

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN RYBA
Engineer, Army, Korean War.

2002

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Ryba, John J., (1929-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Security Copy: 1 sound disc (ca. 55 min.), digital, 4 3/4 in.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John J. Ryba, a Chicago, Illinois native, discusses his Army service as a combat engineer during the Korean War. Ryba talks about his parents' immigration from Poland, growing up in Chicago, and moving to a farm near Sobieski (Wisconsin) after graduating high school. He addresses getting drafted into the Corps of Engineers and touches on building roads and hospitals in Japan and Korea. Ryba comments on four brothers who also served in the military. He talks about basic training at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri), taking the blame for a fellow soldier who stole something from the lunch room, and winning a boxing match against his acting platoon leader. Assigned to Yokohama (Japan), Ryba describes being in charge of building a runway addition with the labor of 500 Japanese civilians, including many women. He speaks of three months with the 45th National Guard Division in Pusan (Korea) doing engineering in a prison compound before being rotated back to Japan. Ryba describes duty as battalion mail clerk at Camp Tokorozawa (Yokohama). He comments on learning Japanese and being impressed by the poverty in Japan and Korea. He expresses opinions about learning English as a second language, respect for the American flag, and having an active foreign policy. Ryba details managing the Japanese workers, motivating them with gifts such as lemonade, intervening in squabbles, working seven days a week, and submitting progress reports. He speaks about food in Japan and the reliance of the Japanese on the U.S. military for income. He describes his homecoming: having leave to see a sister in Colorado, travelling to Wisconsin, and returning to his old job at the paper mill the same day he got back to town. Ryba addresses maintaining friendships from the service and joining the American Legion, VFW, and Elks Club. He comments on his work in the Wisconsin Legislature and reflects on the impact military service had on his life.

Biographical Sketch:

Ryba (b.1929) served active duty in the Army from 1951 to 1953 and in the Army Reserves until 1961. He settled in Green Bay, worked thirty years at Proctor and Gamble, and represented the 90th Assembly District in the Wisconsin Legislature.

Interviewed by Michael Hollander, 2002

Transcribed by Sheila Shambaugh, Court Reporter, 2009

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Interview Transcript:

Mike: This is an interview with John Ryba. The date is June 12th, 2002. We are conducting this interview in his office in the State Capitol, and the interviewer is Michael Hollander. If you could, tell me a little bit about your background and your life circumstances.

Ryba: Well, [laughs] I was born in the city of Chicago. My mother and dad are from Poland. They came in from Poland as immigrants. They were eighteen—my mother was eighteen, and my dad was nineteen, and my mother was then dropped off in Detroit, and my dad went on and was dropped off in Chicago, but they had met on the boat coming over, and they kept communicating between each other, and then my dad sent for my mother, and she came over to Chicago and then they got married, and that started the family of thirteen in Chicago. My dad didn't speak any English when he came here, but he went ahead and took the necessary things to do to learn and became a boiler engineer, and so he was able to take care of his thirteen kids quite well [laughs]. I went to school in Chicago and graduated from high school, and I graduated in June, and then in August we moved on a farm, moved to Wisconsin, and that's how we got out of Chicago. My—one of my older brothers had met a girl in Chicago who was staying with her uncle who was from Wisconsin from a farm, and they got married. And her folks talked my folks into "Come on out, and move on a farm because, boy, with all your kids, you know, you gotta [laughs] have a farm." That's how we came to Wisconsin, which was the best thing that ever happened as far as I'm concerned. So that's how we got here.

Mike: Okay. Could you describe your entry into military service?

Ryba: Well, I was drafted out of Oconto County. I went to—I was just the right time. I was just twenty years old, going on twenty-one, and I got drafted, and that's the way I got in the service. Spent two years, ah, in service, and when I got out I stayed on as an active reserve where we had to make the meetings once a week or—then they went into one weekend or two weekends a month or something, I forgot how it was. I stayed in for nine years that way. That way I was out of my obligations for being on call in case something came up. And as it turned out, something did come up after nine years. We ran into the Korean thing—I mean the Vietnam and—but my time was up, and I didn't reenlist because my wife that stayed with three kids, "There's no way you're going to be gettin' [laughs]—going away again." So I didn't reenlist, but I did have nine years of active reserve plus two years of reserve—I mean active duty in service. I was a combat engineer and later on got transferred to an engineering outfit there, helping build roads and what not, hospitals and—but mostly in Japan. I was in Korea a short time only. I kind of lucked out. I got shipped to Japan, and then from Japan they hooked me up with a—I can't remember, was it 45th? I think it was the 40th or 45th Illinois National Guard Division in Inchon, Korea, and—but they were there almost a year, and so they rotated back to the States. I thought, "Oh, man, I'm

going back home.” No, sir, no such animal. They dropped me off in Japan [laughs] ‘cause I didn’t have enough time overseas. So anyway, I stayed in Japan, but then I picked up some rank and got up to sergeant and so I was, I was in various different duties, mostly in building roads and building hospitals and additions to roadways, the helicopters coming in with wounded can drop their patients off and on, and the ambulance could get them. We thought that was our primary job.

Mike: What year were you drafted?

Ryba: I was drafted in 1951, March 19, 1951, and I got out March 1st, something like that, of ’53.

Mike: What were you doing at the time?

Ryba: I was, I was working for Proctor—well, it was the Charmin paper mill in Green Bay at that time. Because I knew I was going to be drafted I had my, you know, everything was just waiting for the draft notice. So I was—I did, I was working for Charmin, it was, and then I got drafted and went two years and come back and went back to the company, and they hired me back, and, ah, shortly, a year or so after that they became Proctor and Gamble, and I stayed there for thirty years.

Mike: What service unit did you get drafted into?

Ryba: I got drafted into Engineers right off the bat. I was assigned to a combat engineer organization immediately, and I stayed with—went from combat engineers to engineer the building portions, so—I, you know, when I went in I felt like, “Ah, I’ll probably never come back, with my luck [laughs].” So I went in, you know, with great pride, and my dad was really, really proud of me because I was the fourth one of the family to go into service. I had lost three brothers to World War II. Ah, they didn’t die in service but afterwards as a result of injuries in combat. They had—eventually had passed away by the time—a couple years later. So I was the fourth one, and then my brother Leonard also went, but he was just right for Vietnam. So there was five out of the eight brothers who were in service.

Mike: Do you remember your induction interview and physical?

Ryba: Yeah, it was in Milwaukee—no, not Milwaukee—in Illinois. Navy Pier? Yeah, Navy Pier, in that area. We were bussed from Oconto when we were drafted. We met in Oconto at the draft board, got on a bus and were bussed to Navy Pier, that’s what it was. That’s out of Chicago there. And we were there about three days before we were processed, and from there I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. That’s where I took my training.

Mike: Do you have any stories about your entry?

Ryba: Not really, no. There is a picture here of—I got to Korea, some of the guys, and I haven't been able to contact any of the guys. They all moved to different places, but they were from different states, but we were sort of—pretty close knit together, and we were in the same company and got to know each other. They were pretty nice guys. I wish that some day I could run into 'em [laughs]. No, I don't have—because, you know what, we went in there, and I went in because I was asked to go in. I didn't fight it. Besides that, my dad would clobber me if I said, "No, I don't want to go." Because we have—we are a very patriotic family. I have a son, and I told him at eighteen, to go and register. "You go register, or you're out of the house; you're not a member of this household." And so he understood me very clearly, and so he registered, but he never was drafted because in that era there was nothing going on.

Mike: What can you—you tell me your basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, right?

Ryba: Yeah, it was strictly infantry there 'cause we weren't assigned to anything. It was infantry basic training, and it was, it was, you know, pretty swift and long days because we had a short time to train. You know, Viet—Korea was really exploding, and they didn't have enough people, and so what the heck was it that we had? Eleven weeks training, that's all we had, and then at the end of eleven weeks we had a fifteen day leave and then boarded the train, and away we went to Washington to get on a boat to go overseas.

Mike: What do you remember about the camp and its facilities?

Ryba: Fort Leonard Wood was just like a big campground, you know [laughs], with tents all over the place, but they had strict training 'cause we had a lot to learn in a short time, see, and so they were pretty strict. And I remember one time, one of the guys, and I can't remember what his name was anymore, but he was on KP, and he took something, I can't remember what it was, out of the kitchen with him, and as he was coming out, it was like 8:00 o'clock in the evening, he was all done with his KP work, and he was going to go to the barracks. Well, they spotted him with it, and I forget what this was. So he ran to the barracks, and they're chasing after him, and he dropped this thing on my bunk, which I wasn't even there. I was somewhere in the canteen or someplace, but he put it on my bunk and ran right straight through to the Quonset hut it was and out the other door, and they come and they [pounding sound] picked that up, and they didn't see him, but they took the name off the bunk of, you know, Private Ryba [laughs]. So meanwhile, this guy, his name was Joe, I think, something or other. Anyway, he came to me before the authorities got the MPs to pick me up and told me, he said, "John," he said, "Jesus Christ, please don't tell them it was me." 'Cause he was one of those married guys that got drafted. He says, "You're single and I'm married. Jesus Christ," he said. I said, "Okay, don't

worry about it. I won't say nothing." So up they come, they picked me up and said, "All right, why did you steal this?" I said, "I didn't steal it." "Come on now, you came out of—you were seen come out of the lunch room." I says, "I didn't come out of the lunch room. I was in the canteen. I don't know how this got here. I don't know anything." But they, you know, they couldn't find anything else. But we had a real tough sergeant, you know, and he said, "Okay, you little so and so," he says, "you're not gonna graduate with the rest. You're gonna be on KP cleaning grease traps [pounding sound] when we're out—when everybody else is out there graduating." Because it was only like ten days before our final day, and we were going to be shipped out and to go home for the fifteen day leave to get our orders, see [laughs]. But I went there, and I was cleaning grease traps, but, you know, that guy never did forget that. He kept contact, and I think he died and that's why we don't—you know, not contacting me anymore, but I wouldn't give his name. I just, I don't know, I took it [laughs]. I'll never forget that. I figured what the hell, the guy's married, he's in trouble. Me, I'm single, what's the difference? Nobody will know the difference. So that was really something.

Mike: What did you do for recreation during basic training?

Ryba: Well, you know, I used to box when I was in Chicago in Golden Gloves, and I was getting hit, and I was, you know, pretty well built. I was five-eight and about a hundred and ninety pounds, you know, and so I took care of myself pretty good. But then my dad didn't want me to box. He said, "You're gonna get your head all beat up, you're goofy enough without [both laugh] all that kind of—" Then when we moved out of Chicago I didn't get a chance to go to college where I would have, you know, got into this boxing a little deeper probably. So I had kind of given up. So—but the guys knew, you know, everybody knew that I had been boxing, in my unit, see. So the way they did things in those days, the tallest kid was picked as the squad leader, and this kid was picked—I don't know where the hell he was from—but anyway, because of the alphabet deal, most of my friends from Oconto were in the other company because the cutoff was in the Rs, see. So they'd always come over to my barracks, or I'd go over to their barracks. But this redhead sergeant—I mean not sergeant but acting platoon leader, says, "I don't want you going out of this barracks." And he was just another draftee like me [unintelligible], and I said, "Screw ya [laughs]. If I want to go out there, what the hell you think, you're my father, my mother?" And these guys were laughing like hell at me next door, you know. And so they went by this redheaded platoon leader and said, "You know what, you want to do it to this Ryba? Then you ought to go and get a boxing match here between the barracks and punch the hell out of him." "Oh," he says, "that's a good idea," but they'd set him up [both laugh]. They knew I'd boxed. [laughs] And sure as shit, walked in, everybody is out there, eighty, ninety, a hundred people maybe, all the guys in the unit. They're all yelling, and, well, I didn't want to hurt the kid, but I knew that I had way over him because I had training in this, see? He didn't have no training. So he comes out the first thing [whooshing sound], and pretty soon

he is gasping, you know, and all I do was just keep on moving around. He never came close to me, and all of a sudden I give him a little shot. I just kind of burned him a little bit. I didn't want to hurt the guy, and I just kind of burned him up pretty good, and then he finally quit. And I never really give him a shot because I thought it was unfair 'cause he just wasn't a boxer, you know, and these guys started whooping about it (??). "You bastard, you set him up." [both laugh] But anyway, we got by through that. But I used to, you know, if there was a baseball game, I'd get in that, and football, I'd get in that; whatever, you know, sports I could. Bowling, you know, loved to bowl. That was about all. But we had a short stay there, and then when we went overseas there was no room for that kind of stuff because we worked day and night practically.
[coughs]

Mike: Can you tell me about your first assignment?

Ryba: First assignment in?

Mike: After you left basic training.

Ryba: Oh, yeah, the first assignment was in a construction battalion just in Yokohama, Japan, and we were building a runway addition because they wanted bigger planes to come in with more wounded on the hospital planes. So—but there was only three Americans and 500 Japanese laborers. All the labor was, was by the Japanese people, which they were earning their money to live on. And I was in charge of the project, and then I had a guy that was in charge of the heavy machinery and one guy a head of the labor people. So there was three of us that run this whole operation. That was my first job overseas, and we worked day and night [unintelligible]—whenever you fell asleep [laughs] [unintelligible] but we had a field office and all that, you know, and we had probably more women than men. There was no wheelbarrows. They (??) carried stone and everything. Battan [bamboo] baskets on their heads, kept on going round and round. You'd be surprised how quick they could move a ton of stone, boy. But then 15th (??) [Infantry Regiment] got worse, and I got orders to go join the 45th National Guard Division in Pusan and that's what I had to do. So I went and was back like in three months. They rotated back, and then they dropped me back off in Japan again, and I went back to Yokohama. Camp Tokorozawa it was called, and I became the battalion mail clerk. 'Cause by that time I was a sergeant so I was battalion mail clerk, and my job was just to go—I had a jeep assigned to me and a .45. My job was to go down to the battalion—I mean to Yokohama, the main post office there and pick up the mail for our division and bring it to my headquarters and sort the mail out by companies, you know, and battalions within our group there. Then they'd come and—all their mail clerks would come then and get their mail from me. That was my job until I rotated back to the States [laughs]. So I lucked out.

Mike: How did you first get to Yokohama?

Ryba: Well, we went by boat is how we got to Yokohama. We got to—I forget the body of water. Then we dropped off, and then we had to go by train. We had an Army train that took us for days to get to Yokohama to the camp because it wasn't right in the city. It was like in a little village outside the city, and people lived all around there. It just looked like a little alley and these little grass huts, and that's where the Japanese people lived, that was their homes. It was neat to go and see that the first time. Of course you get used to it after awhile, you know. Just people. But it was interesting, you know, you learn—I learned the language, you know, pretty good, pretty quick because we had to. That's why now, you know, I don't have no love for the people who are saying, "We can't learn English, it's too hard. So therefore you should learn our language." Bullshit. Goddamn, they came over here on their own free will, and they got good jobs, you know, and I would never—and I'm glad the county board in our county voted just yesterday to retain English as the official language. I'm really happy, and I'm gonna make sure I get a note out to each one of those guys because it should be. These people come over here and they got good jobs, and, ah, and they're dictating to us what language we should be learning. But see, I found out about a year ago, right here in this office, when we had four—I had four gentlemen come in, Hmongs, and they spoke real well, English, you know, and they said, "Well, we know that you never voted for—against the English language, but we're asking that you not vote for English to be official because our people, they can't learn that." I said, "What do you mean they can't learn it? All the kids are learning it in school. Why aren't the parents learning from the kids?" "Well, it's too hard." You know, I was kind of with mixed emotions, but then a couple months later I had another couple come in, and they spoke English and they says, "Well, we just are following up on the places that these four gentlemen from" and they had a group name. He says, "Actually, what they are, are preserving their jobs because they are interpreters for the Hmong people, and what they do is they charge us to file documents and everything, American documents, and, you know, legal things to read, they charge us for, and so they don't want us to learn. They don't want our people to learn." Ah, that's the—that's when I was really pretty sure that there is no way that I would ever vote against English being our official language. But they still try, you know. So anyway, to me it's not a big thing. This is America, and I feel, by golly, you know, we gave up a lot to preserve our country and our families. I was born in an average family, and I don't think that I want to change anything. My parents came here as Polish immigrants. They learned English, and they got to be successful, and, damn it, everybody else should do it. I don't think there should be any exceptions. Give them the time, give them the resource, provide them with the equipment, but they gotta learn, that's it. None of this, "I can't." If they can't, they should move out. That's my opinion. They should at least try. And we should make sure that we provide them with the necessary tools to learn, and that, that much I have to go along with because if they can't learn on their own when they need some training. And I say, if necessary, hire some more people, but train them. They should be able to learn English in two years and speak

fluently. That's enough time, I learned Japanese in three months [laughs]. Well, anyway that's about the crux of it (??).

Mike: Now then when you got transferred over to Korea, how did they move you?

Ryba: That was all by train. Well, the first move was by plane. Yeah, the first move was a plane, and then got on a plane, they got me on a train from the plane and then trucks first and then to a train, and then I don't know how long that train was, hours, and got dropped off, and back on big trucks again and then out to a camp, and all we did was segregate prisoners that were in the compound. There was way too many, and, you know, killing each other, battling. So we had to just make more because we were engineers, so that's when we [unintelligible] we brought the equipment in and everything, but we never finished the project because my battalion was moving back, rotating back to the States, and I was in that battalion so I tagged along, but [laughs] they dropped me off in Japan because I wasn't overseas long enough. It was less than three months, I know, I can't remember exactly, but anyway, and, oh yeah, I was just—but it was an experience that probably never would experience it [laughs] if I wasn't drafted. It turned out pretty good. So, yeah, I—one thing that I don't ever want to hear anybody say, "Yeah, screw it, you know, screw the flag. God damn, what's a flag, just a piece of rag." I don't want anybody talking like that in front of me. I become very violent. That flag means a lot to us, you know, in our family. My mother and dad are deceased, but they died being very proud of the United States and the flag. Even though they lost three sons, they still were very proud, and my dad would always say, "Don't you ever try to get out of the draft," he says, "or else." [laughs] He said, "This is your country." He said, "I'm only here temporarily, and the Lord will take me away some day but this is your country forever. My country is still Poland, but [unintelligible] I'm here, and this is the country that I have to abide by, and you guys better do that." [laughs] They was pretty strict that way.

Mike: What was your first impression about when you first saw Japan and when you first saw Korea?

Ryba: Oh, I just couldn't believe how people lived (??); it was just horrible. I don't even know how the hell--no wonder they die at a young age [unintelligible]. It was, you know, I couldn't believe, couldn't believe what they drank and ate meals that bad (??). I'm surprised that they lived to be forty or fifty. So we were, you know, we were susceptible to being diseased at any time. So we had, you know, to be careful, make sure we don't—before we go out partying not to drink no water of theirs, and don't drink nothing unless it's bottled with a cap on it. I can't recall which booze (??), but I could not believe how people lived. I thought there is no place in the world that anybody would think (??) is worse, but I found out differently. There is. Goin' into Mexico—we went out into the Hopi (??) land in Mexico. Half the people there—boxes of stuff. Aw, man, you know. I couldn't believe it (??) so close to the United States, Mexico is [unintelligible].

But, you know, those things that because of the places that I've been, you know, I respect the United States a lot better that way. I understand, you know, a lot of—quite a few of these young people say, “What the hell are we doing over there, fighting over there? God damn it, we should—” I says, “Hey, would you rather fight here?” This last episode here, September 11th. Now I can go back to some of those people, “I told you. It's bad. It's close to home.” “Oh, my God.” “Well, yeah, if we don't stay over there, there is going to be a hell of a lot more here. Now you know what I'm talking about?” “Oh, I understand now.” Would you rather have it here, or would you rather have it there? It won't help them over there to try to end this. So yeah, you know, right now all those countries, they're starving. They're going to get more and more vicious. They despise America because they think we are the richest in the world. We probably are, but, you know, we didn't get that way just by itself, we worked for it. So ah—**[End of Tape 1, Side A]** So all in all, I have a good life, good political life, thirty-three years and wind up in government, being on city council, county board, twenty-three, a little over twenty-three years and never was defeated and I think—told that they respect me, and that's the way I want to go out, being respected, and that's what we're going to do. Now, a lot of people say, “How come you're getting out? Christ, you got everything going your way.” I says, “Well, I understand that, but I got a wife that has MS, and so—my grandchildren are all gone, are gonna be all gone to college, and [unintelligible] poppin' in and out all day long. Now I'm here, so I need to be closer to home. So we agreed that I won't run for office anymore [laughs], and so I've ran her up for twenty—thirty-three years total, [unintelligible]. I don't regret nothing, not one day. There's, you know, but I've helped lots of people and that's what this whole country is about, helpin' the ones who need help.

Mike: Could you describe for me your life in the military?

Ryba: Oh, in the military, it was just a routine thing. You know, every day you did the same thing, and you look on the board in the morning and say “Oh, Ryba's got to do this because [unintelligible] except when I got into—I got some rank. Then I was in charge, and then I had to make sure that the GIs were always respectable to the Japanese who were working for us, which they were, and also if there were any problems with the Japanese because there was a lot [unintelligible]. I had to be sort of an intervener with them. So—and there was always problems, there was always something. The big thing was like a lot of time it was a husband and wife on a team, and they'd get to squabble. Didn't quite understand why, but it had to be something to do with another guy or another woman, or just like here, you know, in these factories, there's something to do with male-female, and that thing, you know. But at that point their language was not something that we [unintelligible]. It was hard to pick that up. You just had to kind read between the lines. But as a whole, the Japanese always respected us, my group anyway, my two guys and myself—or three guys and myself. They had respect for us and always did what we asked them to do and [unintelligible] done. I'd always give them a little reward. I came up with a goal. I'd say, “If you guys can gravel this

field here, this road, one mile today, tomorrow I got a present for everybody.” Oh, they’d work like a son of a bitch and they would, they’d gravel these all over. So the next day I go into the canteen. I’d say, “Okay. Fix me up a couple dozen of these two hundred gallon big stainless steel pots.” I said, “Fill it up with lemonade, and bring it out to the work site. I want to treat these people. I want lots of ice in it.” They’d haul truckloads out [unintelligible] treat them all, and they never tasted lemonade before. They just thought [laughs] it was somethin’. So I’d do that, you know, a couple times, two—three times a year to keep them on the good side. And they worked well [unintelligible] and they drove truck, you know. They did everything. Our guys, we were just what they call they “honcho.” We were a big wheel and none of the Army people, the U.S. people did any work, just a progress report. We had to send that in. We had a general that was in charge of this whole project, and he would fly in from some other big city and check it out maybe once a month. [unintelligible] “Aw, shit. You guys are Goddamn good.” [laughs] That’s the way he talked. Back in the helicopter and away he’d go back [unintelligible]. So, you know, it was just—gave him the papers that we kept track of how many miles we went, how much we graded, how much we graveled, you know, black top. We had to have that once a month. So that was kind of a routine, people the same. There was no Saturday, there was no Sunday, it was just the day—every day was a day. Most of the time we didn’t know if it was Saturday or Monday or Sunday or what. You’d take so many days in a row of long days, then we’d just get hold of some Japanese rotgut and get pissed up [laughs], then sleep it off and back to work the next day. So it was just routine; it came every day, and there were days we [unintelligible]. We never got too much information on how the war was going [unintelligible]. Korea [unintelligible]. So we didn’t [unintelligible] not too much. Sort of do our thing except when the planes come in and helicopters come in with their wounded. We had one of the main hospital bases. But it was good. The service was all right. It turned out pretty good for me.

Mike: What was the food like?

Ryba: Oh, it was all right. We, we attempted to try to eat some of the Japanese food, you know, sukiyaki, and some of what they called chicken. It would have been all right if you didn’t see how the chickens were running around out there eating [unintelligible] so we didn’t want no chicken [laughs], but pretty much stuck to our unit brought in by huge canisters full of [unintelligible]. They supplied all the foods [unintelligible] United States and New York and California. It was all in huge containers with dry ice or frozen. [unintelligible] huge [unintelligible] keep ’em fresh in those tankers [unintelligible]. We didn’t have no electricity [unintelligible] generators [unintelligible]. So, the food we tried to [unintelligible] and the cooks did a pretty good job [unintelligible]. We lost some weight, didn’t gain none, but I figured we stayed pretty much the same. It was different. It was different. [unintelligible] Fresh food we couldn’t eat because there wasn’t any. They couldn’t bring it over. So by the time it got there it was rotten. So very rarely did [unintelligible] any of the Japanese

[unintelligible] fertilizer [unintelligible]. I for one [laughs] didn't get involved with that. [unintelligible] that's why. Well, that's why the tour of duty is [unintelligible].

Mike: What did you do while you were on leave?

Ryba: Not much. You couldn't take much leave [unintelligible]. You couldn't, you know, there was really no place to go. We were out in the country, no city (??). It seemed like anyway, and we couldn't get there. I think we took one leave, a pass, a three-day pass, and the trucks drove us into Yokohama. [unintelligible] hotels and restaurants, and all you could do is drink, you know, because what the hell else we gonna do (??). Some guys latched onto some girls, and when they come back then they suffered, too. They got the clap [unintelligible]. So there you are (??) [unintelligible] "What's your name?" (??) but that's, you know, entertainment there wasn't much, not at all, and they were all geared to try to make a buck from the Americans. They did everything and anything necessary to make that buck. So—because, you know, they didn't have no money there. There was no guys, other Japanese. Young guys who were in service fought in the war, got killed. Women outnumbered men in Japan at that time probably ten to one or more. So these women were lookin' for money. No job [unintelligible] for their own needs no money for [unintelligible]. But the veterans, I mean, the military was the one that was feeding them. Then we hired a lot, paid 'em more (??). [unintelligible] and I hired two ladies to work in the office, to scrub the floor for me and clean. [unintelligible] So they do a nice job of cleaning. [unintelligible] for pay. And these were married ladies. A lot of times they'd bring their little baby on their back. I felt sorry for them so I'd give them a candy bar or something, you know, I remember one that [unintelligible] candy bar [laughs]. Yeah, they had tough going, but it's a way of life for them. Now all that's changed. I guess they're living pretty high, and they all got jobs, and things have changed. See at that time, you know, the Japanese were not too good. You know, they got stripped of everything; they were bombed out of everything. They were all hurting (??). But I guess they come out of it [laughs].
[End of Tape 1, Side B]

Mike: So then after your eighteen months were up of your tour overseas, how did you feel?

Ryba: [laughs] I felt glad to get out of there, you know, get back to civilization. We got rotated back to, to state of Washington, Fort Puget Sound, by way of the Puget Sound, and then we got on a train and went to Camp Carson in Colorado, for our process to rotate back home. We stayed in Camp Carson about a week we'd be told before they got to us for rotating back home. So I have a sister living in Denver. I call her up, and I say, "Hey, Mary, can you bring a car down and pick us up, and we could, you know, we could get a three-day pass, but we won't be processed for another seven days. So we can go for a three-day pass." "We'll be right there". So they got a whole God darn van and come down and picked up

five of us, myself and four buddies. And she had a turkey, and we had a big dinner and a couple of beers and the next day they drove us back to the camp and good thing they did because we were processed three days early. So we got there just in time. So we got our orders the next day, and then we got tickets on a plane, first American plane [laughs] they gave us to go back home. We had to go to Milwaukee, and in Milwaukee we had to take a bus, a Greyhound bus. There was no train coming into our area anyways (??) and at that time there was no plane that I could take that went into Green Bay 'cause we lived at Sobieski [unintelligible]. I don't know how I would get from Green Bay to Sobieski then [laughs]. So anyway, we got back home and the next day I went down to Green Bay, the paper mill. "When can you start?" He says, "You can start today." "I'll be comin' in for three-eleven shift." I went right back to work. [unintelligible]

Mike: At that time was the military still on the point system?

Ryba: Yeah, for Regular Army, not for draftees. Draftees, you had to be there two years, mandatory two years for draftees, but the other people, the Regular Army, ah, had—Regular Army and also the, what do you call, Reserves, the Reserve units like the Illinois National Guard, those kinds of units. They had to get seventy-two months or something like that. It was so many points for each thing, and they had to get up to X points, and then they rotated back home. But we didn't have, we didn't have points, we just had the mandatory minimum of twenty months of service. But they ran us right [unintelligible] within two weeks I think of two years (??).

Mike: Did you continue any close friendships you made in the service?

Ryba: Yeah, for a while, for a while, yeah, I did. There was—in fact I still do. There is one, one guy that I got drafted with by the name of Don Mulrain (??) from Pound. He still lives in Oconto, and he's still living. He is about a year older than me, in fact, and I call him every once in awhile. In fact, I'm planning on doing that shortly, to meet him half way someplace for supper, have a steak supper together. We went together, then we separated when we got to Yokohama, Japan, and then on the way back we got back on the same ship to come back. So I didn't see him all the eighteen months I was in Japan, but he stayed right in Korea as a truck driver, see. So—and there was a couple others I had contact with. I think two or three are dead. I knew guys out of the other states—I never did went to see Tom [unintelligible]. He was a big sucker. He was like my guide, you know. So he got to liking me, and nobody messed with me [unintelligible], but I don't know what happened with him. I tried to contact the city, but he must have got home and got married and moved away or something, 'cause there was no I think they call 'em "John Does" in that city, so—but, ah, it's fifty years, you know.

Mike: Did you join or become involved with any veterans organizations?

Ryba: Oh, yeah, I'm a lifetime member of American Legion in the Green Bay division; lifetime member of VFW; lifetime member of the Elks Club. I haven't been going to many meetings. I couldn't, but after I get done here with this term then I'll be—I'll have more time and hopefully I can [unintelligible]. They're not waitin' for me to come back [laughs].

Mike: Have you attended any of the meetings?

Ryba: Oh, yeah, I did earlier, but now lately I haven't. I used to go to all the meetings, VFW and American Legion, but I still, we still go when they have special functions, some special dinner or something like that. [unintelligible] So they know me pretty well.

Mike: Would you say that there is any correlation between working in the legislature and being in the military?

Ryba: Ah, no. You know, being in the military you had to have a certain amount of discipline. They instilled that in you, you know, or you had to pay the consequence. [coughs] Here I'm the boss, and, you know, I don't have to answer to nobody except my voters. And Jensen and Chvala or any of those guys they don't mean diddly. It's—my time is dedicated to the people in the 90th Assembly District. I made that known when I got here, and that's what I have stood by, and they accepted that very well. I had friends on both sides of the aisle. Nobody—no enemy on either side. I voted my conscience and what was best for the people. And the way it turned out, most of the time it was Republican, only because the Republicans had the majority and they wouldn't let any other bill [laughs]. So [laughs], they had a [unintelligible], I had a reporter from Green Bay, "How come you always vote Republican?" I said, "There's no reason for me to go by 'em (??)" That's it. But it—I had worked ten years when I became [unintelligible]. I was treated real well by both parties and any time I want something, they always make sure I get it, if possible. I was treated real well, but I treated them the same way, no animosity toward them, try to respect their wishes. If I couldn't vote for something I'd tell 'em point blank in caucus (??) unless something comes up that changes my mind the last minute, I will be the first one to vote against it, and that I did. So they respected that. They knew when they come to me. They knew if they needed votes they had to go to somebody else because they already know, but what they didn't—if somebody said, "Well, I'll think about it," then they don't know where they are at with their bills, see, they don't know if it's going to pass or not. That put them in a spot. With me, no problem, I vote yes or no right then and there [pounding sound]. I said, "But, I also can change my mind I might change my mind if something changes." We already put in a bill, I already put in a bill that was changed so drastically in committees I voted against it. Somebody said, "What are you doing voting against your own bill?" That ain't my bill. That ain't my bill at all I put in, and, yes, I voting against it. Now, you find [unintelligible]. Before they didn't have the guts to do it. They thought, "That's terrible. You're voting

against your own bill.” Bullshit, you do what you want. If you don’t like it, change it, vote against it. I did. So now you have a lot of ’em doing that, but it’s normal now [laughs]. See, I was one that I didn’t believe in just getting up on the floor for the sake of making noise. If something was answered or said, I didn’t get up if it was said. But a lot of guys, they want to be heard, especially if there’s news people there. Aw, they want to be sure they’re heard, but that was not my cup of tea. I didn’t go for that. If it was said, if the question was answered that I had on mind [unintelligible]. So I didn’t get involved too much in the big arguments. Most of the time it was repetition. You sit there for hours and the same thing, the same questions, and then the people that aren’t there, half of them aren’t there on the floor, then when they come back two hours later, they’re asking the same questions. They weren’t there when the answer was there, you know. I said, “To hell with this noise” [laughs].

Mike: So, looking back, how do you feel about your military and your war experience?

Ryba: Oh, I think it was a good experience. I’m glad everything happened the way it did. It gave me a better feeling of how other people lived, and whenever I thought that, oh boy, we’re really unlucky kids, ’cause, boy, we can’t have roller skates, and we can’t have bicycles like all the other kids have, but, you know. But, you know, and Cal (??) [unintelligible] mentioned there’s a just a [unintelligible] that don’t have folks, no food, no medical at all. They’re disfigured from bein’ sick. So we had a lot—I had a lot to be thankful for. I don’t regret it. I think that I have been lucky to have a good way of life, and that’s because Dad was very strict. Toe the mark. A job to do, you do your job, you do it right. You never talk against your country, never talk against the flag, you never talk against the church. And you will go to church every Sunday, every holiday, period. No questions asked [laughs]. So that’s what we did. Church every Sunday, every holiday. We still do. You just need maintenance (??). My family—I’m happy that my family still goes. We’re Roman Catholic, so—and we’re getting bashed around like that (??), but I ignore it. Some people think it’s a big [unintelligible]. I think they’re just wasting their energy. Most people [unintelligible] the way of life. I think it’s gonna blow over shortly. Then you got the percentage of people who are lying because they want publicity. Unfortunately, they don’t even pick those out (??). I don’t even pay attention to that. I just pay attention to my own priest and how he treats the people and how he treats us. And I’m set in mind (??).

Mike: Do you have anything else you’d like to add?

Ryba: Not really. I guess I just was lucky in life to be able to go thirty-three years without being defeated and to be able to say up until this day I fulfilled my promise. My promise was never have to be ashamed of how I voted to Mom and Dad, and that’s one thing that my dad told me when I first got it as an alderman, and he sat down with me in a room, and he said, “Don’t forget,” he says, “the way you vote, make goldarn sure that the people don’t come back and you’re

gonna—he's gonna look down on you. When you make a vote, lift up your head and vote, vote your conscience, and don't be ashamed of how you voted. But by golly, if you made a mistake, be the first one and get up on that table and say, 'I made mistake.' And there's nothing wrong with that." That's what he always preached at us. So I kind of remembered that. That's what I—when I first started out I promised him he'd never have to be ashamed of [unintelligible] and I until today at least I can say that [laughs] they heard me, and that's why I got so much respect out there. But all good things come to an end, and so I need to be at home now, and that's what I'm going to be doing. I'll be at home. Eh? Who the hell knows, maybe if I feel good in a year or so, I might maybe run for local or at home, you know, like alderman or something like that, but I doubt it because my wife is, you know, she needs somebody by her side pretty steady now, so that's what I plan on doin'. The military was good for me. I think it was a good lesson and probably made a better man [laughs] out of me. I learned to respect people. So time went by so fast that we had to be, you know, you had to enjoy yourself. If it was miserable it would seem like a thousand years, but it doesn't, you know, it just went fast. Just like here, in ten years we're gonna be at the end of the year. I don't know where it went. But that's life. Other than that, I'm a member of VFW, American Legion, Elks. The Elks—I'm an officer in the Elks, and so I go generally go to the meetings there, but the other two organizations, twice a year I go to their dinner, their main dinner dance or somethin' like that or some fundraisers of some kind. I always take their picnic tickets, and I always take their raffle tickets, and I keep active that way. And they know that, you know, that I can't get to all the meetings, but I will, I'll go back and start attending. There's a lot of meetings [laughs]. There is probably a half dozen different organizations that want me to join. The Moose is after me like crazy, and all these small (??) business associations. Hey, I can't make it, the ones I got now. How the hell can I go to another one? [laughs] You know, they don't want—there's no question, I don't care if it cost me a buck or so, but that's not the idea. If you can't make it—all in all, it's, you know, it's all turned out good, and I have no regrets for being drafted. In fact, I'm glad I was, because [unintelligible] and about the military. That's why I'm a firm believer in the military. I think we're making the right move by beefing up our military, and give them decent pay so we can keep them. They've come a long way from when I was in service. I visit some of these units now, man, everything is all on computer, precision work and, you know, all technical [laughs]. Man, it's really something the way these guys are trained now, and all by machine, everything all technical. That's great, you know, I'm all in favor of that for sure.

Mike: Well, thank you for your time.

Ryba: Well, thanks for stopping by, by golly.

[End of Interview]