

Interview with John Raschke

VRK-A-L-2010-002

Interview Date: January 25, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

DePue: Today is Monday, January 25, 2010. My name is Mark DePue; I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here with John R. Raschke. Good afternoon, Mr. Raschke.

Raschke: How do you do?

DePue: We're at his home, which is just east of Geneseo, Illinois. The home is near the farm that you owned and worked most of your life, is that correct?

Raschke: Yes, that's right.

DePue: This is part of our *Veterans Remember* series, and I'm interviewing you today, obviously, about your Korean War experiences. But I always like to start with a little bit of background, especially since you grew up on the farm during the Depression; that's always an interesting and important topic to talk about. So, why don't you start with telling us where and when you were born.

Raschke: July 30, 1930; hospital in Geneseo. About five miles west of Geneseo that I spent the rest of my life, until about...must have been '55 when we moved, oh, right down the road from our present house.

DePue: But still were farming at that time?

Raschke: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yeah.

DePue: Were you the first in the family?

Raschke: No. No, I had a brother that died at birth, a sister that died at nine of leukemia—she was about three years older than I in effect because I started school and she walked with me to school the first day. I think just a couple of days later, her sickness got so bad, you know, then she died right after the new year.

DePue: How many siblings were there all together?

Raschke: Well, the two that died, my sister, and myself.

DePue: So, for most of your life, you were growing up the only child?

Raschke: Well, my surviving sister is about five years younger than me, I believe. So, for about five years, I was.

DePue: What was your father and mother's name?

Raschke: Fern Adams.

DePue: Your mother's maiden name, is Adams?

Raschke: Yes. Yes.

DePue: And your father's name?

Raschke: John Raschke.

DePue: Oh, John R., or...?

Raschke: No, John Ludwig. (laughs) John L.

DePue: Ludwig, huh?

Raschke: Yeah, he was.

DePue: Well, you can't get much more German than Johann Ludwig Raschke, right?

Raschke: *Ja*.

DePue: When did the family come here to the United States, do you know?

Raschke: Well, my father's father came here perhaps twenty years before the turn of the century...

DePue: 1880's, then.

- Raschke: Yeah, 1880, he came. He settled here and went to work; when he had collected enough money, he sent back for his wife-to-be, and then she came. It was probably a couple of years afterward and then they were married.
- DePue: But he started farming right away when he came here—in this area?
- Raschke: He was...I don't know how to answer this. Actually, he was a carpenter and interior decorator, but he must have farmed on the side. I guess I never was interested in that when I was a kid, and by the time I was interested, I don't know. I have some of his tools here—homemade.
- DePue: I'm sure those are some of the most important heirlooms that you have, then?
- Raschke: I only have just a few of those because they were all destroyed in fires and whatnot.
- DePue: You grew up in the midst of the Great Depression. How much do you remember about those days?
- Raschke: I didn't have a clue we were in a depression, you know? (laughs) I never thought about it, and even thinking about it afterward, ...I guess...Well, we had an outhouse; we didn't have any inside toilet, didn't have any running water. Of course, no electricity—we used lamps, you know, I guess we'd be the poorest of the poor, now! (laughter) I mean, we didn't have a clue, you know? That's the way everybody around here lived.
- DePue: Had enough to eat?
- Raschke: Yeah, that's the one thing on the farm, you had enough to eat. Shot a lot of rabbits. (laughter)
- DePue: Did your father have any mechanical equipment?
- Raschke: Oh, yeah, well...I think back as far as I can remember, I think we had two mules and two horses, and then Dad had a—I can't think of the name of the tractor—but it was a big, gray, three-bottom tractor useful only for plowing or heavy duty work, like you're chaining out trees or something. But he didn't use it once he got the plowing done. Dad had a clover-hauler; he hauled clover, you know, and got the seed out of it, and he used the tractor for that.
- DePue: But apparently he had some draft animals as well.
- Raschke: Yeah. What I can remember, we had two mules and two or three horses when I was a kid. I hated those mules. Dad loved them, but... (laughter)
- DePue: Well, they were pretty big for a little kid, I would think.

Raschke: Well, no, actually, you see, a horse will hurt a horse, you know? They're stupid. A mule is not stupid—they will not hurt a mule. So, if you're running something, cultivating corn or whatnot, you're working behind your mule, he is not going to run away and do you harm, you know what I mean? That's a little too simple, but a tame mule will not. I'm sure some of them are wild, you really can't do anything with, but...

DePue: Is it true, the old saying about the stubborn mule?

Raschke: You're damn right. (both laugh) To me, anyway. They weren't stubborn with Dad.

DePue: Maybe they knew who was boss, huh?

Raschke: One time, what was it? Oh! We were making hay. In that time you raked it up and put it on the hay rack, and then you hauled it up into the barn with ropes and whatnot. I was running the... Well, Dad hollered that things were ready to go, then I'd get a-hold of Jack, and we'd run until he'd drop the...

DePue: Hay bale?

Raschke: Hay bale, yeah. Or, not a bale—I was trying to think of what we called it, and I just can't remember. Then went back, and then turned around and get ready for him to go again. I guess it was kind of late in the afternoon one day, and Jack had had about enough of it, you know? I went around, came back, and instead of turning around to get ready to go out again, he just walked all the way around and back into the barn. (both laugh) Me crying, you know. (both laugh) I remember, Dad didn't say a word. He got down off of the hay rack, and he picked up—God knows, I think it was a piece of wood about so long—and he got a-hold of Jack behind his throat, and **wham!** Didn't say a word, and Jack and I turned around, we went out and spent the rest of the day! (laughs)

DePue: So, Jack, obviously, was the name of the mule, huh?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah, Jack was a mule.

DePue: Can you describe the farm? What kind of a farm was it?

Raschke: Well, pretty rough. We had about 120 acres of pasture and stock of cattle on that, and then the other hundred-or-so that probably were less than a hundred tillable. Then, it was pretty hilly, and that was...

DePue: So, you have some of it in timber, then, as well?

Raschke: Well, that's it—it was timber pasture, 120. Well, part of that 120 was timber pasture—there were two coal mines on it, that took up probably maybe eight or ten acres, so...

- DePue: So, was your dad getting some income from the coal mines?
- Raschke: His mother did. She owned the property.
- DePue: Livestock, you said. Were there hogs as well?
- Raschke: Yeah, mm-hmm. Not too many, like now. I really don't know...I suppose we probably raised...fifty or eighty a year, and I think they just farrowed once a year, instead of the continuous farrowing they have now. Then we had the stock cows to raise calves. Then, my mother had, oh, turkeys and chickens, and...geese and ducks. At one time—you know what a street truck is? You know, instead of a semi?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Raschke: Okay, she sent a street truck of poultry to Chicago, and that's where it went. There was a bunch of them, and there was a lot of poultry manure around, too, I can assure you. (both laugh) I sure hated that, getting under the...building and scraping out under where the chickens had crapped all day, you know what I mean? I didn't care much for that. (laughs)
- DePue: How about a milk cow?
- Raschke: Yeah, we had milk cows. Not too many. Oh, this is just a guess—there was at least eight, and I'm not sure more than ten. My mother helped milk, and then they separated it from the...I can't even think what they call the leftover, and fed that to the pigs—
- DePue: The whey?
- Raschke: Well, after you got the cream out of it, you fed the residue to the pigs, or mash it up with the chickens, and whatnot.
- DePue: My guess would be that what you talked about here, all the grain that you would have grown on the farm went right back into the livestock.
- Raschke: Yes, yes. Yeah. I don't recall we ever sold any corn.
- DePue: So, what was the money crop?
- Raschke: (laughs) There was not many of them! When I was a kid, there wasn't much of a money crop all the way around, but the cattle, I would say, was the...
- DePue: It sounds like the milk and the eggs, too? The poultry?
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah, the milk and eggs, that paid for all the groceries, you know, and that sort of stuff, and that was it. Yeah.

- DePue: I wonder if you could tell us what a typical day was for young John Raschke growing up on the farm—maybe when you're about eight or ten or twelve years old. A school day?
- Raschke: Yeah, I was going to school. I was just thinking... Had chores night and morning, and I don't **really** remember, you know? Maybe throw down straw in the barn. We had stock cows, too, for calves and whatnot. Throw down straw in the barn, maybe water something or other. I never did much milking. I just wasn't very good at it—my arm and fingers weren't strong enough. Actually, what I did—it springs to mind—my mother would do the milking, then I did the work. She didn't like to work in the house; I would clean up the house in the morning, get it ready. Then, I can't think... I just really can't remember in the evening. There were chores morning and evening, I know that's it. But I was the housekeeper or whatever. (laughs)
- DePue: Well, you described some pretty graphic jobs. Maybe that wasn't a daily thing, but cleaning out the chicken coop or I'm sure those kinds of things.
- Raschke: Oh, yeah.
- DePue: What time did you have to be at school, and where did you go to school?
- Raschke: Well, I think it was probably eight o'clock, and school was the old Howard School off of Route Six, where there's a building there yet. They have a...
- DePue: Route Six, I would guess, is about three-quarters-of-a-mile to a mile from here?
- Raschke: It's a mile. And then you go up to the first curve, and go to the left, and then I'm right down that road.
- DePue: Between there, where your school was, and here now, there's an interstate. I bet there wasn't an interstate back then, obviously.
- Raschke: (laughs) Not likely, no.
- DePue: Did you walk cross-country or did you take the roads there?
- Raschke: Well, actually, it was about a mile-and-a-half, maybe a little over a mile-and-a-half each way around the roads. When the weather was good, and the going too, I would cut right straight across and eliminate about, oh, forty or sixty rods of that, walking through the field. But you could only do that when it wasn't snowy or muddy, or that sort of thing.
- DePue: Or the fields weren't planted?

- Raschke: Yeah, that's right. But if you walked through them when they were planted, that's how you'd do damage to it, you know? Of course, it got wet much easier then, too, you know, when there's a crop in it.
- DePue: Have you ever had an opportunity to tell children or grandchildren, "Well, I walked two miles to school in the snow in the wintertime?"
- Raschke: I think I've said, "Five miles, uphill both ways." (both laugh) I don't really recall.
- DePue: A one-room schoolhouse?
- Raschke: Yes.
- DePue: Tell us a little bit more about the schoolhouse. Do you remember the teachers at all?
- Raschke: Miss Larson...oh, Molberg. Miss Molberg, Louise Molberg. Miss Larson was there just my first year.
- DePue: Molberg, you say?
- Raschke: Yeah, Molberg. M-o-l-b-e-r-g. Her stepfather was our mailman.
- DePue: All of the classes in the same room?
- Raschke: Oh, yes.
- DePue: What was that experience like?
- Raschke: I really remember very little of it. The numbers went downhill, just shoo! I think when I started school, there were sixteen or eighteen, and then when I graduated...four or five.
- DePue: When you say graduated, you mean...?
- Raschke: From grade school. That was the result of the Depression. (laughs) Kids quit being born, you know, after...
- DePue: Well, that is interesting. So, there's a direct correlation then with the Depression and suddenly the families get a lot smaller very quickly?
- Raschke: They didn't increase.
- DePue: Were you just going through first through fifth grade there, or did you go beyond that?
- Raschke: Well, it was through eighth grade. I skipped one—I think the second grade, I skipped because I was only there seven years.

DePue: Why'd you skip a grade?

Raschke: Well, I guess the teacher thought I didn't need it. (laughs)

DePue: So, you were a bright kid?

Raschke: Well, (laughs) I guess I would hesitate to say that. I've always been a lucky person—I'll say that.

DePue: Maybe modest, too, would be another—

Raschke: I'm not sure about that. I'll brag when I get a shot at it, but... (both laugh)

DePue: The last couple, three years, did you end up helping the teacher with a lot of the other students?

Raschke: You know, I tried to think that over, and it's just pretty erased. I don't...

DePue: Did the school have indoor plumbing and electricity?

Raschke: Oh, no.

DePue: Neither one.

Raschke: Neither one. Oh! It did have electricity, it did have electricity. No indoor plumbing, though. Yeah, I'd forgotten that, you know, and I don't know... Yeah, they had electricity long before we did, and we put it out in the country.

DePue: Well, we're sitting here now in your dining room and we're watching it snow outside. Was there a heater of some type?

Raschke: Yeah, there was a, well, the school—say it was about, like, this shape.

DePue: A rectangular shape.

Raschke: Yeah, and then the back of the rectangle, there was kind of a cellar. You went downstairs a step, and they hauled coal in from the back side. On the school floor, right back in this corner, there was a big stove, and that was it. It had a big stove, and then it had metal around it, you know, so the kids wouldn't get into the real hot stuff. And then on top, teacher always put water in the morning, so it would moisten the air during the day.

DePue: Was it a chore for some of the kids that they had to take care of the stove and do some other things for the stove?

Raschke: Well, actually, (laughs) the teacher made it, it was a privilege! (both laugh)

DePue: They're not so dumb, huh?

- Raschke: No, no. Actually, it burned wood and coal. My dad was a trustee there for several years, and I remember going over with cut-up wood and throwing it in, back to the...
- DePue: Was the family religious?
- Raschke: My family? Yes, I would say so. Yeah. Saint John's Lutheran church here.
- DePue: Primarily serving German Lutheran farmers from around here?
- Raschke: Well, the basis of it was all... They came over from Germany and founded the church. I think it was back in Germany, at that time, if you weren't in the right bunch, you know, (laughs) why, they didn't treat you very well, as far as religion was concerned.
- DePue: So, that was one of the reasons they came here, as far as you know?
- Raschke: Yes, yeah. Yeah, that was it.
- DePue: Did they speak German in the church?
- Raschke: Yes. They spoke German in the church. Well, every fourth Sunday was German, when I was an early kid, and then they quit. I don't remember just when, but yeah. Actually, of course, I never knew my grandfather; my grandmother never spoke any English.
- DePue: Did you learn some German, then?
- Raschke: Not very much. I suppose I picked up some, and then when I went to college, I took German for the language. I think it was one or two semesters, I can't really remember.
- DePue: I was just going to ask you a question, and I forgot, here. How about when you went to high school? Did you go to Geneseo?
- Raschke: Geneseo, yeah. There weren't any buses then—I'm trying to think...
- DePue: That's quite a drive, or a walk, if you're walking, I'd think five or six miles to Geneseo.
- Raschke: Yeah. I'd walk... Frankly, I really can't... I'd walk down at least to the hard road, then somebody was coming from further out, I'd ride with him to school. Then came back, they dropped me off there. But I just can't remember the details of that.
- DePue: Did you have an extended family around here? Other pretty close relatives?
- Raschke: Yeah, well...John's grandfather was my father's brother, and they lived right over right across the river. John's younger brother does now. Then, my

mother's father and mother lived, oh, about a mile and a half away on the other side of the area. My grandfather was a coalminer and small farmer; then my grandmother died when—let's see—I was about six, I think, then.

DePue: Did the family get together for holidays? Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Raschke: Well, I'm sure we did. I don't have much memory there, although I do remember there was one, oh, it had to be Christmas, and it might have been in '36. No, Sally was along; she was just a baby. But anyway, besides wagons, Dad had a farm sled, a big thing to haul corn shocks out of the field and whatnot. He harnessed the mules to that, and we took the big sled around up the road. It was about a mile-and-a-half, two miles. I can still remember that, you know.

DePue: Got the classic picture of the sled and the snow, going to the relatives' house for Christmas or Thanksgiving.

Raschke: Christmas, yeah. That's it.

DePue: There you go.

Raschke: That's a winner.

DePue: Was it difficult to adjust going to Geneseo and Geneseo High School, I mean, It's obviously not a one-room schoolhouse.

Raschke: A bit. Yeah, it was a bit. There again, I don't recall the details, you know, but it was.

DePue: Did you get involved in any of the extracurricular activities?

Raschke: I was on the debate team, yeah.

DePue: Why the debate team?

Raschke: I guess because of the corn raker or whatever—I don't know! (laughs) I don't really know. We all had to take introductory speech; I don't remember, maybe the person who ran that was the debate coach, and he said, "Hey, come over," but I don't really remember.

DePue: How about any of the athletics at school?

Raschke: I was never an athlete. I couldn't run very fast.

DePue: But you could argue, huh?

Raschke: If you can't run very fast, you better not argue very much! (both laugh)

DePue: Well, at least you got into debating. When you were in high school, what were your favorite subjects?

Raschke: (pause) History, I'm sure, was one. I don't recall specifically. Actually, English. And I liked math, too. I guess I wanted to learn, you know? Generally speaking, we had—what I thought—excellent teachers; they would go the second mile but they wouldn't let you get off the wall. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, being born in 1930, I would suspect you also remember Pearl Harbor, that day.

Raschke: Oh, I sure do.

DePue: Can you tell us about your memories from that particular day?

Raschke: Well, Freddie Goodman and I were hunting rabbits Pearl Harbor day. I came home and my mother said, "We're at war."

DePue: You would have been eleven at the time?

Raschke: Well, let's see. That was, what, nineteen...

DePue: December of 1941.

Raschke: Yeah, so I would have been ten.

DePue: Did you know what that meant, that the country was at war?

Raschke: Yes. Yes, I did.

DePue: Had your parents been following along with the news over in Europe before that time?

Raschke: Dad always listened to the news, yeah, I'm sure, but I don't remember the details.

DePue: Well, not just beforehand but then the war itself, were your parents troubled by the fact that here you're Germans, living in the United States? Now, they were, what, second-generation Germans by that time, but still identifying themselves as German stock. And the war was going on in Europe with Hitler and the Nazis in Germany?

Raschke: Well, I think my dad had more difficulties in the First World War. His youngest brother committed suicide rather than going to fight the Germans.

DePue: Really?

Raschke: Well, that's what I heard, you know. Now, I don't know if that's the truth or not, but he did commit suicide. I remember talking to Dad—to answer your

question—whether he felt... He said, “If the old folks gave a damn about Germany, they wouldn’t’ve come here.” (both laugh) He didn’t give a damn about Germany.

DePue: So, no question in his mind: he was an American, then.

Raschke: Oh, yeah. Yeah. The hell with Germany. Like he said, if it was worth a damn, they wouldn’t’ve come here. (laughs)

DePue: What was it like growing up during the Second World War? Now we’re into the time when you’re a young teenager and you’re going to high school. Did you follow the war pretty closely?

Raschke: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I hung on the radio. I remember Pearl Harbor... the various landings... the German saboteurs that came on to...

DePue: Were you following the maps in the newspapers with the lines?

Raschke: Oh, yeah. We were getting the *Tribune* at that time, *The Chicago Tribune*. So, we had really good...

DePue: How about things like ration cards? Maybe that doesn’t play out on the farm; I’m not sure about—

Raschke: Oh, yes, it did.

DePue: —unless you’re talking about gasoline?

Raschke: Yeah. Never cramped. Naturally, we had plenty of gasoline for the car. I really think that gasoline thing was just to make sure that people understood they were at war, you know, rather than actually being a shortage.

DePue: But you did have ration stamps?

Raschke: Oh, yeah.

DePue: For what products?

Raschke: Well, certainly for gasoline. I really don’t recall. Actually, on the farm, we grew simply everything we ate except salt and pepper and all that sort of stuff. My mother cooked. Gasoline, I guess, or fuel—but being on a farm we were unlimited, essentially. How’d they know what barrel we were getting or not? (laughs)

DePue: They needed the farm products.

Raschke: You bet, yeah.

DePue: How about rubber products?

- Raschke: I remember they had rubber collections. Actually, I don't think you could get a...tires were very hard to get, I know, and tractors would certainly have been, too. But I don't recall that, particularly.
- DePue: Well, this next question might be a bit of an anachronism, but was your father using fertilizers, and was that something that would have been restricted? Or would the fertilizer have been the manure?
- Raschke: Well, we used limestone, but no fertilizers; it was just manure.
- DePue: But that wasn't necessarily a factor of the fertilizer products would have gone towards the war effort?
- Raschke: No, no, I mean, we didn't use nitrogen. Actually, we had plenty of manure. (laughs)
- DePue: Yeah, you would have, wouldn't you? I think that's fairly typical, that a lot of the nitrogen fertilizers came in quite a bit after the war.
- Raschke: After the war, yeah. Actually, you see, then, too, everybody had corn, oats, and hay, and hay was legume—it provided the nitrogen. Now, there's no hay growing around here; it's all corn and beans, you know.
- DePue: In other words, your father would have been rotating his crops?
- Raschke: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Yeah, everyone did then because you couldn't control the weeds otherwise.
- DePue: Farming has certainly changed a lot in your lifetime, hasn't it?
- Raschke: Oh, I mean, I haven't even grasped it entirely myself. I was the end of one era and the beginning of another. When a person thinks about it, it's a...
- DePue: Did you have any relatives in the war?
- Raschke: Yeah, two cousins. Art was in John Deere group, repairman, and he was in Europe. My other cousin, Morris was a flier, but they never sent him outside of the United States. There are others too, but those are the close ones, the cousins.
- DePue: Who was your strongest influence on you when you were growing up?
- Raschke: My parents.
- DePue: In what way?
- Raschke: Well, what's right and what's wrong.

- DePue: Well, let me ask you this, because you would have graduated from high school in '46 or '47?
- Raschke: '47, I think.
- DePue: So, do you remember the end of the war, either VE or VJ¹ Day?
- Raschke: Oh, yes. In Europe, it's kind of the middle, before noon, they announced it and let the school disband, and we all went home. That's about all I can remember. And then when Japan surrendered, we were...
- DePue: Yeah, school would not have been going on at that point.
- Raschke: No, we were in the oats fields and we were finishing up. It was a place in Geneseo; there were a couple of acres, and we went in there and threshed that. Somebody came up, "The war is over." I can remember that hour, you know what I mean? I was on top of the wagon, leveling the load, and then that's it.
- DePue: What did you think when you heard about the Americans dropping atomic bombs on Japan?
- Raschke: Thank God.
- DePue: Did you have any idea what an atomic bomb was at the time?
- Raschke: Well, I suppose I did not as I do now, but I know we killed about a hundred-thousand in one shot. (laughs)
- DePue: So, they announced that at the same time?
- Raschke: Well, I presume, but I do remember the...
- DePue: So, let's get to the end of your high school years. You said you were a debater. What did you think you wanted to do after high school with your life?
- Raschke: Didn't have a clue, that I recall.
- DePue: What were your father's expectations on what you'd be doing?
- Raschke: I don't think he ever said. (laughs) When I made up my mind, that was going to be okay. My dad—I say he didn't have very much education... My mother said, "Education, education, education." My dad was so whatever, you know? (laughs) He got along all right.
- DePue: Were they encouraging you to go on to college, or was that left up to you as well?

¹ VE: Victory in Europe. VJ; Victory in Japan.

Raschke: No, that was up to me. There wasn't a word one way or the other, and really, it's so difficult to bring back. I went to Augustana for one semester and I quit and stayed out for a semester; then I went back the following summer and finished it up. I don't really recall the how-come of that, either.

DePue: Why you decided to drop out after one semester?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah. I think...I guess I was probably just too young. You know, I was quite young, and all the combat veterans are there, and you know, that was...

DePue: Taking the GI bill?

Raschke: Yeah, GI Bill. This is kind of off the subject, but those GI people, it was one of the best things that happened to me, too.

DePue: How was that?

Raschke: Well, they were all business. I remember—I can't think of what it was—the first semester; I lived off-campus, then I lived in the dorm, then after that... It was just full of veterans and all that. But I remember, later at night, there's a racket down at the end of the hall and this guy came out, and he said, "God damn it, shut up! I came here to..." (both laugh). And he wasn't fooling. (both laugh) So, I would say, after my folks, the veterans at Augustana probably had a big...

DePue: I think we've skipped over one fact that I want to bring out here. How well did you do in your high school class, academically?

Raschke: I was the valedictorian.

DePue: That something that your parents were proud of?

Raschke: I'm sure they were. I mean, I don't know we ever talked about it.

DePue: They didn't lavish lots of praise on you for that?

Raschke: No. There again, I don't recall. I mean, I'm sure they were proud of it and glad of it. My mother always thought much more of education than my dad did, I'm going to say that.

DePue: While you were still in high school, even when you first went to Augustana College in that first semester, what were your thoughts about military service? I mean, you'd seen an entire generation go off and serve in the Second World War.

Raschke: Yeah. I guess—I think I have a tendency, "I'll think about it when the time comes I need to." (laughs) I don't think I really...

- DePue: You didn't give it much serious consideration?
- Raschke: Well, there's nothing I could do one way or the other.
- DePue: I believe the draft was still in effect until maybe '47, or some time in there...?
- Raschke: I don't think it lasted that long.
- DePue: And you said you were pretty young because you had skipped a year.
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah.
- DePue: When you did go back to Augustana then, what was your focus?
- Raschke: Well, I'd say I did the history, and political science was my major. I guess I wanted to learn, you know. We had some wonderful teachers. Then I was on the debate squad; that was a big thing for me.
- DePue: What were you going to do with history and political science?
- Raschke: I guess I was kind of forming the way I was going. (laughs) As soon as the Korean War broke out, I knew what I was doing next. (laughs)
- DePue: That's a couple of years down the road yet.
- Raschke: Yeah, but I didn't have a clue. I wanted to learn things, and my folks, I guess, were pretty understanding, or...
- DePue: They were paying the bills?
- Raschke: Well, I worked. I paid everything that I could. I don't really remember... See, I worked for Dad in the summertime then; I got wages for that. And then I washed windows, raked leaves... I had a whole bunch of honeybees—hives of honeybees—ten or a dozen, and I peddled that door-to-door and I sold to some of the...
- DePue: Grocery stores around?
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.
- DePue: When you said you had honeybees, were you selling the honey, or were you...?
- Raschke: Selling the honey.
- DePue: Okay, you weren't taking the bees from one place to another for pollinating?
- Raschke: Oh, no, no, no. No, have not. I started out, there were a lot of honeybees around then and they'd swarm and you could catch them. Then you put them

in the hive. I think I had fifteen or twenty hives, and you could figure seventy to eighty pounds of honey, you know...

DePue: That'd be a different kind of hobby for a young man.

Raschke: Well, it wasn't a hobby, it was money! (laughs) But I enjoyed it, too, you know. I had a—oh, I can't think of what they call that thing, you cut them open, put the combs in...

DePue: Spin the honey out of them?

Raschke: Spin the honey out of them,² and then you could reuse the combs; they didn't have to waste all that effort to build another one. (both laugh)

DePue: They could put their effort into making more honey, huh?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Were you still in college when the Korean War started? That would have been June 25, 1950.

Raschke: Yeah, I graduated in '50. Did I?

DePue: I'm thinking you graduate in '51.

Raschke: Quite possible. I went in the army in '51. Yeah, I guess that's right—I must have graduated in '51.

DePue: Do you recall, then, hearing about the Korean War starting?

Raschke: (pause) No, I don't.

DePue: The question, I guess is, if you do recall that, was there any connection with, Oh, this might have something to do with my personal future?

Raschke: I have no such memory.

DePue: You graduated in 1951. How soon after that did you get into the military?

Raschke: The first week of the next January. I got my first notice, I think, about September of that year, and then I got a two-month deferment to finish picking corn. Then I went in right after.

DePue: Were you drafted?

Raschke: Yes, yes.

² He is probably referring a centrifuge to spin the honey out; it may have been hand-cranked.

DePue: Why didn't you enlist?

Raschke: (pause) My mother would have killed me. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, one difference would be—

Raschke: I was working on a farm and they needed me. Dad—I say he offered to quit so I could get a deferment. He rented out the farm the two years I was gone.

DePue: Well, one of the choices would have been, if you enlisted it probably meant three years; if you were drafted, it meant two years.

Raschke: I don't know if that was... Probably if you wanted to enlist for one year, that's (cutting sound)! (laughs) They were desperate.

DePue: Did you have any say whether it was the army, navy, or air force?

Raschke: No. Actually, our marines who were sworn in up in Chicago—I can't think of it, though it's closed up now.

DePue: Fort Sheridan?

Raschke: Yeah, that was it. Fort Sheridan. Anyway, they lined us up in a row where we were going; I was the fifth guy in from the end, and the first four went to the marines. (laughs)

DePue: Well, that's not very scientific, is it?

Raschke: No, no. If you think you're in control of your life, you're nutty. (both laugh) My life, you know, that was a splitting point there—I would have gone to South Carolina or Southern California, and God knows how my life would have been after that.

DePue: Sometimes your lives turn on those very snapshot moments, don't they?

Raschke: Yeah, it has nothing to do with...

DePue: Where did you go, then, for basic training?

Raschke: Camp Roberts, California.

DePue: How long were you there?

Raschke: Well...I think actually about two days. We got out there; we were drafted and sent out on a troop train, and we goofed around for two or three days, and then anybody that wanted to go back, they'd get ten days' leave. My folks wanted me to come home, so I think I flew home and then flew back, then started basic several days after that.

- DePue: You have any special memories, good or bad, about your basic training experience?
- Raschke: Yes. It was good.
- DePue: It was good?
- Raschke: Yeah. Good for me. I say it was just about eight weeks overall, and I can't remember these names I might have in my room—these letters, so I can get back a while—got to look through it. But the field first sergeant was a terrific man. He'd been to Korea, and he wasn't... He did it right; he was not your friend, but he watched over you and made sure you did things right.
- DePue: Think he took it seriously; he was getting you ready to go to Korea to go to war?
- Raschke: You're goddamn right he was, yeah. I wish I remembered his name, and I wish I had been there another eight weeks.
- DePue: As a farm kid, in Augustana you would have encountered plenty of the kids from the city as well, but the military is a different kind of environment. Theoretically, in boot camp you're under a lot of stress. Did the farm kids generally do pretty well in boot camp?
- Raschke: Golly...I wouldn't have any way of... I guess I didn't really look them around and think them in that nature, you know? (laughs)
- DePue: You're probably like everybody else, you're just trying to survive boot camp!
- Raschke: You bet, yeah! (laughs)
- DePue: Where after basic training, then?
- Raschke: Okay, well, I say after eight weeks, our training unit was broken up. The Illinois National Guard had been called up, and they were down further south on the coast.
- DePue: That would have been at Camp Cooke, I think.
- Raschke: Yeah, Camp Cooke, that's right. Most of our guys went down there, but the rest of us that were there yet fooled around, I suppose, for another week. Then I and a bunch of other guys were sent into Morse code school. That was in the same area. I don't know if we lived in the same barracks or not, but it was within half a mile.
- DePue: Do you have any idea why the army decided you were going to go to Morse code school? Did you say that you were interested?

Raschke: They were going through a pile of names, (shooting noises) you know, that's it. (laughs)

DePue: Had you gone through some testing that showed that you had an ability for that?

Raschke: Not that I know of.

DePue: Maybe they had noticed that you were a good student, had college. Did that make any difference?

Raschke: I have no idea why; they never asked me and they never told me.

DePue: Did they ever approach you about going to Officer Candidate School or becoming an officer?

Raschke: I don't really recall. I know I wasn't interested! (laughs)

DePue: Where did you go to Morse code school?

Raschke: Right across the road. I can't remember whether we lived in the same barracks or not; we must not have, but I don't recall.

DePue: Did you like it? Did you take to that training?

Raschke: I hated it.

DePue: Why did you hate it?

Raschke: Well...you sit, I don't know how many hours a day, da-da-di-da-di-da-dit-dit-dit-dit-da, you know? (laughs) I wasn't interested in it at all.

DePue: You didn't find it challenging, then?

Raschke: Well, I don't know. Actually, I don't know if I can anymore. I never used it once I got out of school. That was the end of it.

DePue: Didn't use it in the military at all?

Raschke: No, not at all. No, no. But for years after I got out of the army, I could look at a newspaper and change the letters to Morse code at a pretty fast rate. So, it worked, you know, the education! (laughs)

DePue: Without even thinking about it, just automatically?

Raschke: Right, you don't dare think. You don't dare think. If you think, you can't do it. If you just, da-da-da-da, you can.

DePue: Well that's interesting. Where did you go after you finished with Morse code training?

Raschke: Okay...

DePue: Is that when you went to Fort Bliss?

Raschke: Yeah. I was trying to think. We shipped out on a train...kind of went right straight west, and there was a big outfit there. The guys were sort of dispersed from that. Just some of us went down to Fort Bliss, then. I think there were... five, six, or seven of us went down there to the...

DePue: Well, at the time you've got the war still very hot in Korea, and you also have a large occupation army in Europe and in Japan, and in Okinawa. Why Fort Bliss? What did you do there?

Raschke: Well, for six months, repaired old commo wire. I can't think of the gauge, but it was a wire, coated, and we just spliced it. I mean, I would cut it up and the bad spots out, spliced it. It was make work; I mean, I'm sure they threw it in the junk pile when they were done.

DePue: So, the army had spent all that money teaching you how to do Morse code, and then they got you splicing wire for a few weeks?

Raschke: No, for almost six months.

DePue: Six months?

Raschke: Pretty nearly.

DePue: How'd you like that work?

Raschke: I cannot mention it in company. (both laugh)

DePue: Did it make any sense to you?

Raschke: No. I mean, it was a boondoggle. Actually, the premise we were there, they had a guided missile school. I think the guys were going through in about eight weeks, and they'd fire off a missile. I think the purpose of our unit was to back up—if the landline went down, then our unit was supposed to provide the communication. But I went out there one time just to see what they did, and that was the only time. And they had, I think, about six other guys that had been there quite a while, and they kept doing that. They didn't have anything else for us to do.

DePue: Were you or anybody else asking the Army, "Send me someplace else. I'll go to Korea if you can get me out of here?"

- Raschke: Well, actually, I got so bored I went to the field First Sergeant—it was the only time I ever saw him—and told him, you know, that, “I’m doing nothing here; I’d like to do something useful.” He said in about two weeks, he was going to send someone to Indiana, I think, their school for something-or-other. And I said, “I’d be glad to go, do something useful.” Then, about five days later, we got our FECOM message. (laughs) We’re going to Korea.
- DePue: FECOM, Far East Command.
- Raschke: Yeah, so I don’t know if he was just putting me off, (laughs) or if that’s the way it worked, but...
- DePue: During this whole time, did you think, Oh, it’s just a matter of time before they send me overseas?
- Raschke: I think I was probably wishing they would! (laugh) You’re just bored to tears. I mean, it was awful.
- DePue: Did you get leave between Fort Bliss and going overseas?
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah.
- DePue: Did you come home for that time?
- Raschke: Ye. Probably ten days—I don’t know.
- DePue: Did you have any girlfriends or anything like that back here?
- Raschke: Not seriously. I dated a few girls—not very many—I had no girlfriends.
- DePue: So, nobody to write home to, other than the parents? Is that correct?
- Raschke: Just the parents and my sister.
- DePue: Then, if you could walk us through the steps that you took, the locations you went through, to get overseas.
- Raschke: Okay... I was shipped out to the one in Washington.
- DePue: Fort Lewis?
- Raschke: Yeah, Fort Lewis, that’s it. We were in the old German prisoner area, I think, for about, well, at least ten days, and then we shipped out on an airplane. They flew us to Anchorage, Shemya...then, I guess, Japan. I think there were only two stops on the way.
- DePue: Shemya—is that in Alaska as well?
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah. I think so. S-h-e-m-y-a.

DePue: Okay, and then to Japan, you said?

Raschke: Yes.

DePue: You flew this whole way?

Raschke: Flew that, yes.

DePue: That's very unusual, for most of the ones who were sent overseas were literally shipped overseas.

Raschke: Yeah, well, I was shipped back home. (laughs)

DePue: And found out what you had missed on the first trip over, huh?

Raschke: I wasn't in any hurry to get there; I'd've been glad to reverse it! (laughs)

DePue: Where in Japan did you land?

Raschke: I don't know.

DePue: From Japan, where did you go after that?

Raschke: Korea. We landed the lower end of Korea, I can't think—

DePue: Pusan?

Raschke: Pusan, yeah. Pusan.

DePue: Were you shipped to Korea, or did you fly?

Raschke: Shipped.

DePue: So, you got a little bit of the water trip on the way.

Raschke: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Do you remember, when you first landed in Pusan and were walking around in Pusan, what your thoughts were? Do you remember the sights and the smells, if you will?

Raschke: These poor bastards. (laughs) I mean, the people that lived there, you know, jeez, it was...

DePue: Well, you'd grown up in the Depression on a farm, and you said you didn't have electricity, you didn't have indoor plumbing, but...

Raschke: But I had it quite a while by the time I got to Korea. And, you know, it stunk. The buildings were awful.

DePue: How did it stink? I want you to paint a picture for me, if you can.

Raschke: From manure—people manure.

DePue: Growing up on the farm, you knew the smell of manure?

Raschke: You're damn right. (laughs) And we had an outhouse; I knew both ends of it. But it was just overpowering almost. Actually, I think I have some pictures. They used human manure for fertilizing the fields; that was very stinky stuff. (laughs)

DePue: You found out about that pretty quick, did you?

Raschke: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

DePue: Did that whole concept appall you? I mean, you used cow manure—

Raschke: Yeah, I wasn't shocked like somebody who had never smelled manure before, but I just think of those poor people, you know, Jesus, living like that. I just felt more pity for them. I could get out of there, and they were stuck.

DePue: Where did you go once you got to Pusan?

Raschke: We took a train up north... Frankly, I'm blank here too, just how I got assigned to Seventh Infantry. I was supposed to go to Heavy Mortar Company. I can't remember... They drove us up to... I don't know, there are patches missing here. There were five or six of us in the truck, and we went up to the Seventh Infantry. I said I was supposed to go to the Heavy Mortar Company. We got off there, and I don't know how it was—I can't remember how the conversation resolved, but I was going to the wrong place. I said, "I'm supposed to go to the Heavy Mortar Company," and I don't remember whether it was an officer or private or whatever, said, "Bleeder," you know. (laughs) I was in an infantry unit, a rifle unit, for just a couple of nights, then they loaded us up again.

Climbing on that truck, I dislocated my shoulder. I had all that heavy stuff on me, and I handed up my M-1, I remember that. Then I reached up and pulled up; an arm got in, and the bottom body stayed on the ground. Then we were in that truck until daylight; they were just kind of going and stop, going and stop, going and stop, and they let us off. We were supposed to get grub there. I didn't know shit, you know, and I just got in line. One of the guys there said, "What's the matter with you?" And I said, "I think I broke my shoulder."

DePue: You felt it hurting?

Raschke: Oh, God, yes. I mean, that was—(laughs). He was a veteran there, and he felt it and said, "I'm taking you down to the"—what do they call that?

DePue: Aid center? Aid station?

Raschke: Yeah, it was aid...

DePue: The evacuation hospital or something?

Raschke: No, I wasn't evac'ed, but I mean... Oh, there was a television program on that, I can't think—

DePue: *M*A*S*H*.³

Raschke: MASH, yeah, MASH unit, yeah.

DePue: You went to a MASH unit?

Raschke: MASH unit, yeah. That's it. Anyway, this guy led me down there. I don't even know if I knew his name. We came around to the back of the building—and this I do remember—there were a couple of dead guys laying... There was kind of an awning or something, and otherwise it was open, and the blanket was off the feet of this one guy. You know, I'll never forget that. Then we went in, and I don't know, the doctor looked at me, then I got in line. I laid down; they had a cot of some sort. It was sometime the next night, then, that they got to me. There'd been heavy casualties around that area. I found out later, this material they give you to knock you out, it makes me amorous. (laughs) But anyway—

DePue: (laughs) Without anything to be amorous with, I bet.

Raschke: Yeah, but I remember waking up, and they were still wrapping me up and they're laughing. I couldn't figure out what in hell they were laughing at; (both laugh) someone told me I was trying to make love with everybody! (both laugh heartily)

DePue: I've interviewed a lot of people; I've never heard that before.

Raschke: I guess you've got to say there's a benefit in everything. (laughs)

DePue: Well, that got you out of there pretty quick, then, didn't it?

Raschke: No, they liked me a lot! (both laugh harder) Back in the cots until we got shipped back to Korea, then, for recuperance and that was that.

DePue: Back to Korea or back to Japan?

Raschke: I mean Japan, excuse me, yeah. Back to Japan.

³ MASH: Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. A long-running TV program called *M*A*S*H* was based on typical experiences, with a good deal of humor interspersed.

- DePue: So, you weren't in the country more than a week or so, and you got shipped right back out?
- Raschke: Right. Yeah, that's it. Just lucky. Actually, I was lucky. They got shot to pieces up there later on. When I was in the hospital in Japan, there was one guy that came back; he said that was a bitch. I don't remember any more than that...
- DePue: Do you recall where in Japan you spent your recuperation time?
- Raschke: Well, no. It's probably in that capital there.
- DePue: Help me out with counting your days and rotation points. As I understand, if you're in combat a certain number of days, you're getting a certain number of points, and that determined when you'd be rotated home.
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah.
- DePue: Were you earning any points at all while you were recuperating in Japan?
- Raschke: I must have been, because I got one R&R of my own. In the unit I was in then, a good friend of mine was the company clerk, and when it was time to get his R&R—he'd been there a much shorter time than I had, and he handled the books, you know, and the R&R—and he wrote one up for me. (laughs) And we both went to Japan!
- DePue: Well, he was in a position to be able to do that for you, wasn't he?
- Raschke: Yeah, yeah. I can't remember his name, dammit.
- DePue: How long did you stay in Japan, then?
- Raschke: Well, you mean in the hospital?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Raschke: At least three weeks. I don't think it was four, but more than three weeks.
- DePue: You think you're basically recovered completely from the shoulder being dislocated?
- Raschke: I didn't recover for many years. I dislocated it several times after that, and I put it back myself, then. Actually, it's just in the last maybe eight or ten years it quit bothering me.
- DePue: Really?
- Raschke: Yeah. I couldn't throw a ball; I wasn't much of a baseball player anyway. But if my arms were down like this, I was stronger than anybody.

- DePue: So, it sounds like if you've dislocated your shoulder, you have limited mobility in the shoulder; you're not going to go out to be an infantry or even mortarman, then, after that, are you?
- Raschke: I wasn't, anyway. I went where I was sent and did what I was told, and that's it.
- DePue: You don't know, though, exactly why they would have reassigned you away from being in the infantry or the mortar?
- Raschke: Well, I was in a non-combat situation, I know; I don't know for how long.
- DePue: When you did return to Korea, then, where did you end up?
- Raschke: In a message company. I handled the communications between various units: artillery... (pause) I just can't remember. There were five or six outfits on this message center thing. I was put down in the closest to the corps headquarters. My job and the jobs of the people there were, we took the messages in and made sure there wasn't anything missing, or blips and blops and whatnot, and then we sent it in to the message center.
- DePue: Were these messages coming in, in Morse code? Obviously not.
- Raschke: No, no, it was...
- DePue: Land line?
- Raschke: It was land line—I'm not sure—no, no, it was radio, but it was in code. Everything was five-letter groups.
- DePue: Now, you said you were in a corps; do you recall which corps you were belonging to?
- Raschke: Gosh, it'll be on that stuff I had.
- DePue: Well, when we talked in our pre-interview session, you were thinking it was I Corps.
- Raschke: Yeah, I think it was I Corps.⁴
- DePue: Actually, it's the First Corps, but the troops would have all called it I (pronounced eye) Corps.
- Raschke: Yeah.

⁴ In the U. S. Army, Corps is designated by Roman numerals, hence I for First Corps, leading to vocal representation as *eye* Corps.

- DePue: That would have included the Seventh Infantry Division, the First Commonwealth Division—
- Raschke: Yeah, First Commonwealth, yeah.
- DePue: —and it looks like the marines were over there, too, towards the end of the war. The First Marines.
- Raschke: I don't remember.
- DePue: These units moved from corps to corps a little bit, not a whole lot. Anyway, you were working at the corps level or you were going forward in a mobile...?
- Raschke: Well, I was at the corps level most of the time, and then toward the end of the war—maybe it was several times, I don't remember—probably somebody was gone or whatnot, and filled in different places. The one thing I remember—and I don't know where I was—we were in artillery range. The thing was done, but it was several days before it took effect, and I remember the night is supposed to end at midnight—
- DePue: You're talking about the armistice going into effect?
- Raschke: Yeah, the artillery, you know, and it was a hell of a night. I mean, it was going back and forth. I think just that evening before, where a Korean was killed not too far away. I don't know which side it came from, but...
- DePue: So, the night the war ended, you're close enough to the front lines to be in artillery range?
- Raschke: Oh, yeah.
- DePue: Was that the only time you were under some threat showing?
- Raschke: I think so; that was the only time, yeah. It never happened back at our corps headquarters.
- DePue: It sounds like a lot of the times, though, that you and your group were going forward to kind of act as a relay station between front line units.
- Raschke: Yeah, that was generally.
- DePue: Well, can you give me a little bit of an idea or description of exactly what you were doing, then?
- Raschke: Well, the messages were coming in. We didn't have to write anything down or not, just make sure that—and I don't really remember, because a lot of it was in code—that we knew something was wrong, and made sure the thing was set

right before we sent into corps. We passed it on. It came to us, and somehow or another—and I just don't really recall.

DePue: You just alluded to the end of the war itself. Let's take a couple of steps back: while you were there, did it make sense to you why we were fighting there?

Raschke: Well, I was ignorant, I guess. Afterward, it came to mind. Just a few months ago—I think it was *The Wall Street Journal*—they were considering Truman as a near-great President. Bullshit. (laughs) We should never have tried to go up to... We should have gone to the narrow point or part of Korea that's only about a hundred miles north of Seoul, and told the Koreans, "You want to go on..." Just dumbville.

DePue: Do you think Truman made the right choice to send in American troops at the beginning of the war?

Raschke: Yes.

DePue: Because otherwise, all of Korea would be in control of the Communists.

Raschke: And more. I think Japan was in the balance then.

DePue: So, you were okay with that decision.

Raschke: You bet, you bet.

DePue: Then, just to very quickly recap the history of the Korean War here to set the stage, I guess: the Pusan perimeter was the portion of Korea that, after the North Koreans invaded in 1950, the Americans and South Koreans were in that tiny little corner in the southeast.

Raschke: About thirty-by-forty, I think, or something like that.

DePue: And then, of course, MacArthur is the Commander of Far East Command, not just Korea but the Japanese forces as well. He makes the decision to do the Inchon Landing, kind of an end-run, Inchon being the harbor to this—

Raschke: Which was genius.

DePue: —just a few miles from Seoul. They push north and then they get to the thirty-eighth parallel, and there's a discussion at the very top of the United States government: Well, should we keep going north? And of course, MacArthur says, "We need to go all the way to the Yalu." I think the Truman administration basically kind of acceded that point, and before they knew it, they were heading all the way north. Now, you made an allusion to, they should have stopped at the narrowest part, you said?

- Raschke: Not only the narrowest part, but it's the last part as you go up north that you have east/west communication. Once you get past that place, all you got are up in the mountains, this way, this way, this way—you can't help the other guy on the other side.
- DePue: Well, for listeners of this, if you take a look at a map of the entire country of Korea—and I think the line you're talking about would have been north of—
- Raschke: Let me get my atlas opened up.
- DePue: Well, yeah, but just very quickly and then you can get the atlas—just north of Pyongyang on the west coast, and I think Wonsan on the east coast, and if you draw a line between those two, that would be roughly the place. Does that sound about right?
- Raschke: Yeah, I don't recall the location of those places, but I think it was about a hundred miles up.
- DePue: That's about right. So, that was something that you and your buddies were talking about while you were there?
- Raschke: Well, no, we didn't know shit, you know? (laughs) But once I got back in the hospital and started reading some of the stuff, say, What the hell are we doing up there? I wasn't all that knowledgeable or what not, but I mean, China—and I can understand China's position—they thought we were coming for them, I believe. They could have reasonably thought that.
- DePue: By going all the way up to the Yalu River.
- Raschke: Oh, yeah. Yeah, you know, and maybe not stopping there. (laughs) I think actually, that's what MacArthur probably wanted to do. I don't know.
- DePue: You've made it very clear that you blame Truman for that decision.
- Raschke: He was in command.
- DePue: How about MacArthur?
- Raschke: Well, I don't give MacArthur any, but it was Truman's job to decide what the strategy was going to be: what do we want to get out of this war? The general, I want you to know how to get me what I want, you know?
- DePue: Well, historians would say, "Well, Truman might have had that role, but MacArthur wanted to have that role, and it was his idea to go all the way north."
- Raschke: Well, it was his idea to go all the way up north; Truman okayed it.

- DePue: So, again, you're thinking the onus is on Truman at this point.
- Raschke: He was in charge. Who fired who?
- DePue: You're obviously talking about Truman, later in '51, fired MacArthur.
- Raschke: Yeah. He was in charge.
- DePue: But that was after everything went to hell, quite frankly.
- Raschke: But it was Truman's job, not MacArthur's, to decide what the strategy was going to be. Tactics is MacArthur, but...
- DePue: What'd you think of the war that was being run by the time you got there, by Eisenhower and Ridgway, and probably Van Fleet by the time you got in?
- Raschke: Well, essentially we were on defense.
- DePue: Did it make sense to you at that time, that we were fighting a defensive war just to retain the thirty-eighth parallel, basically?
- Raschke: Well... (pause) I think it would have been terribly wrong had we left the country at that time. We screwed it up, but this was the best outcome of it. The Koreans had a lot into that too. If we were going to go in there, the least we could do was save the ones in the south. It would have been a terrible crime if we had left then, but it wasn't necessary to get into that jam.
- DePue: You already mentioned that you were there when they reached the armistice, which was in July of 1953.
- Raschke: Yeah.
- DePue: Do you recall those months leading up to the armistice, and what you and all your fellow GIs were thinking about that whole process?
- Raschke: Nothing we could do about it, and I guess we didn't think much about it. (laughs) Day is done; how long have I got to go?
- DePue: Were you counting the days when you thought you'd be rotating home?
- Raschke: Well, I wasn't there long enough to rotate. I went home when my term was up.
- DePue: Do you remember the prisoner exchange while you were there?
- Raschke: Yes, and I remember the Koreans left a bunch of them loose.
- DePue: I think that was in March of 1953—March or April—a couple months before the actual armistice.

- Raschke: Okay. I remember, they were looking for them around where we were. (laughs)
- DePue: Well, let me explain that real quickly, then I'll let you reflect on it some more. Syngman Rhee was the President of South Korea—wasn't necessarily all that cooperative with the American or the UN forces.
- Raschke: No, what he wanted was all of Korea, you know? (laughs)
- DePue: Yeah, he wanted all of Korea. The main sticking point of the armistice negotiations was what to do with all these Chinese and North Korean prisoners who wanted nothing to do with going back home. They wanted to stay in the south, and the talks were bogged down. So, on his own, Syngman Rhee just, one night, had his soldiers open the door to these prison camps, and tens of thousands of North Koreans just walked out of those prison camps.
- Raschke: Escaped, yeah.
- DePue: And just kind of melted into the countryside. Now, that had an impact on what you were doing up north of there, where you said that you were told to be watching out for these guys, these Korean prisoners who had just been let out?
- Raschke: I don't think it was the Korean prisoners. There were infiltrators and whatnot, you know, all the time. Not very many, I mean, that was what we were... I don't even remember—I know you're right; I'm thinking about it, but I haven't thought about that for years now—when they released them—and I don't think everybody was concerned or anything.
- DePue: I know the top brass was very upset with Syngman Rhee, at least the historical accounts I've read about it.
- Raschke: I do remember that that happened, but I'd forgotten it.
- DePue: What's your thought about armistice rather than a peace? Armistice is just a temporary stopping of the fighting, and that's what we've got, still to this day.
- Raschke: Well, it's better than going on fighting for nothing. (laughs) What's the point? I think the time of fighting wars and settling terms is probably over. We didn't certainly settle any terms in any...what'd we get out of Vietnam, you know? That really was a fiasco. Makes Korea look like a genius work. (laughs)
- DePue: That's a little bit ahead of our story.
- Raschke: Oh, okay. (laughs)
- DePue: No, that's fine, that's fine. What do you think was the toughest part of your service in Korea, your personal service?

- Raschke: I was so damn lucky, I wouldn't even say that...
- DePue: When you say you were lucky, why do you say you were lucky?
- Raschke: Never got hurt seriously, you know? I mean, I learned one **awful** lot.
- DePue: What were some of the things you were learning that stayed with you?
- Raschke: I can do what I got to do. I think that's the thing I learned.
- DePue: Can you elaborate on that a little bit?
- Raschke: Well, I mean, I'm not especially courageous or anything like that. I was never an athlete, but... I don't know how to explain it. You know, that's my sentiment. I was able to get happy as a clam with any kind of a guy; we had more pleasure. Essentially, I was probably—I can't think of the term—I didn't have a very wide experience. I was a farm kid, I went to Augustana College, which was pretty much all Lutheran and all that sort of thing, and that was probably the first time I ever got around where nobody gave a damn about any of that. (laughs) I think it helped me grow up. I don't regret the times I think it was SNAFU; so much of the time that wasn't necessary, and I wish I could have been more useful. But the army did a lot of good for me.
- DePue: Well, of course, SNAFU has a long military tradition of what that stands for, and we'll just put it this way: situation normal, all fouled up, except it wasn't generally said quite like that.
- Raschke: No, I never heard it that way. (laughs) That's the way I repeat it to people, though.
- DePue: Situation normal, all fouled up. Was that at the senior level, or was it even the day-to-day operations where you were?
- Raschke: It was just my experiences, you know. I'd go out to the west coast, come back home immediately. Go through eight weeks of basic and have it ended. Go to twelve weeks of Morse code, and phft! Nothing. Go to Fort Bliss and waste time.
- DePue: None of it made any sense to you?
- Raschke: One day I was gone; that was all that made sense to me. (both laugh)
- DePue: If you thought, Okay, the way the army's running this war is a snafu half the time, what did you think of the fellow soldiers you served with?
- Raschke: Golly (pause) I can't say I **enjoyed** the time, but I think it made me one helluva lot more confident than I had ever been before. I'll say it again: I got

along with everybody, and sometimes even quarreling, we respected each other. As I said, "I can do it."

DePue: Are you a better person today because you went through that experience?

Raschke: You bet. I don't know how better. I think I'm more useful, more confident.

DePue: Any impressions about the sergeants and the officers that served over you?

Raschke: Well, in basic training—actually, I can't think of the guy's name—I mean, I would like to have written him a letter and thanked him. He was serious. I remember, a good friend of mine—Rodney Remmy was his name, he was from the Geneseo area, too—in basic training, somehow or another, he left his rifle someplace, laid it someplace, you know., The guy's name I can't remember, just came over and **tore his ass**. I mean, he wasn't fooling. **Jeez!** (laughs) Hell when we were doing it, you know, but "**By God! You better not leave your rifle someplace!**"(laughs)

DePue: So, the message got across on that one?

Raschke: You bet! I learned that. (both laugh) Actually, it was **boom!** But I think he had a purple heart, and he was Field First [Sergeant]. I don't know how long he'd been back from Korea. So he was doing the best he could to prepare us.

DePue: You served during a time when the military had recently integrated. How do you think integration was going in the Army that you lived in?

Raschke: I never thought about it. In basic training, one of the cadre was black. There was two stories, and he slept upstairs where I did. They had a private room of course and whatnot. Never said very much. I don't recall...many blacks in any of the units that I was with. Basic training: just the only one I can remember is the corporal that was an instructor.

DePue: It sounds like the units that you were serving with, the small-level units you were serving with, didn't have many blacks in it?

Raschke: I don't recall any. The communications...

DePue: Were there any Koreans incorporated into your unit?

Raschke: No.

DePue: So, no KATUSAs⁵ or anything like that?

Raschke: No, no.

⁵ KATUSA: Korean Augmentee to the United States Army

- DePue: I wonder if you remember much about the Korean people. Did you have much interaction with the Korean people?
- Raschke: No. I have some pictures here, that they were incredibly strong. I can't think what they called that thing, what they carried stuff with.
- DePue: The a-frame carrier.
- Raschke: A-frame, yeah. I think this one guy—I think I might have a picture of him in there—I think he had five-hundred pounds on his back. (laughs) It looked that way to me! It was back out in the farming area and whatnot. And then, I've got some pictures there, too, of I guess it was a rice patch; they worked on it all summer long, and all that was hand work.
- DePue: Different experience than what you experienced here, growing up on the farm in Illinois?
- Raschke: You're damn right! (laughs)
- DePue: Well, even that, you described as pretty primitive, but how—
- Raschke: Oh, nothing like. I think they had all hand tools; there wasn't anything that...
- DePue: Did you have much opportunity to see any built-up areas, like Seoul itself?
- Raschke: It wasn't built-up when I went through it. (laughs)
- DePue: What was like Seoul like when you went through?
- Raschke: Shot to pieces.
- DePue: Basically just a city of rubble?
- Raschke: I got some pictures here.
- DePue: By the time you got there, Seoul had been fought through—one, two, three—four times, I guess, and it showed, I take it.
- Raschke: Oh, boy, that's...
- DePue: One of the things that oftentimes American GIs did get involved with were the orphanages because there was no shortage of orphans over there. Did your unit get involved in that at all?
- Raschke: Not that I recall. I don't recall even thinking about it. I mean, obviously there would have been tons of them, and a lot of them killed, too. God, I don't know how many.
- DePue: How did you stay in touch with the family?

- Raschke: By letters.
- DePue: Did you find a couple letters you could read to us?
- Raschke: I tried to look for them. My writing was so bad, I'm not sure that I can... (laughs)
- DePue: Darn, I was hoping you'd read a couple.
- Raschke: You're welcome to look at them, but I...
- DePue: Was it important for you to get mail from home?
- Raschke: I think so. I think it was more important for them to get mail from me. I mean, I knew what they were doing, and I'm sure that my mother thought constantly I was fighting off a big... (laughs)
- DePue: Were you trying to reassure her, though, that you were well behind the front lines?
- Raschke: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I told her I was way, way, way back—I can't even hear it, you know? (laughs)
- DePue: Your mother was the one of the two parents that was worried, huh?
- Raschke: Well, I'm sure Dad did, too, but she did the writing.
- DePue: Did you find any letters from her?
- Raschke: My mother?
- DePue: Mm-hmm.
- Raschke: I don't think—well, no.
- DePue: You didn't keep those letters?
- Raschke: No, no.
- DePue: Did they send over food or cookies or socks or sweaters or anything like that?
- Raschke: No, no. I had all that stuff I needed.
- DePue: Well, tell me a little bit about the food you're eating. Is the army keeping you well fed?
- Raschke: It wasn't that bad. I do remember something that was bad when I was in Fort Bliss: **horrible** problem with cockroaches. In the barracks, lights would come on and you'd have a swatter in your hand, and bam, bam, bam, bam, bam,

bam! as they ran across the floor. I remember one time, in the mess hall I reached for something, and there was a great, big cockroach sitting on top of it. (laughs) But it was impossible, I guess, to handle them there. I do remember that!

DePue: How many hot meals were you eating on a typical day in Korea?

Raschke: I only ever ate... (pause) I don't remember anything about that at all. We were coming and going. I don't think we ever had a whole bunch of us around at one time. I don't recall that. I think we took grub with us out to the truck. I suppose when we got in, we ate, you know, and when we got up, we ate. (laughs)

DePue: How about this question: do you remember what your favorite c- or k-ration was, and what you **didn't** like to see?

Raschke: I...

DePue: Well, I'm testing your memory here—I'm sorry to do that.

Raschke: No, that's okay—my memory has gone to hell! (laughs)

DePue: How about this: I know, just like during World War II, a lot of entertainers went over to Korea. Do you remember any time when you got to see some entertainers?

Raschke: I'm sure they did, but I don't recall any. Actually, we were far enough back from the line, they shouldn't mess with us anyway; they should go up—because we didn't need some entertainment.

DePue: I know you had that one period of time when you were in Japan because of your injury, but you mentioned also you had an R&R.

Raschke: Two R&Rs, yeah.

DePue: What'd you do in your R&Rs?

Raschke: Went around and saw the sights of Japan. I went once with the company clerk, and then I went alone. The one I really remember is the second atomic city—what was the name of that?

DePue: Nagasaki.

Raschke: Nagasaki, yeah. I visited there.

DePue: What were your impressions of seeing Nagasaki six, seven years after the bomb?

Raschke: Well, the building that had been directly under the bomb was still standing, but the roof was gone—a big stone building. I can't think of it—there was a place where the Japanese people, I guess, sat around that building; you could see the concrete was all burned black, but you could see the... (draws breath) outlines of the little kids. (pause) I'll never forget that. (voice shaking, whispering) I'm sorry about that.

DePue: That's okay. Then you had to go back to Korea after that?

Raschke: Yes, yes, I went back to Korea. When you get older, you get less control of your emotions, after that scene.

DePue: Well, I think that would be tough for anybody to see. You end up proving you're a human being.

When did you come back home?

Raschke: Let's see...gosh, I don't remember. The dates are in there, of course, I'm sure, but I don't really recall there—

DePue: Was it in the fall of '53 sometime?

Raschke: Yeah, it was, well, let's see, I got out the day before Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving Eve, that's when I got home. I was on a troop ship, but I think it took us—it was an old Liberty Ship, I think it was—and that took, seems to me, almost two weeks to get back. (laughs) It took us one day to get over, and then two weeks to get back.

DePue: Comparing the trip over on the airplane and coming back on a ship, which did you like better?

Raschke: (laughs) If anybody wants to ride in a Liberty Ship, they can have my ticket! (both laugh) But it was really kind of funny. Where you slept, they were just barely long enough to lie down in, and if you wanted to turn over, you had to get out and go back in to lay on your stomach or on your face; it was just that snug. I think it was about five high. I think about the second day out, we weren't in the storm, but there'd been a storm and the waves were just **huge**. You could stand in the middle of the ship, and it would go down and then it come up, and when it came up, the propeller would come out of the water—you know, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump! (laughs heartily)

DePue: John, you seem to remember this part pretty well.

Raschke: Oh, yeah, I remember this one! (laughs) I was on KP⁶ and I poured tea. I don't know how long it was, or the whole time, or just part of it, but anyway, I was on the end pouring it. Everybody's standing up and they're eating, and the

⁶ KP: Kitchen Police, usually helping the cooks with routine tasks.

ship would roll, and a plate full of vomit would come sliding by. Pick up what you're eating, (laughs) and eat some more, and it came back, slid back, you know. (laughs)

DePue: Did you get seasick yourself?

Raschke: No, I never was that, not at all. I never got seasick.

DePue: Saw plenty of others though, huh?

Raschke: Oh...I'll never forget that. (laughs)

DePue: You mentioned you have letters here; maybe we can get you to take a look at those after we're done. Do you recall the moment, the actual event of being reunited with the family? It was right at Thanksgiving, obviously.

Raschke: Yeah. Let's see, I rode home with somebody who brought me all the way home; I can't think who that was. I remember Mother was pretty emotional and all that; I remember that, yeah. And the next day was Thanksgiving; I went over to the relatives', but I don't remember anything much about that. I think one of them said, "Were you gone?" (both laugh)

DePue: They didn't treat you like a hero?

Raschke: I wasn't a hero, you know. (laughs)

DePue: But did they treat you like a hero?

Raschke: I think we just took off where we'd left off. Nobody asked any real questions and I didn't tell any...

DePue: Were you wearing a uniform when you were eating Thanksgiving dinner?

Raschke: No, no.

DePue: You were already back in civvies again?

Raschke: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

DePue: Did you know what you wanted to do in your life when you came back home?

Raschke: Yes.

DePue: And that was?

Raschke: Be my own boss.

DePue: Didn't want somebody else ordering you around anymore?

Raschke: No.

DePue: Well, does that mean you were ready to be a farmer again?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Didn't that mean you'd have to have your dad as your boss?

Raschke: No. (laughs) He said, "Here."

DePue: He was ready to have you run the farm?

Raschke: You bet. (laughs)

DePue: And never had any regrets about returning to farm life?

Raschke: Oh, everybody wonders, What if... I had several opportunities, and could have done this or could have done that.

DePue: Well, what are some of the other things that you've done with your life after you did return? I think I heard that you were involved with Augustana College afterwards, as well?

Raschke: Not really. I was—oh, golly—school board in Geneseo, School Board at the community college down in Rock Island. I was president of the Illinois Livestock Feeders Association. A number of things. I mean, I just can't think of all of them.

DePue: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill, coming back?

Raschke: No. Well. In a way—went to ag school in Geneseo, and that was a farce. It was just a way of making, I don't know, sixty or eighty bucks a month, or I can't think of what it was they paid.

DePue: Did you manage to keep tabs with some of your wartime buddies?

Raschke: No.

DePue: You didn't really have much interest in that?

Raschke: I don't know, it just... I really wasn't any one place all that long, you know; it was constantly turning. I wrote a couple of letters, I think, to the fellow I went to Japan with, and that sort of dropped off. Generally speaking, I wasn't with any group very long.

DePue: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

- Raschke: Not to be active in, but I joined because they did good work and whatnot. I've spoken at, oh, Armistice Day and Independence Day in Geneseo, and maybe one or two other places.
- DePue: You grew up during the Second World War. You remember the support and enthusiasm the American public generally had for the veterans of the second war. I suspect you remember when they came home being treated pretty well.
- Raschke: Well, I guess I didn't think much about it. I know we were pretty happy to see my cousins come back and whatnot. I don't have any real memory of... We never went to any parades or anything, I know that.
- DePue: Well, let me ask you this question, because, in general, the Korean War and the Korean War veterans, the Korean War is the forgotten war—
- Raschke: Yeah, I think that's probably inaccurate.
- DePue: —and the Korean War veterans are the soldiers who fought in the forgotten war, and they were ignored as well. Did that bother you?
- Raschke: No. I mean, I doubt that I would have signed up if I didn't have to go, so I don't have anything to... The Ices sacrificed a lot. Frankly, I got a lot more out of it than I ever gave; I'm sure of that. Made me confident in myself, I know I could do it, got along good with strangers, so...
- DePue: So, that was an expanding experience for you, it sounds like.
- Raschke: Right, very much so. Very much so. But then, you know, seeing the devastation in the country, I mean, I think...
- DePue: How did that experience in Korea change your outlook on life?
- Raschke: It made me wiser, I guess that. You know, I mean, that's... But I can't say I had a vision or anything of that nature. It wasn't that sort of thing, but...
- DePue: But you did allude to having a strong opinion about foreign affairs circumstances the United States got into after Korea.
- Raschke: Oh, yeah.
- DePue: What were your thoughts about Vietnam at the time, when it was going on?
- Raschke: Well, obviously it was, We got to get out of there as quick as we can, because it was far different than Korea.
- DePue: Why do you think it was different?
- Raschke: Well, Russia was in there big time in Vietnam, not in combat, but supplying and all that sort of thing. I think we could have done better. We weren't

willing to do the things that would have been done. I mean, if you're going to fight, you kill them until they get tired of being killed, and that's that. But all these armistices, and bullshit—really you should not fight unless you mean it, unless there's something you got to do—I guess you got to do it. Actually, I think we ruined our chances of winning in Korea even before we got in it big. Kennedy gave the okay for the overthrow of—what's the name? I can't think of the last elected minister.

DePue: Oh, Diem. President Diem.

Raschke: Yeah. Gave the okay to overthrow him and acquiesced in his murder. I think it was a poisoned apple. From then on that was our war. That was.

DePue: And similarly—of Korea and Vietnam both ostensibly wars against Communists—and now in the last twenty years it's been wars against radical Islam.

Raschke: Yeah, but I think the difference: Korea was a real danger, I would say, to the United States. The French were the ones that we replaced in Vietnam; what for? What were we going to have in a win? Let's see, what are we going to do now? We're not going to be willing to do what it takes. I mean, unless you want to kill them all, if that's what it takes, you better stay out.

DePue: Well, it certainly was a different kind of combat than it was for those who fought in Korea.

Raschke: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

DePue: How about your thoughts about the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Raschke: Well...I guess I wish they had never happened. Well, the one in Afghanistan is the more serious war. Saddam Hussein—he was a rotten son-of-a-bitch, and somebody should have went over there and shot him in the back, you know what I mean? (laughs)

DePue: Saddam Hussein, yeah.

Raschke: Saddam Hussein. But to get into what we had to, what we surely should have known would be a religious war, was stupid. Between the Muslims, and the radical Muslims. I think what the older Bush did was more sense; every once in a while, he'd bomb them, you know what I mean? (laughs)

DePue: Take them out of Kuwait, and then stop there.

Raschke: Yeah. Yeah, that's it. And this business, messing around—we're not the world's cop, you know? If it affects our interests, we do what we have to do, but...

DePue: You were saying that the United States is not the policeman of the world, but you and your service ended up, to a certain extent, playing the role.

Raschke: But I think it was a danger to the United [States]. If China had taken over Korea, I think Japan was next. And that did matter.

DePue: Well, we've been talking for quite a while here, John. It's been very interesting talking to you. Do you have any final reflections you'd like to sum up with?

Raschke: Golly, I do better reacting than thinking up. (laughs)

DePue: What comments would you like to give to anybody who would be listening to this? Maybe your children or your grandchildren or great-grandchildren down the road somewhere—any lessons you'd like to leave with them?

Raschke: (pause) Well, the United States is a great country, but sometimes it does stupid things. (laughs) And you got to watch out for it!

DePue: Would you encourage them, if they were interested in the military service, to join the military?

Raschke: Military service is certainly an honorable and a necessary thing. It'd be their decision not mine.

DePue: Well, in part, a long time earlier in this interview, you were mentioning a John—his father was a neighbor just across the road here. Well, that John is a very good friend of mine—John S. Raschke—and you're John R. Raschke.

Raschke: Yeah.

DePue: And he is a veteran of the Vietnam war.

Raschke: Oh, yes. Yeah. I think he became a colonel in the Army.

DePue: Yeah.

Raschke: Yeah. He really had a tough childhood. His father and mother were pretty well broken up. I know you might know this. That's got to be terrible on kids, you know. He's really made tremendous—he's really a great person.

DePue: Anything else then, John? Any final words for us?

Raschke: I was just thinking about John: his grandfather was my father's brother, and his grandmother was my mother's aunt. I'm not sure just what kind of relatives we are. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, it sounds pretty close to me.

Raschke: Yeah! (laughs) I never have understood; it's not first or second anything.

DePue: Okay, John, thank you very much.

Raschke: Oh, sure.

DePue: It's been a real pleasure talking to you, and hearing about your experiences, so thank you.

(end of interview)