

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
EDWARD C. RAPPE
Army, Paratrooper and Intelligence Branch, Cold War (1961-1963)

2011

OH
1450

**OH
1450**

Rappe, Edward C., (1938-). Oral History Interview, 2011.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Edward C. Rappe (b. 1938), born in Texas but raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, discusses his experience serving in the Army from 1961-1963 as a paratrooper and as part of the Counterintelligence Corps. Rappe was born into an impoverished German immigrant family but remarks that life for his family improved financially once they moved to Wisconsin. He went through school in Milwaukee, and eventually attended University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, as well as joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). He graduated in January 1961 but went back for academic classes in Germany. Rappe refers to the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and how during his time in basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia, in the spring 1961, he thought he might be shipped out into those operations. Rappe moved on to Fort Holabird in Maryland, where he completed his counterintelligence training. Rappe speaks about finding housing for his wife once he was sent to Germany, since at the time spouses were not allowed in Germany. While overseas, Rappe earned his paratrooper wings. He discusses various missions involving both his paratrooper skills and intelligence work. Rappe describes feeling bullied by his superior officer, the mental health of the intelligence soldiers, being overworked, and the poor morale of the officers. He was a First Lieutenant in the 8th Infantry Division and then in charge of the clearance section for G-2 staff. Rappe explains that under these strained conditions, in December of 1962 he experienced what he calls a nervous breakdown, and was sent to a hospital first in Germany and then in Pennsylvania. He expresses frustration about the poor mental health help in the military at the time. Eventually, Rappe earned a Master's degree in teaching and became a Social Sciences teacher. He talks about being back home, the importance of his children learning German, and working with the VA (Veterans Affairs). Rappe ends the interview discussing the effect of poor treatment from superior officers.

Biographical Sketch:

Edward C. Rappe was born in 1938 in Texas but raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He attended University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as part of the ROTC, graduating in 1961. He went through basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia, and then completed counterintelligence training at Fort Holabird, Maryland. He was stationed in Germany in 1961, and the Berlin Wall construction began shortly afterward. While overseas, he earned his paratrooper wings, and participated in many missions. In this interview, Rappe speaks about being bullied by his superior officer and suffering a nervous breakdown after being overworked while conducting intelligence clearances. He was sent home in 1963. Rappe earned a Master's degree, became a Social Studies teacher, and settled in Wisconsin with his family.

Interviewed by Patrick Gould, 2011.
Transcribed by Joe Fitzgibbon, 2014.
Edited and Abstracted by Dana Gerber, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

Gould: Good afternoon. It is April 5, 2011, my name is Patrick Gould, I'll be doing the interviewing today at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum here in Wisconsin—here in Madison, Wisconsin. The narrator today is Mr. Edward C. Rappe, who is a veteran of the Cold War from 1961 to 1963. Ed, let's begin the interview by having you tell us a little bit about yourself, your background before you came in the service.

Rappe: Okay, thank you. I was real surprised that the Cold War would be added to this list of veterans, but I'm happy to oblige and I'm glad you did it. I was born in Texas in 1938. One of six children, number five actually, and the family was in dire poverty down there, I could tell you horror stories but that's not the place for it here. And we moved to Milwaukee in 1944, late '44, my mother was a registered enemy alien; my dad was a naturalized citizen from Brazil. Actually, all of them are German-Americans as such. And, my mother insisted on going home to Milwaukee because Grandma and Grandpa were there and of course it was the best thing that happened to the Rappe family. Our life changed and slowly got better and better because we moved to this fine state. And I do that not as propaganda, but it's true. I went to Riverside High School--actually went to St. Marcus Lutheran grade school on Palmer Street and Garfield in Milwaukee, and graduated from there and went to UW-M [University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee]. I was in the pioneer class, which I hope to celebrate with them in May of this year. I graduated in 1961, in January, and received my commission through ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. I went the ROTC route, it was money in the bank, as such, as far as that's concerned, and I thought I had an obligation to my country. I know that's—

Gould: Let me ask you, at this point, what does it mean to be a registered enemy alien, and how did that affect you when you were growing up?

Rappe: My mother was a registered enemy alien; I was born in the United States. I do remember the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], auxiliary of the FBI visiting our house in Weslaco, Texas, and standing behind her, hanging on her, frightened by these three big men in the other side of the room. And I complained that they took our shotgun, single-shot shotgun [laughs], and my mother, you know, protected me like--and so one of the FBI agents gave my mother a dollar to buy me a toy rifle, and instead she bought a tractor [laughs] because she didn't want a gun around the house with the FBI lookin' at us. And, uh, so it put her in a rather defensive position, you know, all the way around. And she actually worked for a defense plant in Milwaukee when she got up here in 1944, which is beyond my thinking, you know what I mean? But it didn't bother me too much because I was so young, you know what I mean? But by comparison--

Gould: Okay.

Rappe: And at any rate, I went on to ROTC and graduated and received my commission in 1961 after four and a half years. Came back for two credits in German, I spoke German fairly well as it was a family language but I didn't learn it there, I learned it in college. I married my wife in September 1961 while I was still in the service, and we found out when we came back from our honeymoon that they were not allowing dependents to go overseas to Germany, which caused a real trauma in our household. [laughs] And, uh, I told her, I says, "We'll earn you money, you'll come over as a civilian, we'll put you somewhere on the reservation out there in civilian housing. And she did come over in November, landed in Bremen, and I got up there to pick her up. I was seven hours late, she was standing all alone in this great big wharf warehouse. And I, I still remember that to this day and I still apologize for. And then we moved down, you know with our equipment to housing in a little town called Rothen--not Rothenburg, Abenberg, and found housing there which was very hard because a lot of other soldiers were doing the same thing--we all wanted our wives with us, and there was no place for them in the government housing, so we squirreled them away in different rental units and the Germans were pretty good with that, I gotta admit. And eventually we got into Army housing, you know, at a later date. And I met a lot of great people in the military, and some of the worst people I've ever met in my life--you know, there seems to be nothing in between [laughs]--and I hate to say that but it's true. The Cold War, of course was going on since, what, '47 I think it was? Lasted 'til '89, and so this is about midpoint in the Cold War. I was in in March 1961, I got out in June of 1963. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia for my basic training, officers' training, and at that time there was the Bay of Pigs crisis--and we wondered if they wouldn't even call us out and put us into some operation on that--then I went up to Fort Holabird, Maryland which is in downtown Baltimore at the time, and got my counterintelligence training at that place. At this point, the Berlin Wall went up in August of 1962.

Gould: Were you given that designation, your MOS, your Military Occupational Specialty, because of your language skills in German, or what was the rationale--how did you come to get the job that you were given?

Rappe: I sometimes think it was just because I came in at a certain time and they had a certain slot open. And the German didn't hurt, let's put it this way--and it was an interesting concept, you know, interrogation, I didn't know which direction it would go. I was seriously thinking of photo intelligence, because I like maps, I still do enjoy 'em. But that was a four-year stint, I didn't know if I liked the Army that much [laughs]. In fact, I was thinking of careering the Army when I went in--about eight months in though I had decided I didn't want it, and you can hear why as I go along. The Berlin Wall went up, and that's when the statement came out that we couldn't have dependents overseas anymore and so we shipped out--I flew out of MATS, Military Air Transport System, and took a fourteen-hour flight to Germany, you know as an example of that, landing in the Azores along the way.

Other people went by boat at that time or ship. I wound up in Germany, I was told that I wasn't supposed to show my uniform when I came to this post in Bad Kreuznach Germany, supposed to wear civilian clothes, I was in civilian clothes, and I changed in the Frankfurt Airport, and, uh, don't let anyone know your rank. I was a second lieutenant, and I made a mistake, I didn't have any housing at the time. I was dead-bone tired after that lousy flight. And I did let my rank out to the housing authorities so I could get a place to put my head that night. It was a soldier in charge of it, but somehow it got back to my boss, and he was thoroughly angry with me for a long time to come. See, there is a concept in the military intelligence, or intelligence work: you succeed at the mission, you don't question it. If you have a letter to Orion [??], it didn't matter to which Orion you got to, as long as you delivered the message, you know? And so, therefore, I became his scapegoat, and it was a hell of a time for that reason. Later on I went to jump school in Bad--Wiesbaden and got my paratrooper wings. Rather insolently, I had civilian clothes at the time, and I couldn't partake in the ceremonies, I had to sit back in the stands and that angered me a little bit because I thought, "Darn it, I worked as hard as the rest of the guys," and two sergeants in the paratroopers came over in the back of the field and presented me with my wings. It was a very touching moment for me, and I was very proud of the fact that I made it through that. Within a month they had me shipped out to Denmark to jump in with a battle group which was a--equivalent of a regiment at that time, a little bit different arrangement--I can talk about that later. And I monitored the troops in that area, as such and I did interrogation of prisoners of war. We came in over the North Sea, and I remember the light going on to jump, and I didn't see anything but ocean out there. And the light went back off to red, and then it went back on to green, and they dumped us in this marsh--we had quite a few casualties. I remember one kid landed, and his chute was coming at me, and this guy said, "Chute, chute!" So I ran to get at the chute, I couldn't and he got it, and I went over to the guy, he was crying on the ground--all his teeth were broken out of his mouth. He landed pretty hard. So it was an interesting maneuver to be very honest with you. And it made me think about coming back home to Wisconsin [laughs] afterward, I gotta admit when I was sitting on a grassy knoll watching airplanes coming in to pick us up and seeing the cobalt-blue sky and I thought "Jeez, this looks like Wisconsin, I wanna go home." [laughs] [coughs] Excuse me. At any rate, that was pretty much one of the things that I did as a paratrooper within that situation. I dealt with the situation that I had on my hand as CIC agent and—

Gould: What does CIC agent stand for?

Rappe: It's Counterintelligence Corps, and it's a small group of people by comparison to the military, and our concept was to deny information to the enemy, either by ferretting out the enemy, or like sometimes we had to tell our own troops to shut up about what they were talking about out there. And of course, to make sure that the enemy did not know what the order of battle was for our units, signs were

covered up, or patches taken off, things like that--that was low level. Actually, in my detachment, military intelligence detachment, it was a pretty low level of intelligence work for the military even. And so that was a little bit of what we were doing out there as far as the work in the field was concerned. We had--as I got on the airplane in Jersey, I ran into a black sergeant--I was excited about going to Germany, you know, speaking the language, my family heritage, and things like that. I says, "How is it over in Germany?" He says, "Terrible." I says, "Why?" He says, "They had us on maneuvers constantly," he says, "three alerts a month, you know at two, three in the morning out in the field, you know." It wasn't like combat, I gotta say that so it was better off than the guys that went to Vietnam, but it was not a happy situation, 'cause we were worked to death. Sixty hour workweeks were not uncommon, you know, in fact even more than that. I just mentioned to somebody that one day I put in twenty-three and a half hours [laughs], you know, on a given day. One of the duties I had was to go back forty miles to a previous camp site to make sure a classified document was not laying around in the woods. I searched the woods in the middle of the night and then drove all the way back to the unit just in time to see the sunrise [laughs], is what it amounted to. So it was that type of activity. I always think, in history, there's a lot of the stories that are missed--for instance, I met a German soldier who said that he entered the edges of Leningrad, and it's not anywhere in the history books as far as I'm concerned--I looked a number of times for it, and to give you some idea of how they miss little situations like that. He said the Russians waved to them, and thought they were Russian soldiers and they weren't, they were Germans. And, so, what we had in the 1961 period was the Iron Curtain that Winston Churchill talked about, that descended across Europe and it became the personification in the Berlin Wall. In fact, I have a hard time to this day thinking that that wall is down, it was so much a part of my life, and the time in America, and so this a little bit of the thinking that went on there. We were not allowed to go within seven miles--or, yeah, seven miles or ten kilometers of the Iron Curtain. I saw it once at night from the back of it--a truck. That thing was lit up for miles, to the forest as such. And so it made the Cold War rather real to me at that point in time more than anything else. The Russians had what they called a "Soviet Military Liason Mission," SMIM--and we had LM I mean--and we had the AMLM, which was the American Military Liason Mission, and their job was to sit on the other side of the border, you know, from their own armies, and to watch for the concentration of troops, that there may be a surprise attack coming through across the Iron Curtain from one direction or another. During the Reagan administration, one AMLM American was killed on that duty, he was doing the wrong thing, he was in camouflage sneaking around an enemy camp, or a Soviet camp. I saw them regularly on the road, we got reports some were MPs, shot at them, which was totally illegal. But they were around snooping to make sure we were doing everything right, and to tease us too, you know, that type of thing, to show their macho-ism. The whole thing in Germany at that time was that we were overtrained--to the point where it was getting ridiculous. The crime rate was up for the troops, the AWOL rate was up for the troops, mental breakdowns were up

for the troops, all these things were signs that they were being overworked. And like I said, we would spend seven to ten days every month going into the field, and it got to be rather monotonous after a time, you know. Not that I can complain compared to other soldiers, I have no right to complain. So that's a little bit of the process we're in. The Germans themselves were a mixed breed as far as Americans were concerned. Some of 'em loved us--one guy went out in a thunderstorm to help me find an apartment that time I was trying to get a place for my wife--others hated us, you know. The lady down the block who had been in Berlin and she didn't like any of us foreign soldiers. I had a civilian, German civilian, that I had to talk to once, and he acted like we were scummy, he just brushed us aside until his boss came there and his boss, of course, was a little smarter, and he of course got the obligation--go ahead.

Gould: When you interacted with the Germans, did you interact in German, or in English?

Rappe: Most of the time in German. That got me across. My nametag, too, helped. I remember going into a cafe one time and they saw my nametag, and they sort of looked at me, and looked the other way, and then I ran into a whole bunch of German soldiers and I "surrendered" to them, quoted the quote, and they got a kick out of that too--reverse World War II. But, you know, that was the type of thing that was going on over there. The Germans--well the boys next door were particularly bad--my wife got telephone calls with nobody on the other end and there was German music in the background, which means absolutely nothing on a telephone call, and I proceeded to make strange sounds so that they never called back again--a little psychological game played by both sides. When I'd leave my house in the morning, if the two German boys were next door--they were my age, early twenties, their dad had been a forester, he had his forestry sign, his license in his foyer, there was a big swastika on it and so he was proud of his service in that group, and they would stare at me and I would stare at them as I backed my car out of the drive way, you know in a show of bad will towards each side. So we had some trouble with some of 'em, most of 'em were pretty good with us, I gotta say that. Depended on the situation. They told me once, "Oh, yes, the French Star--" I was in the old French zone, Bad Kreuznach, Germany, and the old French zone, they had a quarry, and they said, "The French took a bunch of SS men up to the quarry and starved them to death, "I thought, 'Oh, that's horrible,' but then I found out later on that the Germans took the French up to the quarry before that and starved them to death, so, you know, it's the on-going crap that goes on in war, excuse my English, okay? Germany was still in the--it was coming alive, you know they had the Wirtschaftswunder, the "economic miracle" by 1954 it had revived that far. But in '59-60, there were still bombed out areas of Germany, in Mainz, for instance. And I'd have to drive by it as I'd go through Mainz to the other side of the river, and by the time I left in '63 it was all rebuilt. They were building like mad to get it out of their way. You would see the de-Nazification all over the place. For instance, we had a--well a post office, for instance would have

the German eagle with the wreath underneath it, and the swastika was chiseled out. I went back twenty years later, and you didn't see any of that. There was a fireplace in the hospital, it was an old German hospital, and it had a big mosaic above it, had a big iron eagle in the grill work, with a swastika place for it underneath, but it was kicked out. There were a lot of World War II German soldiers around on canes, and things like that because it was a hospital town, a spa town. And I asked my wife, who was a young nurse, I said, "Why are they--so many of these people around like this?" She said, "Well, the German army has a policy that when a man was wounded, rather than go through all the therapy, just saw off the leg or the arm." Which was not they way we operated by comparison, so we saw a large number of these people as an example. The bridge that we had in our town had machine gun bullets marked underneath the abutments, you know, that you could see from American aircraft strafing the area, and in fact there was a story that there was an American GI whose plane had crashed in the Nahe River, near the bridge in downtown Bad Kreuznach, and that they left the body of the airman in there. It was a black man, and they put a sign on it, says "These are the animals that the Americans are sending against us," and let his body rot in that cockpit. Which is a horrible sign of what goes on in cases like that. So, it was a situation that sometimes got a little bitter on both sides. The army--at that time, in our army, it was pretty racist too, I gotta say that. I did talk to some southerners, and they seemed to be more compatible with the changes that were happening in the '50s and '60s. But, I remember one Major that got stuck on a job, black major, way out in a building in the back areas and he was not well taken care of by comparison, almost an insulting office is what they gave him. And that was a part of the--I think of the times. We got a lot of crazy reports when we were in the intelligence corps. For instance, one time--and this is history, now, by a long a shot, I'm not worried about the classification. It was some mother, in, I think Kansas, who said, "There's--my son-in-law is broadcasting from East Germany on a radio station there, I heard his voice," and so naturally, the FBI copies it down and naturally, we had to investigate it. What it amounted to was the young man took off with her daughter, and she didn't like that idea, so she was getting back at him. Lot of people used the intelligence services or police agencies for taking care of their personal vendettas. I had one guy say that he had a German girl that knew his name, and she must be spy, and I gotta go meet her down at [laughing] the railroad station to see her off. Well, I asked him what he was wearing for a unifor-for clothing that night when he met her. He says, "What I got on now." There was his nametag. And I thought, "Well, what the heck do you think this is?" But we had an understanding that he was an alcoholic anyway, and he was pretty much a user type of thing. [background voices] So that's a little bit of the process went through. We had cases where soldiers used it--I remember one soldier said, when we got the report, he'd just gotten a Buick franchise in America, I guess. And he turned around and said, "I was contacted by Soviet agents, and me and my buddy are going to meet them in Paris, Brussels, and London." Well it was an excuse to get out on the road and go have a good time. They captured 'em in Brussels and brought 'em back and court-martialed them, the

whole bit, you know. A couple of weeks later, or months later, I read his name again in a file, he'd been driving a fuel tank truck down the highway, it flipped over and exploded. He never did use that Buick franchise as far as I know, so you have all sorts of things along that line. So, we were heavily worked, you know. I would go out in the field, I'd have a stack of papers, I'd work it down to a reasonable level, you know, in the time before. And by the time we'd come back after a week that thing would be up six inches in my "in" basket, just to give you an example. A lot of intelligence work is just plain legwork, you know? Boring, straightforward type of thing. Once in a while there's a bright light. After I left Bad Kreuznach, Bad Kreuznach, there was a case of an American soldier that turned over to the other side, and I remember the building, I saw pictures of it, and I used to walk by it on almost a daily basis for a while. So we had to worry about those individuals too. So a bit of the process that went on there. I was transferred to the 8th Infantry Division, "half airborne, half leg" as they call it, meaning footsoldiers, which is rather a strange thing and I got promoted to First Lieutenant, you know, despite the being a constant scapegoat for my boss. And I was glad when he finally left for the United States, in fact I made arrangements so he'd fly out because he didn't like flying, and I knew how to handle it myself by then in Stuttgart at the intelligence headquarters. And so he went home by plane against his own best wishes. I met some great people like I said, I remember one family name Bob Kaiser. We had an interesting little trio. A Jewish couple, a Protestant couple, and a Catholic couple, and we got along famously as an example. The Catholic couple's name was Bob Kaiser, and I'd give my eyeteeth to run into that couple again someday, you know. The Jewish couple, the husband was killed in an automobile accident over there, not uncommon. And my wife escorted the body home with his wife. And so that's a little bit of the process we went through. I got switched over to the clearance section of the G-2 staff headquarters from our--in my detachment. I was in charge of clearing clearances, to make sure a person had everything in order for a confidential, secret, or top secret clearance. I was rather strict, the lieutenant colonel, head of the G-2 section was not. We had a lot of interesting breaks in what you'd call good, clean intelligence work.

[break in recording][00:22:49]

Rappe: We had, in the division headquarters, a telephone exchange just below the general's office, and a sergeant in my unit was going in there trying to check it out to see if someone wasn't tapping into the general's office upstairs on a moment-by-moment inspection, any time he felt like it. The Germans protested, and [laughs] he was basically kicked out of the operation. So, for all we know, the Germans were tapping through his basement floor or his telephone and getting the information to the other side, and we were forbidden to go into that telephone exchange from then on in, because the general said so, to give you some idea of the process. We had a case where I inspected one evening in the headquarters, which was one of our regular jobs, you know, spot inspections. I found arms that

weren't supposed to be in the building, that were never recorded, even though they were supposed to be a court martial offense for that. I was trying to get a hold of my captain from there one time and the exchange people got me on the phone and told me that I was dialing the wrong number, I should dial this number--they knew where I wanted to go better than I did [laughs].

Gould: What type of arms did you discover in this building?

Rappe: . 45s, normally. Forty-five caliber pistols, automatics and, something you could slide into a drawer, you know that type of thing. We had safe house areas which were closed off, you know, combination doors and things like that. So this was a part of the process, you know. You have a constant worry about what troops do with their weapons, as we found out in recent times. They can wind up killing somebody. We had cases of--I remember going out in the field one time with one of our battle groups, regiments, and working alongside the S-2 and S-3, the staff officer for intelligence and the staff officer for operations, and their sergeants, and about two weeks after we got back from the maneuver, my sergeant came up to me and said, "Do you remember the S-2 sergeant in the so-and-so regiment that we'd been in the field with?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You know he killed his commanding officer?" I said, "What're you talking about?" He said, "Well the guy went into the officer of the day office, at night, put a gun to the head of the young lieutenant, and the sergeant said 'get the S-2 and S-3 in here.'" The S-3 I think it was, came in, not the S-2, and he sat him down, with the gun on 'em, and he says, "Just wait." And then the S-2 came in the door, saw him, and he--before he could get control of 'em, he pushed back from the door and he fired at 'em, and the guy fled and got out of the area. He went back to the S-3 and said--the S-3 asked him, he says, "Can I have a cigarette?" He says, "No, you won't have time to finish it," and blew his brains out. And then he blew his own brains out. Not an uncommon crime type of thing that we'd have over there. It was often very horrid to hear the stories that were comin' down through the pike. And we don't know what happened, why it happened, it was a criminal investigation, not an intelligence investigation. You can get all sorts of ideas in your head on that as far as that's concerned. So I got promoted to the--G-2 clearance office. I had three young privates there, one had been in the Army for almost four years. Morale was terrible; the production was about a hundred clearances a month. And I was determined to do a little bit better job than that within the complex of the power struggles within the military division, which are interesting in their own right. And so I st—

Gould: What does that mean, one hundred clearances a month?

Rappe: Well, we'd get the paperwork to give a soldier a confidential or secret clearance, and then we'd chart him on the board, how many we had cleared that month to keep statistics on it, our productivity. And that meant the paperwork went to the United States where there were interviews being done locally, and then we'd clear

it and finally sign for the lieutenant colonel--did a lot of signing for the lieutenant colonel 'cause that was my job. And if I had a dispute as far as what some people were like--we had one case of a sergeant who went completely off the deep end, throwing his furniture in the street and everything else, [laughs] I took it down--the Colonel, and he said, "Oh that's okay, it's not a big deal." You know, so he passed people that I would have never passed for a security clearance, but of course it meant their careers right away, too. They didn't get a clearance and they were a sergeant, they were pretty well on their way out, eventually at least. So I worked very hard, I got a promotion for the one boy--he had the Army disease, got it in Paris, and for that reason they wouldn't give him a promotion. I thought, to get--can I say it? "Clap" as they call it, it was a minor offense for an Army boy, seeing as they were lonely and many miles from home. But they held it against him, and I talked to the headquarters and headquarters company and they finally got convinced with about three months to go to give him the promotion. The morale in the group went up, production went up, we went up from one hundred, roughly, clearances a month to three hundred. And I was working around the clock, many nights--at night I'd go back up there and I was smoking heavily, I'd wake up at night coughing. Something like three packs of Lucky's a day. And finally in December of 1962 I had a nervous breakdown. And this is for the record, for the historians, I joined the group, so did a lot of others. And there were a lot of us that, you know, went back to the United States with that type of thing. They call it a different word now, I don't know what it is, but it was basically a collapse mentally. And I couldn't get any help anywhere and finally I begged to be sent to a hospital. They sent me to a hospital down on Landstuhl where I went on the psychiatric ward, and had all the issues which you have in a psychiatric ward, closed. They probably were sort of watching me because, with the clearances I had, you know, you don't know what the hell a person might do. We had soldiers that went over to the other side just for that reason, when they got in trouble. And then in early January 1963 they shipped me home, which is where I wanted to go in the first place, and I went to Valley Forge Hospital, which was for tuberculosis and mental illness, and eventually got out of that area. And my wife waited for me in nearby Pottstown, and the day that we got our chance to go home I was going to be on last convalescent leave at home for about a month I guess it would be. We drove all night, she had to drive all night, my license had lapsed. We got home to Milwaukee and we were safe, in my mind. The military does a rather poor job, even to this day, I found out--you have a mental break down or emotional problems they kick you out on the street and that's about it. My wife was my psychiatrist, you know. Not the military. And I went back to college, got myself a teaching degree, and I imagine if they knew I had a nervous breakdown in the military, I would have never gotten a job. I'm now retired, I'm safe home, they can't touch me.

Gould: What was the characterization of your discharge?

Rappe: I was an honorable discharge.

Gould: Did you have access to the VA afterwards?

Rappe: Yes I did. I had bargained with them, and I said, you know, they gave me 10 percent disability, I get a small check every month and I felt a little funny about that at first but now I don't feel so bad 'cause the Army took me through the wringer financially a number of times. And I get medical--appointments, and, you know, medications when I order it through the military which I pay [coughs] excuse me, partially. And, so I get this material as a [coughs] part of the, you might say, the settlement. But the first few months and years, there was no psychiatrist for me. And I needed it, I know I needed it bad at that point in time. But I outgrew it, you know, I got to be a tough individual because of the military, my nervous breakdown, I--six years later, and I hope nobody reads this in our local papers, I was leading the teachers' strike in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, illegally at the time. So I was tough enough then, you know, I'd grown. But they had me at a very vulnerable time and I was a pretty smart aleck kid, you know. [coughs] In my own way, I knew my way around the streets of Milwaukee, but when I ran into the military it was a different ball game, you know? You don't say, "No, I won't do that." [laughs] Simple as that. So that was a little bit of the process that went on there. It was a--heavy [coughs] excuse me--physical and emotional strain of work, heavy work. And I was in the ranks of a lot of others. A lot of them were in Valley Forge—

[break in recording][00:31:32]

Rappe: The family I went back to, of course, was a German-American family as I said earlier. And the older brothers and sisters all spoke German at home, in fact, some of 'em can still speak better than me [coughs] if they'd open up and start talking, but they try to avoid it. And I had to learn it in college, much to my mild chagrin, and it's a lot more difficult in college than it is at home. My mother helped me a little bit, you know, because she could help with a few of the words--and drill me, she knew what I was--what to do and ask. But mine was learned at home and my wife never really learned it, she did take classes--she can understand it more than she can speak it. I can write it, I do write letters to Germany to friends and ancient family and that's about it, but that's it. My kids all speak a foreign language, or at least have some background in it because we did it at home as a secret language between my wife and myself. And the two youngest, the girl and the boy, girl's in the middle, Sarah, and the boy, Kurt, both took German, two years of German at least. And they can do some work. The daughter's better than I am, I'm afraid [laughs]. My oldest son, of course, was a little bit of a rebel--that's Eric and he took French. And I said, "Son, when you get in the Navy, make sure they know you can speak some French, you know, can do all sorts of good things." Of course, the rebel wouldn't do that. But he wound up in France gettin' to go to a party because he spoke some French. [laughs] And he said, "Yeah it was great, Dad." [coughs] So that's a little bit of the process there. The three kids I have are

all alive yet, one's forty-six years old and he works at a nuclear power plant. The daughter's over in Ann Arbor area, Michigan, and doesn't practice her German at all, I wish she did, you know, because she's very good at it. And my other son's out in Seattle looking for a job after a Master's Degree. So that's a little bit of the process. It's interesting how my dad would not let the family speak German after 1941 because it was the Germans again in World War II. He was very anti-fascist and Nazi at the same time, of course. And, so that's where it ended for me, so. And they still talk German once in a while to each other but not often any more.

Gould: I'm gonna take you a little bit out of sync--sequence here and ask you about your thoughts. [Rappe coughs] You must have been seven years old, if I'm counting, when World War II ends?

Rappe: Yeah.

Gould: So that would be old enough where you'd have cognizant--you'd be able to remember--

Rappe: Oh sure.

Gould: So what were your thoughts about that time, and right after the war?

Rappe: Right after the war? I remember sitting on the front stoop by 2103 South--North--2231, I'm sorry, that's a present memory--2231 North Palmer Street in Milwaukee when all the bells started ringing and the sirens went off in the summertime. I was playing with my dog Rex. So I ran back to our house in the rear--2231A--I said, "Ma, what's going on?" and all the women came out in the area sort of like a commons almost, all--they were lots--and they said, "The war must be over, the war must be over." That night my great-aunt, my little sister, my mother and I got on a bus that didn't make it to downtown Milwaukee. We walked down the rest of the way to watch all the sailors and soldiers and girls and guys and everyone parading in the streets just having a great time as you can only imagine ending a war like that was like. And of course I was awed, as a kid. I was up to my knees in paper. And every once in a while somebody'd start a fire in the paper by whatever reason. [coughs] It could have been very dangerous but it wasn't. And then somewhere in late in the evening we started walking back home from Wisconsin Avenue all the way to North Avenue [laughs] so that was quite a hike for a little seven year old and his five year old sister. But it was quite a thing to know the war was over. The GIs were all over the place, their paraphernalia was all over the place. I remember the big, thick aviator jackets that guys were wearing. I remember the big, heavy aviation gloves that they were commonplace at that time. I remember some of the airmen that visited my oldest sister at my grandma's house on Garfield Avenue. She was a good-looking gal, my oldest sister, and she had no problem [laughs]--the Air Force boys coming around and saying hello to her and coming all the way up to Milwaukee to see her in fact.

And so, it was quite an operation that way. The neighbor friend of mine was a--landed at Normandy as an example. And he suffered mentally, he never really recovered, well he had asthma and bronchitis, he drank heavy, you know, his florid face. He died fairly young, I gotta say that, you know he was in forties or something along that line. But it was a good time. The World War II materials disappeared all of a sudden, you know I was starting to collect stuff like that and all of a sudden couldn't get anything. It was gone from the streets. But we were glad the war was over, and then along comes the Cold War, the thing in Europe wasn't so bad, my mother was packing stuff to Germany illegally, like coffee and cigarettes, they would sew them into clothing and ship 'em over there and they said, "If your mother hadn't sent that stuff to us we'd have starved to death," you know, because the food supply was cut off to German civilians. And I remember my great-aunt and my mother being little criminals doing that [laughs] type of thing. Then I remember walking down Third Street which was a big shopping area in Milwaukee, my friend said, "Ah those--damn Chinese they're turning to Communists," he says. I said, "Well I thought they were pretty good people? They were on our side in World War II." Well, the Cold War's already starting at the early stage, is what it amounted to. So.

Gould: Okay, so I'm gonna bring you right back out to you've been discharged from the Army in 1963--

Rappe: Mm-hm.

Gould: You're back--you're back in Wisconsin, you want to talk any more about your veteran's administration, the hospital experience, the medical care you received--

Rappe: Yeah.

Gould: Afterwards.

Rappe: Well, when I was finally arrived in Pottstown, Pennsylvania area, the Valley Forge Hospital--it was a big ol' World War I type of hospital--and there were more patients than there was time for the psychiatrists, you know. We were just shelved for a while, is what it amounted to. I talked to them I think twice. And they gave me a little job, I ran into a soldier who didn't know how to read and write and I--to keep me busy--work therapy, which is always a good thing, I think--I tried to teach him how to read and write, you know as such. Otherwise they were going to kick him out of the Army. And finally after about two, three months there they gave me my discharge to go home. Simple as that, you know they went before a board and they asked me some questions in a room, and then I was given the official furlough as such, I'd say. When I came to Wisconsin, I went to Madison to live with my in-laws for a short while, and the VA sent me a form, you know, and I had a visitation in Milwaukee at the VA office downtown, a big white building. And they had some guy there who must have been a psychologist

or something like that. He talked to me briefly and I told him I was having difficulty getting a job, you know, because of course the field I was in was bad, teaching social studies. But there was no real attempt to help a person get a job either, and I thought, "You know, that helps a person get started going again and the VA should probably open that up too as far as I'm concerned." When they finally did activate me on the medical field, you know, when I was thirty years out of the Army, or close to it, then they proved themselves to be pretty capable. But back in those days, it was like you didn't exist, you know. And I'm a little--a little miffed about it because like I said, my wife was my psychiatrist, and that wasn't fair to her, you know?

Gould: Did you have, afterwards, did you have any interaction with veterans' organizations--American Legions, Veterans of Foreign Wars, or any interactions with your former comrades over in Germany?

Rappe: No, on both counts. I think it was sort of like sealing off a past, you know. Some bitter memories in it, and I was thinking of careering it--and I, or using it as a stepping stone to some other area of international relations or affairs. And on top of it, when you move in the military, they don't forward your mail to people if you move, so if we would have sent a letter back to Germany to the Kaisers, they would have never gotten it if they'd moved on to another place, you know, there's no order with it, so it broke the little chains of friendship that you'd had. And I didn't know where they were from as such. One of them was from New York City, and that just disappears, you know. A state like Wisconsin's a big place to find somebody, at least in those pre-computer days, you know.

Gould: Looking, looking back--we're kinda at the end of this tape, now--looking back, if you had to do it over again, would you have done anything different, or would you have taken a different line? Because you weren't drafted, you were ROTC. What would you have done, if anything, different?

Rappe: Probably not much, but I would say this, you know, 'course I'm fifty years older. That would have never happened to me a second time. In fact I've had people that were similar in nature to the people I dealt with, you know, people that were backstabbers, manipulators, or things like exploiters, or just plain jerks. But I can handle 'em now, back in those days I was fresh kid from the Midwest, they treated me like a Midwesterner, too, you know. Basic honesty, straightforward, that type of thing. But today I know how to handle myself real well. I've had problems with bosses that I took care of, took care of 'em lot differently than I did back in those days. I couldn't tell him to go to hell like Captain Shire, you know? It was just a different situation. He ridiculed me, one day I was sick, and I said, "I'd like to go home." He said, "They don't make you paratroopers very tough, do they?" I thought, "Why?" He talked to the sergeants about me, which you don't do, you know, not if you're a real legitimate leader. You don't do that with anybody, not even another soldier, you know? And so today I would have confronted him, as an

example. But as far as a career, I think I would have stuck to the same thing. I really--well, before I got into the military, the days before, one of my friends said, "Ed, why are you going into the military?" I says, "I think I owe it to my country, it gave me this opportunity to go to college--" He said, "You idiot," he says, "They're drafting less than one half of one percent of the people." And he didn't look at it the same way I did, obviously. I'm not a super patriot, but I do believe that, you know, we have community and we gotta deal with it and work for it.

Gould: Did you use your GI Bill afterwards?

Rappe: GI Bill came too late for me. I had my Master's Degree out of the way, and I think I got one credit out of it. Another case where the military dragged its feet and I suffered from it financially, you know. You get--well, you know for instance we went to Fort Holabird, Maryland, which is a big city up north and we were in the heart of it, and we had no field ration mess, we had no, well the officer's club was exuberant, expensive. And so we ate lunches that we made ourselves and everything else. And the group before us got per diem of seven dollars a day which would have taken care of some of those costs, our group got cut off. [laughs] It was one after another. I don't want to even bring it up in one respect 'cause it's ridiculous. But that's the type of thing you run into, you know. But I--I'm glad I served, you know. I--I feel that I'm a little notch above a lot of other people I run into. A lot of my friends never went into the military. They have no experience like I do. They don't know what a division's like, they don't know how you watch the other side. They don't know how to interrogate, things like that. And I use some of these skills to this day, you know? And I can't say--I think it--the military's a great place for young men and women to get their feet on the ground, and start establishing their thinking, provided they're not abused, you know that's the thing I worry about from my own experience. When my son went in the Navy, I said to him, the last thing I said, I says, "Go with God, just pick you friends well, you know?" And he seemed to have done that, and I'm glad for that. That came from my experience [laughs].

Gould: Any final thoughts on this?

Rappe: You know it's sorta sad when you run into a situation like I did, in my own mind, that one person can be such an influential mess for you. It's a first bad boss, or something like that, and it sets the tone for many years to come for people and the military should monitor some of its junior-level officers a little more. That's my feeling. Not me so much, but the captain before me. Talking about me to the troops, and insulting me? You know--I don't go for this "fellow officers" baloney all the time, but on the other hand there's things you just don't do. When I was in a classroom, I hardly ever disciplined a kid in front of the class. If I was really angry at him, out in the hall. And this is not the way he treated it. And that was fundamental, it was basic, it was human, you know? And that was not the way I was treated, and that angers me to this day. End of statement. [laughs]

Gould: Thank you Mr. Rappe. It's been a very informative and interesting interview.

[End of interview]