afraid, too, because they had surrendered and didn't want to go back. And then we had Syngman Rhee and his person there and saying that he was going to stop the whole thing or he was just going to let them all go so we had the trains taking them from prison camps up to Inchon or Panmunjom actually where there final stuff was, and we had to have, well, I made one mistake. I got back in S2 work here. I got, someone else had found I had been to school and they put me in Battalion S2 so I was working S2 on the train business here and monitoring the rail traffic and the control tour and keeping track of the trains and the South Korean units in the area. Kim Due Shun was the Korean provost marshal, and he was as crooked as they come, and he said he wasn't going to permit this. For a minute I thought we were going to go to war with Korea. It went off, actually, without a hitch.

Van Ells: Remarkable considering the stickiness of the whole situation.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: So, after the exchange then you were again kind of a—well, Korea was still tense.

Clampitt: Yeah. We went up ...

Van Ells: I mean there had been an armistice but there was still ...

Clampitt: We went up into what was formerly North Korea, north of Congchon, and were in reserve there behind the truce line until my time was up and I went back to the States, I actually went back to Hawaii.

Van Ells: So, what sort of, describe your daily life in occupation Korea. Or post-war Korea I guess. I mean, what did you do? Did you look for Communist infiltration? Was there sniping?

Clampitt: Not where we were. We did a lot of training and a lot of patrolling out North of where we were and the Wonsan Reservoir. Very serious here.

Van Ells: I was going to say, was there more of a concern here for a flare up again ...

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: ... more than there was in Italy?

Clampitt: Yeah, it looked like it could flare any time.

Van Ells: Did you actually get shot at again?

Clampitt: Not that I recall. But we did get, on one training problem we did get surrounded by Korean guerillas, Korean Communists, and they set the whole woods on fire around us.

Van Ells: That can kill you, too.

Clampitt: Yeah. And we found a road out and got out of the fire encirclement. But nobody shot at us during that.

Van Ells: So you stayed in Korea how long then?

Clampitt: Fourteen months.

Van Ells: Yeah. It didn't sound like it was too long. You went back to Hawaii you said.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Now somewhere pretty soon, if my timing is correct, you had to make re-enlistment decisions.

Clampitt: Yup. I did that in Korea. I re-enlisted for six years.

Van Ells: Now this is the biggy.

Clampitt: Yeah, you get the big bonus.

Van Ells: Now, we've touched on this before. If you'd tell me a little bit more about why you decided to re-enlist and did you make, was this your decision to make the Army your career or was this just another six years.

Clampitt: At this time I hadn't really made up my mind whether I was going to stay or not. I was just kind of, I think I kind of stumbled in my career. I wanted that big re-up bonus 'cause that was a good package of money and said I can finally quit driving ten-year-old cars and drive one maybe only a year old. Plus you could re-enlist for the 25th Division which was going to leave Korea and go to Hawaii and I did like to travel so this was a good chance to go to Hawaii, and my wife could come along, and son. So I guess when I finished that six years, well, heck, you know, I figured I might as well just stay.

Van Ells: So, there was some space between Korea and Vietnam.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: Like ten years.

Clampitt: Yeah. I went to ...

Van Ells: If you'd just tell me a little bit about Army life during that time. Where you were, what you did.

Clampitt: Well, I was in the 25th Division for a year-and-a-half in Hawaii at Schofield Barracks. We did a lot of field training which I thought was good. We went out three days a week, every week, week after week. Plus when we were back we had all the garrison horse shit, you know, inspections and guard mounts and classes and so forth. I enjoyed the field training more. I'll tell you, we were really lean and mean then. There wasn't anybody that was overweight. A lot of guys probably weighed 140 pounds or something like that. And from there I went to the 1st Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. They'd come back from Germany and all my Army career I'd heard, boy, what a great division the 1st Division was, this was the greatest division in the Army.

Van Ells: What did you find when you got there?

Clampitt: Uh, I thought it was in poor shape myself. It was a poor division. They were so "big red one" happy. They were more interested in painting big red ones and blue spades on regimental crests, on everything that would hold them and they weren't doing any decent field training. The only real field training we had was hikes; hikes and bivouacs. We really didn't have any, I don't recall any really decent field training at all. It was good for the PT [physical training] but as for company units and division pride, we did very little. The post was small and they've since taken over a lot more.

They couldn't fire artillery at that time, no bigger than 75 millimeter on account of no impact zone to speak of.

Van Ells: Now at this time you must have been beyond the staff sergeant.

Clampitt: I was sergeant first class.

Van Ells: This is where I lose track of Army ranks then. E7 is technical sergeant in the Air Force and I don't know what that is in ...

Clampitt: Yeah, well, this time ...

Van Ells: ... well, staff sergeant is E7. See I don't know.

Clampitt: At this time a staff sergeant was an E5 and sergeant first class is an E6 and I was an E6 now. And we only went to E7, was the top grade then.

Van Ells: Is this infantry?

Clampitt: Yeah. Still infantry.

Van Ells: So you were an infantry NCO.

Clampitt: Yup.

Van Ells: And so you consisted of, describe what size of unit you operated and what were some of the problems involved in that.

Clampitt: Well, I'll tell you, with that one pair of stripes, E6, I had a squad leader, platoon sergeant, first sergeant in Korea for about three or four months, first sergeant again in Hawaii, a platoon sergeant, first sergeant. Then I went to TDY to instruct at the division NCO academy and then I went to Fort Riley. I was a squad leader again because we were so over strength in master sergeants at that time. It was just, we couldn't get promoted. I wasn't an E7, maybe for ten years I don't think 'cause they were RIFing all these officers ...

Van Ells: I've heard this term but it "RIF?"

Clampitt: Yeah, reduction in force. And a lot of these guys were captains and some were even majors and lieutenant colonels but they were offering the option of being not discharged but sent to a reserve unit, could keep the rank and stay on reserve status in a reserve unit, or if they want to stay in active duty, they could revert to master sergeant. So many of them stayed and stayed as master sergeants that us sergeant first classes couldn't get promoted. There were no slots. There were five E7 slots in a rifle company and we had ten E7s in our company. You're talking to get promoted.

Van Ells: Pretty top heavy, too.

Clampitt: Yeah, it was. Very top heavy in the upper ranks.

Van Ells: So, when did you leave Fort Riley in the 1st Division then?

Clampitt: I left in '57. I put in for civilian component duty for ROTC instructor at the University of Illinois. Of course, I didn't know where I was going. I just put in for ROTC duty. And they went over my records. They didn't want any duds out in the civilian components. You had to send in your picture in uniform and you had to be interviewed and make the cut there. At the same time I put in for OCS. A company commander insisted I go. He thought I was officer material, he said, and I was a year too old. He got me a waiver for it. And then they both came down approved—civilian component and OCS—and he called me in the orderly room and said, "Which one do you want?" And like a dope, I said the civilian component. I've been sorry ever since but ...

Van Ells: Why is that?

Clampitt: Well, I think I probably could have retired a colonel or even lieutenant colonel. And a guy I went to high school with retired a brigadier general. I don't know why he got that high. I think with the Vietnam War coming up I think I probably could have. But I was selfish. It was a six month course and I just didn't want to leave my wife and kids for six months. I'd left them so many times and I said, no, I just don't want another big, long separation. I went to Chicago to Chicago branch of the University of Illinois. I was there for three years.

Van Ells: Now, yeah, at this time, on many campuses, ROTC was mandatory. Was that the case?

Clampitt: It was mandatory at the UW. Or not UW, UI.

Van Ells: UI, Chicago. Describe briefly what you, your duties there as an NCO in the ROTC on campus.

Clampitt: Well, I was an instructor. I taught American military history and drill and ceremonies and individual weapons and marksmanship. I didn't have to do anything with the drill. I just did my instructional duties. And I was faculty advisor to Society of American Military Engineers and also coached the university rifle team and ROTC rifle team. We had two. The university there treated us like we were real people.

Van Ells: You mean real people as compared to who? The Army?

Clampitt: No, compared to the University of Wisconsin when I went there as a ROTC cadre years later. So they had them. We were listed in the faculty catalogues. The enlisted men, we were given instructors ratings and the officers were given assistant professors ratings, and we were invited to the faculty teas, and faculty Christmas parties and stuff. I went to some engineering lectures there. It was basically an, UI is basically engineering is there big thing. And that was a very pleasant life I felt. We had, the first major that was in charge of us, our PMS & T professor in military science and techniques, was a “dick head.” But the second one we got after he left was real good. A good officer and knew how to get the most out of you without having to raise his voice, you know. Very good. It was a very good experience I thought. I think it was the best duty I ever had in the Army.

Van Ells: Yeah, you speak very highly of it. What did you think of the students? Did you get a handle of what sort of young officers were coming in to the Army?

Clampitt: Yeah. Some of them were pretty good. I was surprised. But one thing I started to get a low opinion of the Chicago public schools when they would talk about—I remember I had guys assigned to different elements of reports on the Battle of Gettysburg for one thing and this one guy gets up—and this is a college freshman of course—”and General Meade crossed the Potomac River with three corpse of infantry.” [in the quote the student mispronounced “Potomac” and “corps”].

Van Ells: Some of the rudiments were missing in this.

Clampitt: Yes. I said what are you going to do with those three dead soldiers? And he said, “Huh?” I said, “Those three infantry corpses, what are you going to do with those? Are you going to bury them up there?” In individual marksmanship I remember the kids had to write “kneeling position.” They had to write out an exam all the basic firing positions and you should see “kneeling.” I got “melling,” I got “m-e-i-l.” I thought, my God, have schools quit teaching spelling. I guess they do ‘cause none of my kids could spell either. When I went to school you had to learn to spell. But just to realize they treated us like real people. We were considered members of the faculty there. Their various engineering societies, the whole three years that I was there mine won the best on campus, The Society of American Military Engineers. It was quite interesting. Then a little later, after my first tour in Vietnam, I came to the University of Wisconsin as the operations sergeant here at the ROTC detachment in between my two Vietnam tours.

Van Ells: Now this had to be about ‘69 or so?

Clampitt: Yeah, ‘66.

Van Ells: That’s got to be another story unto itself.

Clampitt: It wasn’t just the students who thought you were shit. It was the faculty, too.

Van Ells: I'll have lots of questions about that so we'll save that.

Clampitt: Okay.

Van Ells: I see that you were in Berlin.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: After you left Illinois then.

Clampitt: I went to Germany in 1960.

Van Ells: 19th Infantry.

Clampitt: Uh hum, 19th Infantry.

Van Ells: 19th Infantry Regiment?

Clampitt: Yeah, regiments at that.

Van Ells: And was that part of the division?

Clampitt: Yeah. Three regiments to a division.

Van Ells: And which division was that?

Clampitt: 24th.

Van Ells: 24th.

Clampitt: Same one I was in in Korea.

Van Ells: I see. And of course you were in Berlin during the wall.

Clampitt: Yeah. We went up in December, just before Christmas, so I got to miss another Christmas with the family. An augmentation force to the Berlin Brigade. That was interesting duty, too.

Van Ells: You arrived in Germany when?

Clampitt: Fall, September of '60.

Van Ells: 1960. So the wall had not been started.

Clampitt: It hadn't been built yet, no.

Van Ells: I'm sorry, I forgot what I asked. You were in Berlin in 1960.

Clampitt: No, we went up in '61.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, when you went to Germany first where were you?

Clampitt: Augsburg.

Van Ells: Augsburg. Okay. And just general Army duties there?

Clampitt: Well, I was in a rifle company. Actually, no, I take that back. Started in what we call "combat support company." I don't know how I lucked out into that. That was the, combat support company had the heavy mortar platoon, the big mortars, 4.2 mortars. They used to be in a separate company but now they were in this company. And the recon platoon that had two tanks, had a tank section, an infantry squad, and a scout section. I had the infantry squad and the re-con platoon. And then it had an antitank platoon and they had these self-propelled 90 millimeter antitank guns. I don't know what else we had. Something else in there, too.

Van Ells: And you were, of course, training for the, in the event of a Soviet invasion.

Clampitt: Yup. That was, we had good training there. We were out in the field constantly.

Van Ells: See, I was going to ask, did you think you were prepared?

Clampitt: Yeah, I think we were. We had good training.

Van Ells: Was there a serious thought that that might happen? 'Cause I would have.

Clampitt: Oh, yeah. The whole thing was that was our enemy and all our training was that way.

Van Ells: I was in Germany in the 1980s. No one believed the Russians were really going to attack. Maybe some people ...

Clampitt: Well, this was right after Khrushchev, you know, said "We'll bury you."

Van Ells: This is a very different time.

Clampitt: Yeah, this is.

Van Ells: And then of course when they started to build the wall then, perhaps describe how that affected you and your physical location.

Clampitt: Well, I really thought at that time we would probably be going to war over this. I told my wife that maybe she ought to consider going back home.

Van Ells: She was there in Augsburg.

Clampitt: Yeah, with the kids. I think we had three then. “Maybe you ought to consider going back home.” I really think this is going to go to war and she didn’t want to, she wanted to stay. They had an evacuation plan—that the civilians were all supposed to get in their cars with their families, and you had to keep a five gallon can of gas in the car, a case of C-rations. But can’t you just see five divisions’ wives and children heading down the autobahn. You think Russian Yaks wouldn’t have strafed that column or Migs? We used to have a monthly alert at different times—two in the morning one time. Never during duty hours.

Van Ells: Of course.

Clampitt: Then we’d have to go out to our assembly area. And even though I wasn’t in the scout section—the guy that had the scout section couldn’t read a map—and they called me many times to make recons from our assembly area all the way to where our front line positions would be. I’d get road conditions and everything. Did that several times even though basically it wasn’t my job. When we went up to Berlin we, most of the guys just trained in riot control but I got to run patrols along the whole length of the American sector.

Van Ells: Now, I assume you had to fly into Berlin.

Clampitt: Yup. No, we took a train.

Van Ells: Really?

Clampitt: Sealed train. I wasn’t allowed to fly because of the sensitive job I had in recon and intelligence work I was doing. I was, I forgot what they called that category, something or other. I wasn’t allowed to fly because I had access to NATO, I had NATO secret clearance. Had to take the train and couldn’t fly.

Van Ells: See I’m surprised that the East Germans and the Russians would let troop trains go through their territory to reinforce a brigade to forestall their invasion.

Clampitt: Yeah. Well, when we first went up, back and forth travel was by train. We went up in the motor convoy but we couldn’t take our weapons with us. Those had to be shipped in. And we stood still for stuff like that, you know. When we go into East Berlin we had to get off the trucks and the Russians had to come and count everybody and when we got to Berlin they had to do it all over again and then we got weapons back when we got into Berlin and we did weapons training there. Like I said, recon platoon, we did a lot of this super intelligence training. I was pretty much up on

everything. I know we went to a class. It was kind of interesting. We went to an old section of Berlin, Dahlem, which hadn't been destroyed in the war. The spooks are operating out of this one big building here, it's a civilian house, and they're all in civilian clothes but the Army's idea of civilian clothes—coats and ties—and then when they were taking us in to give us our super secret briefings here we had to put on civilian clothes with a coat and of course they'd never know we were GIs 'cause we all had close-cropped hair, we're all wearing, even the spooks, are wearing the black low quarters. Nobody had any civilian shoes, you didn't have to buy, wear your black low quarters.

Van Ells: I suspect the suits are all pretty much the same, too.

Clampitt: Yeah. And then they'd park, we went up there in an armored bus and parked a whole two blocks away or a block away, and we got off in a bunch. I said, "Yeah, this is really secret."

Van Ells: It didn't look very, it would look suspicious.

Clampitt: Nope. And then I noticed in the next building over there's some painters wall-papering over there, and our windows are open, and theirs are open, I mean with no curtains or anything. I said, "I wonder if those guys are watching what we're doing." I wouldn't doubt it a bit.

Van Ells: It does seem funny in retrospect doesn't it? So, in Berlin, they built the wall and the tension just sort of melted away I guess. I mean it didn't erupt into war. Just describe what happened in Berlin.

Clampitt: Well, when we made our patrols it was pretty interesting. If we had jeeps with machine guns mounted and sometimes we just took a jeep with a 106 on it and we all had weapons, we had ammunition and field glasses and we were just going to see what happened. I knew the weapons, the German weapons, and I knew their uniforms better than anybody I think. I could tell a—I remember at the class I could tell the difference between the people's police and the Breichauf, the riot police. The difference was the people's police wore long trousers tucked in the boots and the riot police wore riding britches. Very simple to tell them apart. And I knew all the rank insignias and the Russian rank insignias. Once they had, I remember, a newscast. There has been some Russians, a Russian officer or Russian something was seen on top of the Brandenburg gate and—Russians were allowed to be there but East Germans weren't supposed to be, East German troops weren't supposed to be in Berlin, and I spotted them all the time, and I would always report it, and I saw this one Russian officer up there, and not only did I report him as an officer I said he's a cadet from the Seriov (sp??) Military Academy.

Van Ells: He had some insignia on him.

Clampitt: Yeah. And they said, “How’d you know that?” and I said, “From his shoulder boards.” And we had some what were temporary third lieutenants they were called, West Point cadets over there being given tours and I think the Russian military academy was doing the same thing. And I was the only one that ever spotted that. I really looked these guys over with my glasses. I figured you’re out there you’re supposed to be seeing what’s going on and I would try and talk to the border guards sometimes and I only got one that would ever talk to me. And he’d give me quite a long spiel. It was quite interesting.

Van Ells: On what?

Clampitt: On the wall and everything.

Van Ells: What’d he tell you?

Clampitt: I ask, he didn’t even know I was there. Our jeep came up real silent and stopped and I walked up and he had his back to the wall. It was about four in the morning; the sun was just starting to rise. He was there all alone, there’s usually two of them, and he didn’t even know I was there. And I made a practice of always leaving my rifle in the jeep instead of carrying it up the wall. I figured that was showing my contempt for them ‘cause they’ve always got their brute (??) guns and all. And sometimes they’d even point them at you. And I was showing them my contempt for them by not being armed. And I just thought I’d have a little fun with him and I leaned right on the wall, got right on it, and got my binoculars up, looking at him. He turned around and he was surprised. If you take a camera, they turn around immediately. They wouldn’t let their picture be taken at all. So after he got over his surprise—I was fairly proficient in German—and I talking to him about the wall or the mauer in German, and I told him “Come on over” and he wouldn’t. He said he’d like to, told me he’d like to but he can’t. I said, “Why not?” and he says, “Cause the other guard will shoot me.”

Van Ells: So there was someone else around?

Clampitt: Uh hum. The other guard was in the shack. He says, “He’ll shoot me.” and I said, “Well, he’s your buddy isn’t he. Aren’t you guys buddies? Why don’t you both come over.” He said, “We don’t know each other.” and he told me they don’t put with people you know for even from the same part of the country. Your partner’s always a stranger so you never know what his thinking is. So it’s dangerous to even start making. But still we had over 300 border guards came over in the first three months of the wall when it was still the barbed-wire fence. When it got a little big with the guard towers they couldn’t do it anymore.

Van Ells: I was going to ask, just before you started this, and this is related to what I was going to ask anyway. Could you get a sense of the East Germans and the Soviets and their capabilities and their motivations and morale and that sort of thing? You were observing them.

Clampitt: Oh yeah. And not being a general, only being a sergeant who's opinions aren't valued too highly by the higher-ups, at some of the classes when they would tell about the Russian colossus and everything and I used to say, I used to argue with them. I said, "I don't think that Russia's ever going to attack us in Europe." and that was against all the thinking and planning. "Why, why?" And I says, "Well, first of all if they wanted all of Europe, they could have had it in one afternoon when we were first involved in Korea. All we had over there was a skeleton 1st Division and \_\_\_\_\_. They could have had all Europe in a weekend if they wanted it." And they said well, they were afraid of the atomic bomb. I said, "They're not afraid of it now." "Oh, no, they've got it too now. So they're going to have a ground war." And I says, "You're going to tell me that only 20 years after World War II, not even 20, that these Polish and Czechoslovak and East German troops are loyal to Russia? That the East German army is going to attack West German?" I said, "I don't believe that. I don't think they will. I think they would defect in droves." and I think it proved in the end that I was right.

Van Ells: In retrospect.

Clampitt: That they couldn't trust a satellite arms. That was my opinion all along, that the Russians couldn't trust their satellite armies.

Van Ells: That's interesting actually. I do value an enlisted man's opinion having been one myself.

Clampitt: Sometimes we know more of what's going on.

Van Ells: Yeah, I would agree with that. So you left Germany '64.

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: Oh, I was going to ask, did you see the President speak ...

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: ... when he said that he was a \_\_\_\_\_?

Clampitt: Nope. Saw it on the newsreel. I did see Marilyn Monroe in Korea though.

Van Ells: Oh, you did? Tell me about that real quickly, just for anecdotal purposes.

Clampitt: Well, she was going to be down at Kimfoo (sp??) Air Field and we were, this was right after the prisoner exchange and we were still up in the Seoul area then ...

[END OF TAPE, SIDE A]

Clampitt: ... Monroe. "Yes, I do." "No, no. You've got work to do here." so I said, "God dammit, I'm going to see Marilyn Monroe." so I, \_\_\_\_\_ came I said, "I need to borrow the jeep today." "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going down to Seoul and get some more maps, engineer map that was down there, so I went out to Kimfoo (sp??) in my own jeep and saw Marilyn Monroe and just I wouldn't be a complete liar I did go over to the engineer depot and get some more maps. Saw James Stewart in Vietnam.

Van Ells: Oh, is that right?

Clampitt: Had a couple of beers with him.

Van Ells: Oh, is that right? I was about to get to Vietnam. Now, you got there in '66.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: I want to go back a little bit. You were, when you were in the Army you were married and had kids. So your kids are technically "Army brats." Would you just comment a little bit about your family life in the military. You mentioned missing some Christmases and dragging them all over and I'm interested in these sorts of topics anyway.

Clampitt: It takes a good woman to be an Army wife. A lot of divorces in the Army. There's a lot of women who couldn't take it. They couldn't stand being away from their mamas or the rest of their family 'cause when I was in Germany four years, my wife and kids were there three years and I, now that my grandchildren are in South Carolina I can see how my parents must have felt with having see them gone for three years and with her family. It's hard because, it's hard on family life. The Army comes first. You've got two wives. You're married to the Army and then your wife is your mistress or the Army's your mistress.

Van Ells: Or something like that.

Clampitt: Yeah, but the Army comes first and some women can't stand not being first. Duty first, you know. Army, Army, Army. The Army's first and family second.

Van Ells: How'd the kids hold up through all the ...

Clampitt: I think they did it better than a lot of the grownups do. They like to travel. They got to see a lot of different things. They got an education. And the Army did have good schools for the kids.

Van Ells: Right. Yeah, I was impressed by that in Germany. The schools and the housing communities and all that sort of thing. But you're right, the traveling can be hard. Okay. Vietnam. Now, you went there in '66. Now, this is fairly early.

Clampitt: Yeah. I was a drill sergeant. I had volunteered when I was still in Germany. I volunteered a couple of times.

Van Ells: To go to Vietnam.

Clampitt: To go to Vietnam.

Van Ells: Why is that?

Clampitt: I just wanted to see what it was all about. At that time it was just advisor there.

Van Ells: What were people saying about Vietnam at the time?

Clampitt: It wasn't going on, wasn't really up in people's minds 'cause we were in Germany and the Russians are right there. And I had given a class once on, I was a fill-in for something that had to be canceled and the captain asked me would I give a class on American military history, go over all the wars, an hour long. That's quite a subject for an hour but I went through it quite a bit and the principles of leadership and some of the great generals like Rommel and Patton, and I mentioned if you go back over history, you find we're going to have a war every 20 years, basically. And I says it's time for our next war will be in 1965 and I told the class it's going to be in Vietnam. No, no, no. Nobody believed that. Just advisors there. And I said, "Well, wait and see."

Van Ells: Well, now, did you believe that or did you ...

Clampitt: Yeah, I firmly believed it. I wanted to get in on the ground floor. I'd gone to Ford Ord and I became a drill sergeant there. And then I put in for military advisor again and while I was there they, while they are still processing my advisor application, they sent the first American troop unit, Army unit.

Van Ells: '65, yeah.

Clampitt: Yeah. The 173rd Airborne was there. And so I got accepted for the advisor training. I went to Fort Bragg, special warfare school for I think it was six weeks. We had three Marines who had graduated first, second, and third and then they an old Marine sergeant major there in charge of the Marine group that was going through the school and he made these guys study all the time, every night, and I never cracked a book the whole time I was there. I stuffed them in my wall locker and went to town every night and hoot and holler and graduated third in the class. I'd already read all the

books that they were giving us. “Street Without Joy” was one of the textbooks and I’d already read that.

Van Ells: Now, you went to Fort Bragg and took special forces training but you didn’t wear the Korean braids. Correct?

Clampitt: No, no.

Van Ells: You were trained to be an advisor.

Clampitt: Yup.

Van Ells: Okay.

Clampitt: So I went to Vietnam. Left out here at the old airport. They hadn’t built the new one yet in Madison. Went to the old side, you know, on Washington Avenue.

Van Ells: Truax.

Clampitt: In January I think it was. In 26 below zero. About four days later I’m in Saigon and it’s 104. Quite a change.

Van Ells: I’m sure it was. And four days to get over there. It took you ten days to get to \_\_\_\_\_.

Clampitt: I flew, of course. It wasn’t much more comfortable. They had these giant airliners with every seat packed. There wasn’t an empty seat. You know how it rides in coach class in an aircraft. You have to sit like that for the whole trip, very uncomfortable and we did get out and stretch our legs in Wake, or Guam rather, and Hawaii.

Van Ells: Did you have any initial impressions of Vietnam when you got there?

Clampitt: Well, it looked a lot like Korea in a way. It was filthy and very, the construction of buildings was pretty poor. But then again when you never have winter you don’t have to have a basement and an attic and a heating plant. All you need is a bamboo ...

Van Ells: Right.

Clampitt: ... house. I used to get so perturbed later on the newsreels when I’d see them that showing the nasty GIs and Marines burning down a house. I used to hear about that back here at the university, “Well, you burned all the people’s house.” I said, “Well, first of all,” I said, “they’ve got weapons hidden there and we haven’t got time to search their whole house to find out where their grenades and weapons are. The easiest way to do it is just burn it down.” “Well, you burned them out of their home.” I said, “It’s bamboo and grass. They can build another one on a Saturday afternoon. It’s not like you’re out in Maple Bluff burning down the governor’s mansion, you

know. Grass hut, they'll build another one." There was no family heirlooms or anything. Most of them don't even have a bed they've got a hammock, and cook on an open fire. You're not really, like you're burning Shorewood down or something.

Van Ells: So you got to Saigon in four days.

Clampitt: Yup.

Van Ells: You eventually got hooked up with an advisor to the 52nd ARVN Ranger Battalion. That must have been a fairly elite unit.

Clampitt: Yeah. ARVN Rangers were the best troops.

Van Ells: 'Cause I've talked to Vets from Vietnam and they're decidedly split on the ARVN and their capabilities and their motivations. What was your experience with the ARVN?

Clampitt: Well, both my tours were ARVNs and I got along good with them and I thought they were pretty good fighters, most of the time. It depends on their leadership, as it does in any unit, and their motivation. And some of us said, "Well, they don't want to get killed." I said, "Of course they don't want to get killed. I don't want to get killed." But I said, "You've got to look at it this way, you know, they've been fighting for 20 years already and they don't know when it's going to end and we only got to stay alive for a year." The Rangers were good troops.

Van Ells: So as an advisor, what were you advising them to do? I mean, you were training them with weapons, tactics? I mean, what were you doing?

Clampitt: Yeah, supposedly we were supposed to be training them on whatever our specialty was—weapons and tactics. Basically, what we did was just maintain air support for them with radios. We had, we were their link to American air support.

Van Ells: I see.

Clampitt: That was our most important job I think.

Van Ells: Now, this was where? Was this in the Delta?

Clampitt: This was in 3rd Corps. This is when we were up in... northeast of Bien Hoa.

Van Ells: Okay. We have discussed this once before. You were in the Delta at one time. It must have been the second tour.

Clampitt: Yeah, that was the second tour. This was up in the jungle. We'd go out on operations here three or four days at a time and this is triple canopy jungle. And it's kind of

interesting. I liked the Rangers. They were good troops. But the battalion, it's not anywhere near as big as an American battalion. Probably 250 soldiers.

Van Ells: So when they would go out on a mission you would go with them.

Clampitt: Yeah. And we stayed with them in base camp. We had an, where our base camp was in Swan Luc there was an American compound right across the way but we didn't stay there. I mean, we went over there in the evenings, drink some beer with them and see the movies, then we came back to the ARVNs.

Van Ells: I see. I was wondering if you could describe some of the missions. What kinds of missions were you going on at this time? What were your goals and objectives? How did ...

Clampitt: Well, the Rangers were basically what we call "Fire Brigade." If somebody was getting hit somewhere and they needed help, we'd send a Ranger battalion.

Van Ells: So with a moments notice you could call them out.

Clampitt: Yeah, we could go any time. And then in this one big operation, Silver City, American units were out and we were out with them too. Ranger battalions usually didn't do, sustained operations. We were this time though. We were out for at least a week and we only made contact twice I think. Very heavy VC area. Every time we'd go through a village everybody's glowering at you and they've all got VC flags over their doors.

Van Ells: So in many cases there was no ambiguity as to what side a particular village ...

Clampitt: No. In that area, some of these areas there was no government presence at all except when we were there. We ran it the day we were there and when we were gone the VC took it over again.

Van Ells: Now, as I asked you about the East Germans and the Russians in Berlin, did you get a sense of the VC and their capabilities and their motivations? At this time how much NVA presence was there did you notice?

Clampitt: We didn't see any NVA there in 3rd Corps at the time. They were all VC main force units. There were probably some cadre from up north but most of the NVA units were farther north up in 1st and 2nd Corps. We didn't have too many, later they were in 3rd Corps. At this time we didn't have very many, at least not in our area. They were over in the Parrots Beak on the other side along Cambodia but where we were it was pretty much ...

Van Ells: So it was almost always VC?

Clampitt: VC.

Van Ells: What was your sense of their capabilities and morale?

Clampitt: Well, to go through and live like they did they had to have high morale. They had to believe in what they were doing. No two ways about it. I thought they were going to be like Italian Communists. If they got what they wanted they were going to find out it wasn't as good as they thought it was going to be. You know some of these movements are long on promises and short on delivery but when you don't have anything and somebody promises you something and the government has already, has never given you anything, then you're probably going to go with the promises. I think they were motivated. I think we could have won if we'd have put a really concerted effort out. I don't think we really had any idea what we were doing there. The higher-ups. I don't think they knew what they wanted.

Van Ells: That so.

Clampitt: From the President on down.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Clampitt: Clausewitz says, Clausewitz's first rule is "every mission must be set at an obtainable objective." And what the hell our "obtainable objective" was in Vietnam I didn't know and I don't think anybody knew.

Van Ells: Now, is that 20 years of retrospect talking or did you think that in Vietnam?

Clampitt: No, I thought that at the time. I had, I often wondered why does the Army teach Clausewitz in the academies and ignore it in the field. We didn't seem to have any, you go out and take an area, go back to base camp and give it right back to them. Didn't seem like they're, you're not improving that villager's life by coming in their and shooting some people and leaving. You're not making him think, gee, I'd rather work for the government.

Van Ells: Now, you were a career Army person so perhaps you dealt with that sort of thing better than most. Did that sort of seemingly aimlessness have an impact on your morale or on others around you?

Clampitt: It didn't bother me but I know it probably bothered, 'cause we were all professionals and advisors ...

Van Ells: Right.

Clampitt: ... but I'm sure a bunch of draftees in a rifle company, you know, if they've got a reason, you know, or yeah, got to get them dirty Japs for Pearl Harbor or something,

you know. I think how do you build up a, of course, with self-preservation somebody shooting at you you're going to shoot back. It didn't, doesn't seem to be an end in sight and I think that was getting to everybody after awhile. When does it stop? You know, we're doing the same thing four years later and we're doing, and in the same places.

Van Ells: Right. And the one year tour—now, when you first went over, when you went over there as an advisor was it a one year tour like in regular infantry, a grunt? Did that have an impact?

Clampitt: Well, there's so much talking now that, thinking that, yeah, gee, we should have done like World War II and we should have had a longer tour. Everybody should have stayed till the war ended and they shouldn't have had this one year tour because that made everybody short-timers and were just trying to stay alive, they don't really want to put out, and blah, blah, blah, blah. And I got to thinking, at first I thought that way too. And well, now, go back and read Ross Carter's book, "Bells in Baggy Pants." There was only two guys survived his platoon. I said, is that what we wanted? Did we want to just replace only dead people? And it might have been, got more people involved, or might not have had so many people involved but I said is it fair to take a guy here when you've only got a six division war and say you're going to stay here and all the guys back don't have to worry now because you're going to stay here until the war ends or you die and we're only going to replace you? Or is better to give a guy a goal that he can see?

Van Ells: Well, and in a war of attrition also. Units could theoretically be up there for years and years. In fact they were.

Clampitt: A war of attrition. That sounds good to the planners but to the guy that's doing the "attriting" ...

Van Ells: Especially if he's forced to stay there for four years. That's absolutely ...

Clampitt: In a way, I think the one year tours, I think back about it I thought first it was bad then afterwards it is better I think to give a guy a break. Of course, what they were doing with the regulars they were sending them back again anyhow after a year or two in the States and were right back over there again.

Van Ells: So, when you left Vietnam them in '60, was it '66 ...

Clampitt: '66.

Van Ells: ... or '67.

Clampitt: '66.

Van Ells: What was going through your mind as you're going back to the States?

Clampitt: Well, I thought in our area we were doing pretty well, around the Bien Hoa area, and I thought, to be perfectly frank, I thought we'd be done in a year. I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, too, right along with the rest of them. It looked like we were doing, at least in our section, it looked like we were doing very well.

Van Ells: Now, what gave you that impression?

Clampitt: Oh, the rate of contacts were going down, we were increasing villages under our control. It looked pretty good. It looked like we might, of course, then we had that massive infusion of NVA after that. And no corresponding build-up from our side.

Van Ells: Well, we'll come back to that. This is where you go to the University of Wisconsin now right?

Clampitt: Yup.

Van Ells: Okay. Not exactly the most conservative campus in the United States.

Clampitt: Nope.

Van Ells: Just, we'll start from the beginning. Tell me what you were going to do there and how you adjusted to life on the UW campus.

Clampitt: Well, I'd come home early from Vietnam 'cause my wife had been in a bad automobile accident and was hospitalized for over six months at Madison General so I got a compassion reassignment and they had an opening here in the ROTC detachment. And I thought I would be an instructor again, same as I was in Illinois. And I got out, no, you're going to be the operation's sergeant. Yeah, well, okay.

Van Ells: What does the operation's sergeant do?

Clampitt: Oh, you prepare the lesson plans and the training and administration. The administration was for teams to train in, maintain the library and stuff. And says, "You won't be doing any teaching." and I says, "Why not?" "Well, the University of Wisconsin doesn't allow anyone to teach unless they have a bachelor's degree." Well, University of Illinois, they didn't care. If you knew what you were doing, they didn't care if you'd even been to school. They had a lot of practical engineers there that were teaching, that had never graduated from an engineering college. They were a little, they weren't so straight laced, you know. They said, "No, if you don't have a degree, you can't teach." and I said, "Well, I would figure with all my military schooling and training I certainly was appropriate ..." I did teach once or twice when an officer was sick and we had to substitute. No teaching and we had to give these orientation classes. When I was at the UW, the guys had, at the University of Illinois,

they had to take two years. And some guys actually liked it and went on and some even got regular Army commissions and we wouldn't have had them if it hadn't been compulsory. And they've gone up to university here they decided the only compulsion now instead of two years was go to an orientation class. That was it. That was the only compulsory thing. And when the colonel would give those and all the anti-war freaks would be there and when the colonel asked for questions one guy raised his hand, "Why do you teach people to kill?" Well, you know.

Van Ells: This happened fairly frequently.

Clampitt: Yeah. There were always assholes. Well, that's what armies do, you know, like it or not.

Van Ells: I'm sorry, not to interrupt. This is fascinating. You were running around on campus as an E7 by this time? In uniform, during what might be called the height of the anti-war movement. How did that go? It's a question I can't help but wonder.

Clampitt: Well, everybody thought it was very clever to count cadence when you march by or a lot of them go "heil Hitler" at you. That was supposed to be very clever. Some of them were even more clever and just say "fuck you," you know. Well, this guy's really getting an education here. You're really learning how to be good citizens here.

Van Ells: Was this an every day occurrence?

Clampitt: Yeah, every day.

Van Ells: Now, you were in the Red Gym at the time is that right?

Clampitt: Well headquarters were. We were down, the training part was in T16.

Van Ells: Is that ...

Clampitt: The temporary building down across from where they made the ice cream.

Van Ells: Oh, yeah, I know where that is.

Clampitt: It's gone now.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Clampitt: And that was where all our classes were held. Administration was done up there except for the training administration. We did that down there. I think, for some reason students came in there, too. I don't know if the university had something in there. I thought it was all our building. But anyhow, they just walked through and make those little snide remarks. Some guy would stand next to it, "Yeah, I'd never

take ROTC. Have to call somebody ‘Sir’ when they’ve only got a fourth grade education.” and I told the kid that unless you got a college degree you don’t have any more education than I’ve got, unless you’re a graduate student. Got that all the time, all the time, you know.

Van Ells: Now, this is very different when you were growing up. Did you think about what had happened in these kids? What had changed?

Clampitt: Yeah, I figured when you came home from war you’re supposed to get a little welcome here and a little respect. And of course we’d see these parades up State Street, Vietcong flags, God I wonder what happened. If a bunch of students would have marched up State Street, Japanese and Nazi flags in World War II probably’d been murdered on the spot.

Van Ells: Did you think it was the Vietnam War itself? Or was there something else you think that was—a question historians debate every day. I’m not looking for an answer. I’m just interested in your thoughts.

Clampitt: Well, you know, University of Wisconsin has always been anti-military. There were times get the ROTC out way back in the ‘30s. This has been a constant for them. And they’re a land grant college so they can’t do it. And then they wanted to make the school drop it ‘cause the Army wouldn’t take homosexuals. There’s always something, you know.

Van Ells: That’s recently.

Clampitt: Yeah. They’re always at ROTC. They never wanted it. They were forced to take it in the first place and they just don’t think that military has any place in the world. They’re looking for the perfect world from their ivory tower and you can tell them for sure there is no perfect world except maybe on the campus and I’m not even so sure about that. Especially with the “politically correct” crap they have now. You can have free speech but you can only say what we want you to say.

Van Ells: You have free speech now sit down or I’ll kick your ass.

Clampitt: Well, you agree with me.

Van Ells: Now, you mentioned hostility from the faculty as well.

Clampitt: Oh, yeah.

Van Ells: Now, I assume that they didn’t say “fuck you” behind your back. Or did they? I don’t know. How did ...

Clampitt: I don't think there was a faculty advisor on campus that told a kid to take ROTC. I'm sure of that. If there was I never heard of it. At Illinois faculty advisors would tell these kids to take ROTC. And the town went crazy if you don't 'cause like I said, it was an engineering, heavy on engineering, and they still had branch training. They had engineers, armored cavalry, and infantry and we didn't have branch training here. They cut that out years ago. We just had general military science and 90 percent of our graduates weren't going to be warriors anyhow. They were going to the transportation corps and the quartermaster corps.

Van Ells: You left town here in '68. Is that right?

Clampitt: Yeah, uh hum.

Van Ells: So you were here when the Tet Offensive occurred.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: And the, well, the Dow riots of '67, too.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: You were here for a lot of big ...

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Now, I'm sure but the fire bombing didn't start until after '68. Is that correct?

Clampitt: Yeah, they didn't do that while I was here. When I was in Nam I got papers they had firebombed T16 and the gymnasium. And I don't think it was, it was really hard to read the mood on campus. There was a lot of, a lot of them were conservatives. We did have some good guys in ROTC and I could see their point, too, in some ways. The war hadn't been sold to the American people. They really didn't think it was necessary. These people didn't have any oil. And if it had looked, I think, like the government really had some end in view of it other than to just keep fighting ...

Van Ells: That there wouldn't have been as much trouble as there was.

Clampitt: No. And, of course, this has always been a liberal campus. Do your own thing. A lot of hangers-on that weren't even students. And we've still got those. I mean, people walking around campus, they live on campus but they don't go to. They might monitor a class but they're never going to graduate.

Van Ells: So you left here when in '68? You went back to Vietnam.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Perhaps you could just tell me, like you must have gotten orders in the mailbox or something.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: Describe your trip from T16 to Vietnam.

Clampitt: Well, I had to get, my wife was living and kids were living out in Sun Prairie housing and they said she could stay there 'cause they didn't have enough Air Force families to fill it up. And I thought, well, that was good and that was one less worry. I flew this time. Flew to San Francisco and then took the bus up to the Air Force base, Travis.

Van Ells: Travis. Right.

Clampitt: Yeah. And got drunk there the one night I was there in the NCO club. Me and some other drunks went over and decided we'd eat—the mess hall ran 24 hours a day—so we're going down the line—they served breakfast 24 hours a day—grill says, "How do you want your eggs?" and I said, "Sunny side down." She didn't know how to do that so I said, "All right, then scramble them." So then we flew over. We stopped in Hawaii and Guam and we landed at Seoul at—I'm mixing up my wars—at Saigon. A lot of guys landed at Bien Hoa but we went to Saigon. Bussed us up to the "Reppo Deppo" and I was kind of hoping to get back in MACV but I'm going up to where they send the replacements to the Infantry divisions. So I was, "Well, I guess I'm going to be with an American unit this time." I was there a couple of days and no orders had come down for me and finally, and then, "Well, what's holding up my orders?" They went down the list, "Oh, you're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to be in Saigon at the MACV reception center." So I'm, "Okay." So I got a ride back down there back to the same reception center for MACV that I went to in '66. Different people but the same briefing. Then I went, kind of interesting. I met a guy there. You know, sometimes you just take instantly to a guy. He was my roommate up there in the MACV compound and we just hit it right off. Damn I can't remember his name now. But we ...

Van Ells: It will come back to you at 10:00 tonight. It virtually always does.

Clampitt: Yeah. We were hoping we could stay together 'cause we were about the same age, had wives and kids, and we had a lot in common. We were hoping we could stay together. Being as how it was my second time there, his first time, he was listening to all my war stories. He says, "What's the best place to go?" and I said, "Actually, 1st Corps. Weather's a lot better up in the mountains, cooler and not so much. Absolutely the pits is the Delta." So we both get our assignments and we're both going to the Delta. And I had told him, you know, the old timer scaring the new guy, you know, and I said, "If you get assigned to the Delta, the first thing you do is you

write your wife and tell her to start the paper work for the life insurance and just leave everything but the date blank 'cause we're going to get killed if we go to the Delta." And sure enough they send us to RFPP, regional forces popular forces, and that's the pits of the Vietnamese army. So we were going down there and we're flying over, we go down first to Khan Tuo and that's where assignments are done there. And of course we're flying over, it's the raining season and everything's flooded, and we're flying over dry land water. Supposedly CaMau Peninsula but it's all water. The canals are overflowing and the rice paddies are overflowing and he's looking out and says, "I don't see a damn thing but water down there. How are we going to get around?" And I said, "Be glad we're going to Vietnamese. At least we'll travel in sampans. American units would be wading through them." And he says, "How are you going to take cover?" I says, "You're not. I keep telling you, we're going to get killed." So they split us up. We were hoping we could go to the same team somewhere but they split us up at Khan Tuo and he went over to Kien Giang Province. I think it was Kein Giang, up that way, and I went all the way down to Amswan (sp??), the farthest south. We got two Vietcong strongholds at each end of the province. Nankung (sp??) down below and Hunan (sp??) up above. Both free fire zones and both VC for years. Kind of interesting there. It was an interesting province and I went out to one of the close end districts to be a district advisor and I'd only been there a short time when they called me back to Kamong (sp??) and said you're going to take over the S2 section because of your school training. I said, "I don't really want to." He said, "Well, you can take a district out here." we had a vacant district 'cause the guy, the first district I had gone to, the guy re-upped to stay. So I went out to the district and I barely got acquainted out here and they called me back out and, "You've got to take the S2 section. Can't get anybody from Khan Tuo (sp??)" and it was a mess. They hadn't done any proper record keeping, their filing system was a mess, the captain, he was a dud. I mean a dud. He was more interested in going around looking for pussy every day and drinking coffee in the coffee house. So I gradually took the whole thing over. Before I left I was even doing the air strikes. ARVN and American Air Force, took that over in G3. I did all the air strikes, intelligence summary every day, and I did the agent net, ran the agent's net, and I also went out with PRUs, provincial reconnaissance units, on operations, and went out with Vietnamese troops with the Phoenix, I was on the Phoenix Committee, and went out with Phoenix operation. Some people think I'm bragging. I don't think there was another enlisted man in Vietnam that did as much, that had as much to do, or played that big a part in the war as I did.

Van Ells: Yeah. No, it was quite impressive.

Clampitt: I did much more than if I'd been humping a platoon somewhere.

Van Ells: Now, from this vantage point, how had the war changed?

Clampitt: In our province, we used to kid. We said the province was 85 percent pacified. The only trouble is it's pacified by the VC. We held the district towns. That was all we

had. We had the district towns and the province capitol. In the daytime the road between the first district, the first western one in Kamong (sp??), that was open. None of the other roads were open, day or night. And one of the things up above, we were also, we had a convoluted chain of command here. I worked for 525 Military Intelligence which was headquartered in Khan Tuo (sp??), I was technically a member of them. Plus I'm in the province team so I'm working for the colonel, I'm a province senior advisor. Plus I'm in the S2 which was all put under CORDS, all of this group was put under CORDS. I used to call it the "congress of racial division" but it was, what the heck was it stood for? CORDS, CORDS, CORDS. [Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development]

Van Ells: Yeah, I've come across this, too.

Clampitt: Yeah. That was run by, well, they wrote a book about him. He was running it from 4th Corps at that time. Van, John Van.

Van Ells: Oh, John Paul Van?

Clampitt: Yeah. I saw him a lot of times. Hell, it was "revolutionary development"—"civil operations and revolutionary development." Sounds like you're out spreading democracy. Actually, all the S2 in the PR province reconnaissance unit, those were the hired killers. That was all under CORDS. And the Phoenix was all part of CORDS. They did all of this and put it all under CORDS, which actually improved us 100 percent.

Van Ells: Yeah. I was going to ask—now, there's probably some things you can't tell me. I'm not going to ask you tell me anything you don't want to, but tell me as much as you can. What were the objectives of these operations, the Phoenix and these other sorts of things.

Clampitt: This was to eliminate the Vietcong infrastructure.

Van Ells: Tell me how well it worked and ...

Clampitt: It worked very well. And if we had started that four or five years earlier, we might have won the war. This was the most effective program we had, I think. And I had to go up for training at Vung Tau for the Phoenix operators. So we had a very good intelligence section here. The ARVNs were very good and we had the DIOIC, district intelligence operations and intelligence center, combining operations and intelligence in one office, you know. One problem we always had in the Army, I thought our staff sections never told each other what they were doing. We're all winning the war on our own and nobody else knows what, but they don't talk to the guy at the next desk. So we all worked together here, very good. Once a VC is targeted, a known VC who is ...

Van Ells: He would be a village commander or something like that.

Clampitt: Yeah, he'd be the village president, the village, the shadow government or finance and economy. The ones we really wanted that were running it were finance and economy. These are the ones we wanted to get. And we could target one and we'd run a PRU operation in there and get him. And we'd pull him out and if you couldn't get him out, you killed him. If you could get him out, you try and convert him to your side. We had a Chieu Hoi center there, too. I've got my own opinion of Chieu Hoi program.

Van Ells: Well, let's hear it.

Clampitt: Well, one day our, I used to do a lot of flying, too, in fixed-wing to look at all the province, and I wasn't flying this day but the pilot came back, warrant officer, and said he'd noticed, he said, "There's no flag flying over one of the outposts up here in Toi Bien (sp??) sector." And we flew back up and said, "Yeah, there's a Vietcong flag flying over." So I sent a scout section up there, RF company to see what's going on and this outpost was all Chieu Hois except for the officers and NCOs that were ARVNs, and they killed them. Chieu Hois had risen and killed the officers and the non-coms and abandoned the fort. Took all the weapons with them, of course.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, to clarify, some of these things are kind of unclear. The Chieu Hois are, they were ...

Clampitt: Defectors.

Van Ells: ... VCs who would defect.

Clampitt: Yeah. They ...

Van Ells: Right. Or surrendered.

Clampitt: ... they'd either been captured or they had come in with a pass and said, "I want to get on the side of the good guys." And of course some of them hadn't changed sides. This was to ruin the program. Of course how are you going to tell, you know? You've got to take them at face value pretty well unless ...

Van Ells: Unless proven otherwise. And in this case that sort of thing did happen.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: Were there many defectors?

Clampitt: Yeah, we had a lot of them, a lot of them. I was surprised.

Van Ells: I mean ...

Clampitt: Not from NVA. We didn't get any NVA defectors. We got a lot of VC defectors. I think they just got tired of living in the jungle and tired of fighting. Thought they'd come in on the government's side, thought it might be easier. Maybe they thought we were going to win. And then when they saw that we didn't know what we were doing either they go back out on the other side.

Van Ells: You think that's what it was?

Clampitt: I don't know. Of course their families are out there. It's uh, you know, it's like our own Civil War. We had, Farragut was from Alabama and was considered a traitor to the Confederacy. And Thomas, an Army general, was from Virginia. And Pemberton at Vicksburg, was from New York.

Van Ells: You had mentioned that you thought these programs were effective. Did you have a measuring stick that you would gauge this by?

Clampitt: Well, yeah, by the HES evaluation system, the Hamlet Evaluation System. The one bad thing where the effect on was broke down was that if you told the truth and said that everything was terrible, they wouldn't accept your report.

Van Ells: Your higher-ups.

Clampitt: Yeah. It had to come back, everything is wonderful 'cause it reflects on them. Then the computer in Saigon says we're winning. Well, garbage in, garbage out, you know. If you're not going to take true reports and only want rosy reports, to me that seems the height of idiocy. How are you ever going to find out what is really going on.

Van Ells: So, in that way it wasn't terribly effective.

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: In what ways was it effective?

Clampitt: I think it was effective by bringing, we brought in a large number of Chieu Hois and we got a lot of the infrastructure out so that the people could run their own villages. And I think probably a lot of them would have just as soon would have stayed with the government. But then the United States ran out of world ...

Van Ells: Right. Now, this gets into my next area of questioning and that's, after Tet we started to pull out of Vietnam. I'm wondering how that impacted on the war effort.

Clampitt: I think it brought it down all the way. Especially when we would read, see a picture in the Stars and Stripes, of a unit going home and, but another unit's staying. I

remember what I felt in Italy, guys who had less time in Italy than I did were being sent home and I was homesick. I wanted to go home. Well, they had more time left in the Army and my time was short so they thought I might as well just stay there. That's the best utilization of manpower, they say. Not the best utilization of morale, or working morale. I thought that people who hadn't been there as long as I had shouldn't have went home before I did. This goes here. You've got one unit that's going to stay, the other unit's going home. And Nixon says, "Eventually you're all going to go home." and then you think this unit really wants to go out and beat the bush now and get killed? For what?

Van Ells: What impact do you think this had on the enemy?

Clampitt: Oh, of course ...

Van Ells: 'Cause the idea was, of course, that American forces would pull out and ...

Clampitt: Well, I think they had a pretty good breather. They were just fighting ARVNs then. We were only doing defensive things. Even down in our area we could see that there was less war going on. They're just biding our time. Pretty soon the Americans would all be gone and go in and take everything over.

Van Ells: When you study the Vietnam War, 1968 is kind of the dividing line. Before that morale was high, troop effectiveness was very high, the drug use and that sort of thing that you associate with Vietnam today, was fairly low. And after '68 then, these sorts of things, the poor morale, the drug use sort of thing, you were in kind of a unique situation so perhaps you can't comment on this but if you could perhaps comment on some of the changes in the Army and the morale and that sort of thing.

Clampitt: Well, when I got back home, our advisor group was a pretty strong group there.

Van Ells: That's what I said.

Clampitt: And I felt a little guilty at going home. I almost felt like I should extend 'cause they didn't have a replacement for me and I had everything really running good and the guy that was going to take over for me I didn't think could handle it. Of course, no guy thinks anybody is going to do as good as he did, you know. But I really was split there. I want to go home and see the wife and kids, and I want to go home alive, and yet I hated to leave. It was kind of mixed emotions there. I wrote my wife and I said, "What would you think about a six month extension?" and she wasn't too happy about that so I just went home. I got back to, came home in '68, fall of '68, and then I went to Fort Riley, Kansas as a platoon sergeant in the correctional training facility.

Van Ells: This is a military prison.

Clampitt: Yeah. This was a unit that was set up by the Pentagon. We worked directly under the Pentagon, directly under the Department of Army. We weren't under the post at all. And supposedly all the officers and non-coms were hand-picked. I know how "hand-picked" works sometimes. Sometimes it means you get the best, sometimes you get the worst, depends on who is doing the picking. But I read a little bit about how the program originated. A colonel that wrote the book, the big book here. Oh, it was a battlefield commission from Korea, the Warrior, "The Warrior Story." I can't think of his name. He's retired now.

Van Ells: Hackworth?

Clampitt: Hackworth, yeah. That was his brainchild. And he said, "We've got all these guys in stockade and stuff that could perhaps be salvageable. Get the best hand-picked NCOs and officers and set up a training facility and retrain them and see if we can get them back on duty."

Van Ells: And how did that go? First of all, what sort of guys were in this prison? Were these drug users ...

Clampitt: Well, the colonel that was commanding CTF so aptly put it, we had the "cream of the crap." So we had it set up here. We had a big area. All of Camp Fungston and we had correctional training units, that were the same as companies, and a correctional training battalion, and then the correctional training facility which was the, I think we had four battalions. I was a platoon sergeant, I got promoted to E7, I became a first sergeant. Got into another unit, took over as first sergeant. Actually, it had a fence around it and guard towers but every day we took them outside. They weren't under armed guard at all. And went to different classes. We even went out in the rifle range, give them loaded rifles and had them fire, didn't have any guards on them, they were unguarded but they had to come back to the stockade or confinement facility—it wasn't a stockade, it was a confinement facility—at night. And they had, half the cadre were MP, correctional specialist, and the other half were infantry, officers and enlisted. So you might have four platoon sergeants and you might have two more MP sergeants, and two more infantry. And their assistant platoon sergeants would be, you know, a prior infantry man, and an MP in each platoon, a correctional specialist. Not the "butt on your pocket" MPs but the ones that had, ran prisons and stuff. And they had their own personnel section. And a lot of these guys, they were so screwed up. They'd never paid taxes, even when they were working and we'd try to get all their personnel work straightened out for them. One guy said, "Yeah, if the whole Army had been like this, I'd never went to the stockade." And one of them got caught. He was selling black market gas in Korea and got caught.

Van Ells: You mean gasoline.

Clampitt: Yeah. And he eventually became one of our trustee cadre men. It was a good program. We said we had a 50 percent return to active duty but we didn't do any follow-up on how many of that 50 percent stayed and didn't go AWOL again.

Van Ells: Now, these guys, there was the black marketeer you just described, were these, how did these guys get in the stockade in the first place? And how were they identified as "salvageable?" Do you know?

Clampitt: Oh, no, I didn't have anything to do with who picked them. They were by the stockade commanders. I mean we didn't have any murderers or rapists. It was long-term AWOLs or failure to adapt to military. Some we boarded out anyhow. There was just no hope for them. And some of them were, just went home, didn't want to leave their girlfriend, or over stayed leaves and stuff. And some were just completely useless. Even our "cream of the crap." We had hard-core blacks that were trying to, in the Black Panthers and everything, getting all this radical literature. And we had to let them have it. I didn't hold much hope for them but people would ask me, "I suppose you had majority of blacks." I said, "No, actually we had a majority of whites." Poor white, Southern trash basically.

Van Ells: Did you get a sense of how many were draftees and volunteers?

Clampitt: Actually, most of them were volunteers, a large proportion. But it wasn't what they thought it was going to be I guess. I don't know. And some were draftees. But I think some of them did respond to positive training and leadership which they weren't getting wherever they'd come from. But in '68 and '69 the Army just started this down-hill decline. They said we were going to do away with formations and we were going to do away with this and we're going to let them have beer in the barracks and we're going to. Took away a lot of the NCO's authority 'cause they thought we might abuse these poor boys. And it was just so, I went to a lecture up at the post here at Fort Riley, the continental Army commander who had been my battalion commander in Italy was giving a speech. And he says, "The only thing that's holding back this new Army is these old sergeants that just can't change with the times." And I says, "Buddy, you're talking about me." And I went out to the personnel section and put me in for retirement. I was going to stay for 30. I'm just burned out. I can't stay in an Army that's not an Army. And a lot of good people got out then.

Van Ells: Yeah, I was going to ask under what circumstances you left. Obviously very, not favorable necessarily.

Clampitt: Nope. I could see the country was ruining the Army, to make the, I don't know, the dissenters happy or the wild left, trying to, discipline was reduced to almost nothing. God, you can't have an Army like this. It's not even as much discipline as a boy scout troop. I just can't stay in an Army like this.

Van Ells: And so you left.

Clampitt: Yeah. They said maybe it will get better if you stay around. I said, "No." Not only that, they were still having advisor in Vietnam and they were sending guys back for a third tour and I thought no way am I going back there again. I says I've done 20, I guess I'm going to quit. Plus retirement, re-employment, too. You get a better job at 43 than you can at 53.

Van Ells: And that was a consideration for you.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: I was going to ask you now. This is the part where my traditional sort of interview kicks in. You're now out of the service and you've got to make a living and you've got to get back in the civilian life for the first time since high school, really. So, in terms of getting your civilian life on track, you came back to Madison apparently?

Clampitt: Yeah. Sun Prairie.

Van Ells: And what did you do?

Clampitt: Rented a house there and went out looking for a job. I had practically been assured of a job on the Sun Prairie police department. I had worked for them part-time while I was at the university. But in the mean time the chief that had told me I had a job any time I came back had retired and the new chief was not doing very well there and I don't think he wanted any competition. And so I got a job in DeForest as a police officer there, and then up to the Dells, and then to Cross Plains as chief. And I had wanted to go into police work. I thought that would be fairly interesting and it had been a career goal at one time.

Van Ells: Yeah. And sort of along the lines of what you did.

Clampitt: Uh hum.

Van Ells: So, after getting out of service employment wasn't necessarily a problem for you.

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: Military service hadn't hindered your employment opportunity.

Clampitt: No.

Van Ells: In fact it sort of led you in this area.

Clampitt: Yeah. Although I think mainly because I had some military police and military intelligence experience. I found there's not much call in civilian life for mortar men and machine-gunners and riflemen.

Van Ells: Although there is room for detective work and in your police work, did you do that sort of thing? Were you pounding a beat, driving a car around, chasing ...

Clampitt: Well, I was in small police departments so we had to do our own investigating. I did a lot of investigating work.

Van Ells: In terms of the sort of physical and psychological readjustments to civilian life. Now you're out of the service. Now you've been through three wars. Now did you have any sort of ...

Clampitt: No. I had no problems at all.

Van Ells: You hadn't been physically wounded or anything so that sort of thing wasn't in effect either.

Clampitt: No. I didn't have any problems readjusting. I didn't have any, I didn't have nightmares. The only nightmares I have, and I've talked to other veterans and they have the same dreams, that were in the Army, that we're moving out to get somewhere and we've only got a few minutes and we've got to get everything packed up and we can't find anything. Everybody's moving out and we're still looking for our shoes and our belt buckle. And I thought I was only having them and I've talked to a few other guys I know, retired military, yeah, they dream that dream all the time. And one other one I have, my car, yeah, I still have that one, my car is going backwards and I'm stepping on the breaks trying to stop it, it's always a Ford for some reason, never any car I've had lately 'cause I've had Plymouths for years, and it won't stop no matter how hard I chomp on the break and I've got to rub it up against the curb or hit a tree or something to make the car stop. And I told this other friend of mine, he says, "Yeah, I dream that dream all the time." I don't know what that symbolizes, either one of those, but that's ...

Van Ells: Another veteran you told this to.

Clampitt: Yeah. And we both ...

Van Ells: That's interesting.

Clampitt: ... had those same stupid dreams.

Van Ells: No combat nightmares or anything like that. I see.

Clampitt: No. Once in a while I'll be in a firefight or something but few and far between.

Van Ells: Now, in terms of veteran's organizations, did you stay active with the VFW? And did you join any others?

Clampitt: Yeah. I joined the American Legion, the VFW, and the "40 and 8" in the Wisconsin Vietnam Vets. I was a post commander and county commander in the American Legion and state chaplain.

Van Ells: So you went pretty hog wild after you retired.

Clampitt: Yeah.

Van Ells: For what reason? I'm interested in why you joined these groups.

Clampitt: Well, one reason I didn't feel that Vietnam veterans were getting their due, society was looking down on them. That's especially why I got in the Vietnam Veteran organization, chapter president and all of Chapter 4. You know there was a spate of Vietnam movies and every one of them were kill crazy, rapists ...

Van Ells: Deer Hunter and that kind of thing.

Clampitt: Deer Hunter wasn't too bad but it's kind of surrealist. It's not really ... But one I remember, this guy is special forces ...

Van Ells: Apocalypse Now.

Clampitt: Yeah. No, another one.

Van Ells: It's a different one.

Clampitt: I can't even remember the name of it but it was terrible. And they all wear their field jackets wherever they go, and he's got his field jacket, and he goes into McDonald's and he wants a raw hamburger. He's got his Green Beret patch on, his special forces pads. He wants a raw hamburger and he goes outside and sits on the gutter and throws the bun away and eats the raw hamburger and then it just starts going down hill from then. But all these Vietnam movies are all the same. There wasn't a decent one made. They were all kill crazy, we've all got M16s, and machine-guns, and radios, and grenades. I don't know. I had to turn mine in when I left. I don't know how these guys got M16s back in the country. That's so silly I know, but that was the, and the Rambo ones, too, and all. The only decent one that was made was a television movie. Maybe you saw it. Rumor of War based on Philip Kaputo's book?

Van Ells: No. I've read the book though.

Clampitt: And they stayed pretty true. That was the only decent, and that was a TV movie. It wasn't in the theaters.

Van Ells: Yeah. In the time, when did you start joining these groups? Was it right after the war? Or was it like later into the '70s and '80s?

Clampitt: I had been in the VFW and I'd dropped out. I joined the Legion in '66 when I was in Sun Prairie.

Van Ells: A lot of the Vietnam groups didn't get going until late '70s or early '80s and that sort of thing.

Clampitt: Yeah. I think some of the traditional veteran's units were even looking down on Vietnam vets.

Van Ells: That's what a lot of Vietnam veterans will say. Do you think that's true?

Clampitt: I felt it more in the Legion than I did the VFW. The VFW was all overseas vets and combat veterans mostly.

Van Ells: Have things changed over time? Do you think your involvement opened ...

Clampitt: I'm still active but even some of those guys that used to be active aren't any more. I think they're raising their wives and families. What we wanted to really do in Wisconsin Vietnam Vets was show them that we're not kill crazy, dope ...

Van Ells: Right.

Clampitt: ... ravaged, baby raping. That we're just like all the other old veterans. We went over, did our job and came home. That's what most of us did.

Van Ells: And do you think there's a different attitude towards Vietnam veterans now?

Clampitt: Yeah, I think so now. I think the public's over that idea that we were all baby rapers, and killers, and losers. But the press put that out so strong in the movies. That we were all high school, we were all drop-outs, we were all ignorant, we were all kill crazy, and we were all dope addicts. The only dope I took was Carling's Black Label and Ba Muoi Ba.

Van Ells: Carling's Black Label is pretty bad.

Clampitt: Yeah. Well, I used to say I liked Ba Muoi Ba because you could have your hangover before you even get to bed.

Van Ells: I don't know what that is. Is that a Vietnamese ...

Clampitt: It's a Vietnamese beer. They put formaldehyde in it to preserve it. The refrigeration isn't the best and about your third beer your head hurts already like you've been drinking whiskey all night. You have your hangover before, you didn't have to wait until morning to have a hangover.

Van Ells: That's my line of questioning. Those are the standard questions I have. I try to adopt them to each particular conflict. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think I've missed?

Clampitt: No, I can't think of anything.

Van Ells: Very well timed. Again, this takes just about an hour. Thank you for stopping in.

Clampitt: Yeah.

L:\ORALHIST\TR95-50.DOC