Interview with John Raschke

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, October 18, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. And I'm here this afternoon with John S. Raschke. Good afternoon, John.

Raschke: Hi, Mark, how are you?

DePue: Pretty good. In the interest of full disclosure here, I've known John since I think 1981. We were back in the National Guard together; that's why I know you've got an important story to tell about the Vietnam War. And I know you well enough to think that your comment would be, "Oh, I don't think it's all that important," but every story adds a level of understanding as we try to examine what happened in those difficult days. So let's start with when and where you were born.

Raschke: I was born November 2, 1947, in Geneseo, Illinois, which is in Henry County.

DePue: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

Raschke: My father had a eighth-grade education. He was born and raised in the same exact area, Edford Township. My mother had a tenth-grade education. She married young. And she originally was born in Effingham County, Illinois. Came to the Geneseo area in the early '40s.

DePue: When did they get married?

Raschke: Got married December 3, 1944.

DePue: Was your dad in the military?

Raschke: Well, he was in the Illinois state militia, which during World War II, basically, they were the ones that were guarding the home front, if you will.

DePue: But he sounds like he otherwise was of age to be drafted or inducted.

Raschke: He was. I don't know for certain, but I'm sure he had some sort of farming deferment. His father, my grandfather, had been a farmer all of his life, and as you know, the war effort needed farmers.

DePue: Absolutely. Raschke, I know, is a German name. Do you know where the family came from in Germany?

Raschke: I certainly do. In fact, I've visited the place where my great-grandfather was born. It's now in what is Poland—back then it was in West Prussia—small town by the name of Magdalenka.

DePue: Magdalenka. What were your impressions going back to your ancestral roots?

Raschke: It was just amazing. I mean, to stand on the same ground where my great-grandfather was born and his father and father and father before him, it was just really amazing. You know, it kind of takes your breath away.

DePue: I don't think you mentioned your father's name?

Raschke: My father's name was Edward Marvin. Went primarily by Marvin since my grandfather's name was Edward.

DePue: How about your mother's name?

Raschke: My mother's name was Betty Lou, maiden name Martin.

DePue: Okay. You grew up on the farm, then.

Raschke: I did.

DePue: Tell us a little bit about the farm.

Raschke: My first recollection was back in the very early '50s. You know, had, I guess, kind of a normal farm child childhood. Worked pretty much at an early age. We had chickens, primarily, but we had hogs, cattle, for a while milk cows. And then the typical grains: the corn, the oats, the hay, that sort of thing.

DePue: Did you say you had some horses or…?

Raschke: We never had horses. Never was into the horses thing.

DePue: So it was a mechanized farm by the time you came along.

Raschke: At that time, yeah, sure. We had an old F-20 tractor I remember that my grandfather so proudly bought back in the mid-1930s. Had a small Allis-Chalmers C. Then sometime during the mid-'50s, my father—and I can remember this day distinctly—came driving home in a new Allis-Chalmers WD45.

DePue: WD45.

Raschke: WD45, exactly.

DePue: Is that connected with the horsepower of the tractor, or…?

Raschke: I don't know. I assume it was right at forty-some horsepower, so I would guess that's what it was, yes.

DePue: Well, today that would be tiny, wouldn't it?

Raschke: Very tiny when you're into the hundreds of horsepower, but our farm was 212 acres, most of which was rolling hills. I would say that probably sixty or seventy acres is all that was tillable, which explains why we had the cattle. We had stock cattle that ran on the pastures during the summer times.

DePue: You mentioned that the chickens were an important component. Was that the main source of money?

Raschke: Yeah, it really was. I mean, it was the staple, if you will. Every week my mother and grandfather would go down to the Quad Cities, about twenty miles away, and they had a regular egg route. They would deliver the eggs, and that was certainly our source of income for that week. The other thing is, when you sold cattle or you sold your grains or hogs or whatever, I mean, you certainly got a pretty big check then, but those were kind of few and far between, it seemed.

DePue: All the grain that was grown on the property was for feed?

Raschke: Most of it, yes. I mean, on just a very few occasions I can remember shelling corn and selling it out, but mostly it was consumed by the livestock.

DePue: Well, now when you think about a chicken farm or a chicken ranch, you're thinking large numbers. How many chickens would you normally have at one time?

Raschke: I would guess maybe anywhere from three to five hundred. And that's just a guess; I really have no clue. I know I spent a lot of time gathering eggs, a lot of time feeding the chickens, a lot of time cleaning up the chicken house, but I never did stop and count them individually.

DePue: (laughs) Well, I've heard others explain that that wasn't one of their favorite jobs.

Raschke: It's a terrible job! (laughs) Chickens are dirty.

DePue: Worse than other livestock?

Raschke: Yeah, pretty much. I mean, I guess hogs, you expect it from them, but there's something about chicken manure that just lasts with you a long time.

DePue: What other chores did you get to do?

Raschke: Oh my gosh. Well, when I was growing up, fact is my entire childhood we never had running water on the farm. So one of our big chores was to carry water, primarily to the chickens and to the hogs, which always involved two five-gallon buckets you try to use to evenly balance you. I can remember, it seems like those hog waters in particular, you'd just never get them filled up. It was a long process, and we had to carry them a long ways. I mean, we're talking about five-gallon buckets, forty pounds apiece, and I'm talking about, probably starting at age twelve, carrying them 100, 150 yards.

DePue: Was there no windmill?

Raschke: No, no. We had a pump, you know, that was a central source of water for the entire farm, to include the house. But still, we had to carry it from that pump to where the livestock actually were.

DePue: Well, no indoor plumbing for a city kid like myself means that you're going outside to do your business, too.

Raschke: That's exactly right.

DePue: Was that typical of farms in that area?

Raschke: I would say that where we lived, we were probably one of the very few that did not have indoor plumbing.

DePue: But you had electricity.

Raschke: We did have electricity, yes.

DePue: Do you know when that came into the area?

Raschke: Before my recollection, so my guess is probably the mid-, late forties, something like that.

DePue: So after the war, it sounds like.

Raschke: I believe that, but I'm not certain.

DePue: Do you have any siblings?

Raschke: Oh, yes. I'm the oldest boy of ten children. I have a sister that's older than I, and next is another sister, two brothers, two sisters, and then three brothers. I think that comes up to ten with myself included.

DePue: Would it be fair to describe the farm as a subsistence farm?

Raschke: A subsistence farm on its **best day**, perhaps. I mean, my recollection of living on the farm and growing up was that we were just barely getting by; that's just the way it was. My father—or let me rephrase that—my grandfather had really done quite well in his life. Started with a third-grade education. His father died when he was twelve, so he had to raise his siblings and take care of his mother, and he went from essentially nothing to rather prosperous in the sense of accumulating land and wealth. My father didn't seem to have his energies as such. I mean, his priorities were, other than making money or really, for that matter, it seemed, taking care of the family. It was a pretty harsh and brutal childhood.

DePue: Did you have any other important influences growing up?

Raschke: Yeah, as a matter of fact, my cousin, whom I know you also interviewed, John R. Raschke, he always was an inspiration to me. He lived less than a quarter-mile away from us. As a kid, probably starting around age ten or twelve, I spent time working for him, and then up until my eventual departure from the house, so I spent a lot of time with him, particularly baling hay, but also mending fence, just a number of other odd jobs. I always looked up to him. He was just a very intelligent man. He had the same love for history that I seemed to grow into. Again, he was someone that I just truly admired. So he was one important part of my life.

My other would be my grandfather, whom I spent a great deal of time with growing up. We had, as I said, 212 acres on two separate parcels of land that were separated by several miles, and my grandfather had cattle on what we called "the other place." He would stop out typically early in the morning and we'd get saddled up and jump in his old '49 Chevrolet car and drive over to the other farm, and we'd mend fence or count cattle or just do something. I spent a lot of time with him and just truly enjoyed every bit of that time. He was an old German and didn't really show love, but you knew that when you around him, that he liked you being there. And I guess I really appreciated that. I didn't get that sense from others.

DePue: Did you like farming? Did you think farming was your future at the time?

Raschke: Not at all. Again, I saw the way that my mother, father, siblings lived; as I said, we were just barely eking by. I just knew that this wasn't the kind of life that I wanted for me. I look at farming as a very noble and honorable profession, I like the sense of being close to God and earth, but there just

wasn't enough there. I was not inspired to do that. I knew I wanted to do something else. I didn't know what that something else was, but it certainly wasn't farming.

DePue: Was the family religious? Did you get to church?

Raschke: Yeah, I got to church and Sunday school, for that matter, pretty much every Sunday. I mean, my mother went on occasions, but she pretty much insisted or ensured that we go there all the time. It really wasn't difficult; I loved the church that we were in. It was a Lutheran church, Missouri synod, a lot of old tradition. As I now know after studying genealogy, fully three-quarters of the church was related to our family in some fashion. I would consider myself very religious at that point in my life.

DePue: You mentioned your mother went sometimes. I'm assuming your dad didn't go to church much.

Raschke: Seldom. You know, I really can't recall. I'm sure that he did on occasion, but I just really don't recall that. I know in the latter part of his life—he died rather young at sixty-six—I knew that he became religious, because he had the pastor stop out and talk with him and give him communion and that sort of thing. But as I was growing up, I just don't remember any part of that, I mean, him being in church with me.

DePue: Who was taking all the kids to church, then?

Raschke: Well, the good news is that we lived at the top of a hill separated by a valley, and at the top of that valley was the church, so we were only about a quarter-mile away from that church as well. We're talking a country church. Often my mother would take us and drop us off at Sunday school, and if the weather was good, we would just stay for church and then walk home. Often someone would stop and pick us up and bring us home. But getting there and back was not an issue at all.

DePue: How about schools? Where did you start going to school?

Raschke: Started originally in a one-room schoolhouse—and no, I didn't have to walk ten miles (DePue laughs) one way in the snow. But it was a small school out in the country, about two miles from where we lived, called Howard School. Had first and second grade there, and then I went from there to another one-room schoolhouse called Green River School, and that was for third grade. That was, oh, probably six, seven miles away, but again, it was a country one-room school. From there I went to fourth grade to Geneseo South Side School. That was a big school, old school, built probably in the 1890s, that housed grades four, five, six. Went there for fourth and I believe fifth grade.

DePue: Was it different now, getting away from a one-room school where it had all the grades in one place—I'm assuming—to going to Geneseo and now it's just one grade, one group of kids that's all the same age?

Raschke: I guess it's different when you're out on the playground. I mean, there's a lot more people to run into. But as a kid you just adapted to that kind of thing, so it's no big deal. To be honest, I don't even think I thought about it.

DePue: Did you have some of the other more modern things? You're growing up in the '50s and '60', and many people look back since then at those days as very nostalgic.

Raschke: Well, yeah. I think probably like most kids of that day, we had television probably spent more time sitting in front of the television than I would have allowed my children to do as they were growing up. But back then, that was a big deal. I mean, I can remember coming home from school, getting dropped off by the bus, and going in, getting some kind of snack and sitting down, watching some kind of cartoons or the Three Stooges or something like that on TV when we should have been out doing chores. But, you know, we were amazed at the TV, and I think I learned a lot on the TV too. I mean, back then we had what I consider now, certainly, wholesome shows. You know, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Andy Griffith*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Nelsons*, those kinds of things, which I thought in retrospect, now anyway, look and provided some life lessons that I've taken with me.

DePue: As the oldest boy in the family, were you also in charge of the other kids getting chores done, things like that?

Raschke: Not really. (laughs) I mean, I had my two younger brothers. As they got older, of course I was older then too, and a typical thing to do would be, for example, feeding the hogs or feeding the chickens, someone would be in the wagon with the grain and they'd be shoveling the feed into the buckets and handing the buckets out to us, and we would be carrying them. Probably more often than not we'd end up fighting or throwing corn cobs at each other or chasing one another around, accusing each other of being incredibly lazy.

DePue: You have any memories of especially humorous events growing up?

Raschke: My brother tells this story; I don't seem to remember it, but I certainly wouldn't deny it, though, either. But he talks about one time when we took him out into the hog lot and tied him up around a tree and threw a bunch of corn down at his feet. He didn't seem to be too happy about that situation, but it certainly lasted in his memory. But we were kids on a farm; we didn't have a lot of other kinds of entertainment short of TV and entertaining ourselves. So again, we played a lot. We had a crick[1] or creek down at the bottom of the

[1] Crick is a common pronunciation for creek in this part of the world, not necessarily limited to farm boys.

valley I was talking about, and we'd go down there and play a lot. You know, had an assortment of pets. I remember a raccoon for a pet.

DePue: That sounds like an outside pet.

Raschke: Oh, absolutely. Well, he occasionally got inside, because he seemed to like eggs, and my mother didn't particularly care for that.

DePue: I can't imagine.

Raschke: Yeah.

DePue: They're resourceful little critters.

Raschke: They are. I remember he used to crawl up to the top of the door, the screen door, and then reach his hand in—because it wasn't quite level—and he'd reach his hand in and push it away and then crawl down to the inside. I can remember going out there one time and seeing him—we'd gather eggs and we'd put them in buckets and set them on the porch—and he was out there in the middle of the bucket, throwing eggs out with both hands, (laughs) like he was digging for something. Again, my mother was not terribly happy with that.

DePue: There goes your egg money.

Raschke: That sure was.

DePue: I'm assuming you went to high school in Geneseo as well?

Raschke: I did. Geneseo High School; I went there for the tenth, eleventh grades, sophomore, junior. And the good part about that is when I was going to fourth grade, my grandparents lived not terribly far from both of those schools, and so pretty much every day we'd—"we," I'd say my sister and I—would walk down to our grandmother's, and she would have lunch for us. That was just some very memorable times as well. I just truly adored both of my grandparents.

DePue: Did you get involved in extracurricular activities?

Raschke: Not really, and there were several reasons. Number one is, to do that—I was going to school in Geneseo which was six miles away, and for the most part, even back then with cheap gas, it was just the inconvenience of having to drive into Geneseo and pick us up and take us back. I did do some things, though. I mean, I remember I was in the senior class play, debate, speech, those kinds of things, but never any athletic things, although I considered myself reasonably okay as far as an athlete goes.

DePue: In high school, what did you think you wanted to do with your life?

Raschke: Actually, I had really intended on becoming a surveyor. I don't know exactly how I came up with that notion except it just seemed intriguing to me. I liked math and trig and those kinds of things, and it just seemed to be kind of a neat thing. I don't know, maybe my inspiration was Lincoln. I just don't know, but I do recall that's what I was thinking of doing. That lasted with me a year or two, and after that, I kind of gave up on that idea and just decided, Well, I need to eventually go to college, but knew also that I didn't have the means or resources to do that.

DePue: Was that something that your parents would have encouraged, going to college?

Raschke: No, not at all. In fact, my father kind of disdained education. I don't know, that doesn't sound right, but that's what it seemed like. My mother was much more open-minded. I can remember probably in my freshmen year when you're signing up for all of your other high school classes, one of the questions they ask is, Are you planning on going to college? And your parents had to sign that. I remember distinctly that my mother said "possibly." (laughs) That also sticks with me. I somehow managed to do that, but that's a long story too.

DePue: Well, with ten kids in the family…

Raschke: Well, that's the thing, too. I mean, number one, we're just barely getting by with ten kids—at that point in time there were seven of us. But it was just doggone hard to make it.

DePue: When did you graduate from high school?

Raschke: In 1965.

DePue: So 1965, the Vietnam War is starting to heat up, although it's pretty early for that. And anyway, there's been a draft for ten years. Was that part of your thought, that you'd be drafted or go into the military?

Raschke: Well, I thought about going into the military then. I think about this on occasion, too, is that back in that era, as I'm sure they're doing now, they had military recruiters coming to the schools. I can distinctly remember one time the Marine recruiter coming to the school and remember his nice, spiffy uniform and everything else like that. He gave us the typical recruiting pitch. And I think I was pretty interested at the time and gave him my name and contact information and everything and never heard a lick from him at all, which is just amazing to me. But I think in retrospect, as I tell the rest of my story, how incredibly fortunate I was for him not getting back to me, (DePue laughs) because I just came to find out that I really didn't need him.

DePue: Spring of '65, you graduate. What happens after that?

Raschke: Well, that summer I hung around and worked for farmers and worked for a guy that was doing some sod laying and that sort of business. In November of 1965, I turned eighteen, and prior to that, my uncle, who worked for International Harvester Farmall said that they were hiring; you need to go down and talk to them. Back then, it was no big deal; you'd just go down and sign up, get a job, and some people would stay there the rest of their working careers.

DePue: Did you say Farmall?

Raschke: Farmall, yeah. So anyway, I went down there and applied, and they hired me on exactly my eighteenth birthday. I started to work there for them and I worked for them for about ten months. But certainly in that ten months the Vietnam War that you said was heating up was starting to get quite warm at that point in time. So I saw the handwriting on the wall with regard to the draft.

DePue: You mentioned already that you had a love of history. Did you identify that already? Did you know that was something that you were really interested in?

Raschke: Oh, yeah. I mean, my first recollection was in fourth grade at the library; there was this book on Lincoln; actually I think it was Matthew Brady's series of photos of Lincoln and that caught my attention. Pretty much thereafter, I was just consuming history books. I remember also that my aunt, my mother's sister, bought the family, one Christmas, the Little Golden Book or the white book encyclopedia, which was really oriented towards a younger crowd. I studied every page of those as well. I mean, that wasn't necessarily history, but there was a lot of history in there, and they were great learning little tools.

DePue: One of the reasons I'm asking about that—curious if you were also paying attention to the current events when you were growing up.

Raschke: Kind of. But, you know, you had Huntley–Brinkley[2] on every night. I guess the thing is that I remember history also from a standpoint of the movies that were out at that point in time. In particular, I remember Saturdays—and this wasn't a movie but a regular series—they had *The Big Picture*, which is an Army basically recruiting thing (DePue laughs) that came on. I thought that was really neat. But the movies of the day, you know, *To Hell and Back*, *Audie Murphy, Sergeant Stryker, Sands of Iwo Jima*, certainly the show *Combat* at the time, *The Longest Day* and so many of the others.

DePue: This is all World War II history.

Raschke Yeah, yeah, it really was. But it was history, and I was kind of fixated on it.

[2] Huntley and Brinkley for years were a news and analysis team on National Public Radio, later TV.

DePue: A different kind of an event, but do you remember the day that Kennedy was assassinated?

Raschke: I do. In fact, my wife and I were talking about that last week because I had stayed home that particular Friday doing, of all things, cleaning out the chicken house, and remember going in—

DePue: You skipped school so you can clean out the chicken house?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah, amazing, isn't it? Well, that's kind of what farm kids did. I mean, the farm had to survive. But I remember eating lunch and hearing the news on the radio—I wasn't watching TV at the time, but the radio—and they had announced that there was something going on, and didn't learn until later that day exactly what that something was. Then that weekend, distinctly remembered us being at my grandmother's house in Geneseo as they were transporting Oswald. That was live at the time when he was shot and killed. So I remember that event quite well.

DePue: On TV you watched him get shot?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah, live, yeah.

DePue: What was your reaction then?

Raschke: It's amazing. You know, I don't really know. I mean, it was just—you couldn't believe it. I guess that's the biggest reaction that we'd have. But then they would just run it over and over again, and eventually you knew exactly what happened.

DePue: Let's jump ahead again and get you to the point you're graduated from high school, you're working in the factory. Were you paying attention to what was going on in Vietnam at the time? This would be your war if you'd been in the military.

Raschke: Yeah. I was paying some attention to it. I mean, I think at that point in time, girls or relationships were probably more important. But I do recall reading *Time* magazine pretty regularly then and getting their spin on things. As a family, I think we would subscribe to *Look* magazine; I think that's where Larry Burrows was submitting his photos to. So yeah, I was aware that there was something going on over there, and I was pretty sure that at some point in time it would be my turn to go to bat.

DePue: You mentioned, though, that that was a point in time that girls were more important. Was there any particular girl?

Raschke: Well, my first wife, she was a Geneseo girl. I met her in early '66 and eventually married her in '68.

DePue: What's her name?

Raschke: Sue.

DePue: It wasn't Susan, it was just Sue?

Raschke: It was Susan, actually.

DePue: And her last name?

Raschke: Mirocha, M-i-r-o-c-h-a. I was eighteen at the time, she was fifteen, so in retrospect it was just infatuation, first love, if you will.

DePue: What led you to the point where you approached the recruiters again?

Raschke: Well, again, this is now October of 1966, and I just knew that it was inevitable. I mean, working at Farmall, there were young men of my approximate age that were working there; they were getting their draft notices. I just figured that either I can go in and take my chances or I can enlist for something specific and try to cut the best deal that I can. I knew pretty much at that time that working in a factory wasn't what I wanted to do either. As a matter of fact—today's October the 18th—on October 18, 1966, I went up for my induction physical at Chicago and was sworn in, on this day forty-five years ago.

DePue: Wow. Didn't realize we were going to hit an anniversary for you.

Raschke: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: What did you initially sign up for?

Raschke: Well—

DePue: First of all, why the Army?

Raschke: I don't know. The Army seemed—I guess *Big Picture*, *The Longest Day*—I mean, the truth of the matter is there's no real connection of my family with the Army. I guess at that point in time I was mad at the Marines for not calling me back, my father wanted me to go into the Navy because he said you could always have a bunk to sleep in and something over your head, and I wasn't terribly enamored with the Air Force, so I guess it reduced down to the Army. So I chose them. When I enlisted, I believed at the time I was specifically enlisting to become an X-ray technician, and my thought process there was—I was eighteen at the time—I thought, Well, the thing is I can go into the Army, I can get a profession that is an X-ray technician that's transferable to the civilian life, serve my couple of years, get out, and jump right into something that at that point in time paid ten thousand dollars a year, which was a whole bunch of money back then. That was a big part of my thought process.

DePue: Did you know at the time that the Army actually had surveyors?

Raschke: That didn't even occur to me, to be honest about it. I don't know what it was, but for some reason, I just wanted to become an X-ray technician. In this regard, I didn't have anyone that had told me, this is a good deal or this is what you should do or anything like that. I mean, this was my whole plan concocted, pure and simple.

DePue: Obviously when you went through your physical, everything was green-lighted there.

Raschke: Yep, yep.

DePue: What happened after that?

Raschke: Well, again, I was sworn in in October, and I was put on what was then the 120 day delay program, so I just hung around home. I went down to Farmall, told them that I'd like a leave of absence to serve in the military, and they certainly granted that.

DePue: Did that mean that you'd be able to go back once you were out?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah, exactly. That was just kind of hedging bets more than anything else. But I was at home until the 20th of February 1967, at which time I was sent through the reception station again, given another physical, and later that day ended up down at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for my basic training.

DePue: Any memories about going through basic training?

Raschke: Well, just it occurred to me that I was in better shape than most of the people that they were inducting or enlisting at the time. Living on a farm certainly had some value or benefits to it. At that point in time you had a five-event Army PT[3] test, a hundred points each. I recall that in my basic training platoon I scored the highest of everyone else. I didn't really consider myself a world-class athlete or anything else like that, but I did pretty well and they didn't. I remember probably the pugil[4] sticks. I mean, that was an interesting thing. I had an African-American platoon sergeant that—I don't think he really cared for me a whole lot. I don't know what it was. But anyway, he pitted me against an African-American young man from Chicago who was about twice my size, and I'm sure his thought was, We're going to teach this young man a little respect or something. But it was a pretty nasty match. Neither of us prevailed, but we sure beat the dickens out of one another.

[3] PT: Physical Training
[4] Pugil sticks: heavily padded poles used for close combat training

DePue: Well, for most people, their exposure to basic training is a lot of discipline, a lot of structure, some would call it a lot of harassment. Did you take to the discipline?

Raschke: Yeah. That was no problem at all. It was just again, I think, perhaps the adversity of my younger years and getting by with little to nothing. I mean, taking orders. My father was a very demanding, controlling person, so the Army was actually easier than he was. So there was no part of that that gave me any problems. The hardest part, perhaps, was the first couple of weeks, just the, Oh my gosh, my life has changed, you know. Now instead of going out on a date on a Friday night I'm cooped up here in this barracks, scrubbing the latrine or something like that, feeling sorry for myself. But other than that, after that, those couple weeks, that passed as well, and I kind of felt like a duck in water.

DePue: This was late 1966. By this time—

Raschke: Actually we're now talking early 1967.

DePue: Sixty-seven.

Raschke: Yeah, February of 1967.

DePue: So Vietnam is definitely warming up by that time.

Raschke: Absolutely.

DePue: Was that always in the background when you were going through basic?

Raschke: Oh, absolutely. I mean, at that point we had drill instructors that were wearing their CIBs and their overseas patches and things like that, and everything that we were taught was pretty much focused towards Vietnam in some way. I guess if I have a recollection about basic—and this is only in retrospect and subsequent thirty-three years in the military—was how little I really learned. I feel now that what I learned in basic training was just totally inadequate to sustain a soldier, to train a soldier for combat, even at the very basic level.

DePue: But basic training is only the first step in most people's military training experience.

Raschke: Right, right. But even that, I mean, those basic things— we're talking about marksmanship, we're talking about road marches, we're talking about physical training, we're talking about rudimentary map reading, we're talking about very basic first aid. I mean, I think it should have been called something like basic basic basic training or something like that.

DePue: How about the sense where they're taking away or diminishing individual personality and substituting that for being a member of a team?

Raschke: You know, again, that didn't bother me at all.

DePue: So you thought they had done that adequately?

Raschke: Yeah, I thought so. It's hard not to get that sort of feeling when you're doing five-, ten-mile road marches or runs or things like that. You know, when you have to pitch in to get through the obstacle course or whatever. Yeah. I mean, you learn that, and I thought they did a pretty good job of that, of taking the individualism out of us.

DePue: I believe that you had a chance to take some tests for OCS or NCO schools?

Raschke: Well, like everybody else at the time, when you came in, you took a series of tests. It used to be called the ASVAB. I believe that's what it was called. And in that they test all of your different attributes as far as what your inclination is. Are you mechanically inclined, are you…? Where would you best fit into the military? And part of that process ended up with a GT score. And I don't recall exactly what that means, but you had to get a certain GT score to get into certain other occupations. Well, it happened that my test results made me eligible for Officer Candidate School, as were probably several dozen of my basic training company. Of course the NCOs, the commander of the unit, tried to encourage us to go to OCS. And at that point in time I somewhat smugly thought, Why should I want to do that when I can become an X-ray technician? And so I turned it down when I was in basic training.

DePue: What was your commitment – three years?

Raschke: Yes, three years.

DePue: Would that have extended your commitment?

Raschke: No, no, not at all. So anyway, I turned that down and then graduated from basic training in April or so of 1967. Of course at that point you get your orders, and a lot of the draftees are going to Fort Polk and Fort Benning and all those other places for Advanced Infantry Training. I thought, Well, I don't have to worry about it; I'm going down someplace to become an X-ray technician. Come to find out that my recruiter had conveniently or otherwise forgot to put a particular code into my requested Military Occupational Specialty, MOS; that instead of becoming an X-ray technician, I was to become a medical corpsman or a combat medic. When I found that out, we went from Fort Campbell, flew down to Fort Sam Houston. I remember how when I got to Fort Sam Houston, how I was telling them what a serious mistake they had made; they apparently didn't see the humor in it because I was put into the medical corpsman training cycle for ten weeks.

DePue: Was part of the decision to get the initial training request that you could avoid combat that way?

Raschke: I don't think I was really thinking of it that way because, again, as a kid, I had an old Army helmet and I got pictures of me dressed up in a Army backpack and a six-shooter and those sorts of things, and my brothers and I used to play war, play combat a lot. I don't think it was an intent to avoid combat as much as it was a desire to improve my lot in life, because I just really didn't even think about that. All I wanted to do was go into the military and come out much better than I was when I left.

DePue: In that respect, then, getting switched over to become a medic is also a marketable skill once you get to civilian life. Did you look at it that way?

Raschke: No, I really didn't, because I knew that in my AIT battalion, of which there were two or three battalions there—

DePue: AIT, Advanced Individual Training.

Raschke: —Advanced Individual Training—that there were literally hundreds if not thousands of individuals that were going to be medical corpsmen. And I guess at that point—now we're talking the late '60s—when you think of the medical field, except for the doctors, you always think that, well, the nurses, they're all female. So I guess in that regard I didn't think that that was a terribly marketable skill for me.

DePue: Did it seem like a good match for your interests and your skills?

Raschke: I did really well in my Advanced Individual Training because I always applied myself. But in retrospect it just taught me some very valuable things that I would use later in my life. But at the time it just didn't do much for me. I didn't think of it in terms of, well, going over to Vietnam and having to save other people. I didn't have a fear of that, but again, I was just so focused on becoming something better than what I was when I left home, coming out the other side, and I just didn't think that combat medic or medical corpsman would do it for me.

DePue: What were your parents telling you about their concerns about you going in the military at that time?

Raschke: To be honest, I mean, it really wasn't a big deal. I can recall that when I departed for basic training I went down to the train depot there in Rock Island, which was not but a couple hundred yards away from the Farmall plant where I worked; on that occasion, both my mother and father took me down there. There wasn't any crying on anyone's part, there weren't any words of wisdom from either parent. It was basically, Goodbye, you know. And I don't mean that as quite as cold as what it sounds, but it wasn't a big event. It was almost like sending me off to see my grandmother in Wisconsin, for example.

DePue: What happened after you finished your combat medic training?

Raschke: Well, partially through that, I mean, again, they came around—"they" being the leadership within the companies—and said, Hey, we're looking for individuals that would be interested in going to Officer Candidate School. At that point in time I decided, Well, I'm going to take them up on this. So about midway through my medical corpsman training I did apply for OCS. At that time you had to get a recommendation from your commander and you had to be interviewed and that sort of thing. I went through that entire process and was selected. I graduated from medical corpsman training—don't remember the exact date, but it had to be somewhere in July, August, of '67. What you would do is, once you were accepted into the OCS program, you would wait for a training date or a date to be brought into OCS. As it turned out, I ended up waiting from about August of '67 until March of '68 when I eventually went in. During that time I was very fortunate in that I went through what was called a leadership preparatory class; that was basically to be able to march AIT soldiers around from class to class and to kind of be their guardian and that sort of thing. And was assigned to a particular AIT class. At that point all the NCOs had been to Vietnam, so I mean they knew what was going on and they imparted wisdom—good bad, or indifferent—to me. I think the biggest thing or the most beneficial thing that I didn't quite realize at the time was that my commander had been given a quota for the Fourth Army NCO Academy, which is up at Fort Hood, which is about 90, 120 miles away from Fort Sam Houston; so he selected me, or I was selected to go to that. That did a much better job of preparing me not just for OCS, as it eventually turned out, but really for getting a good sense of military training. Because I considered that was really pretty good. That was a six-week course, and I graduated sometime in December of 1967.

DePue: And you say that was at Fort Hood, then?

Raschke: Yes, it was.

DePue: Okay. So you're getting to see a little bit of the United States.

Raschke: Yeah, yeah. I had never seen it (laughs) before.

DePue: Didn't get too far out of Geneseo before that?

Raschke: Well, my grandparents lived in Wisconsin. I had been there on a couple of occasions. But between Wisconsin and Iowa, just being on the other side of the river from the Quad Cities, those are pretty much the only states I had seen.

DePue: Once you get to OCS, is it your thought that, Well, I know I'm going to Vietnam; I just need to get ready now, get my mind right?

Raschke: Yeah. Again, I think the realization really hit home back down at Fort Sam Houston, because in my graduating class from medical corpsman AIT, and my subsequent class that I had been an assistant—I don't want to call it a drill

instructor, but basically an assistant to that class—probably 75 percent of those kids were all going to Vietnam. So I mean, at that point you knew it was inevitable; the thing you were trying to do, or I was just trying to do, is get as prepared as what I could for it.

So when I went to OCS, I went to Engineer Officer Candidate School up at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, again, arriving there in March of 1968. My classmates—and we just had a reunion this past June—were predominantly young men who had enlisted or had been drafted, but when they were drafted they were specifically put on a track to go to OCS. And probably 80 to maybe even 90 percent of my OCS classmates were college graduates. And here I'm a—what am I at that time?—I'm a twenty-year-old kid, basically in with a bunch of college graduates. I felt somewhat inadequate in that sense. But I went through OCS, which I guess, again, in retrospect, I wish I had been better prepared for physically, because it was probably the most demanding thing that I've ever done, not just physically but mentally as well. But I survived that six-month ordeal; at the risk of sounding like I'm bragging, quite well. I mean, I was in the upper third of the class as far as academics, and higher than that in leadership, so I considered that quite an accomplishment.

DePue: Why engineer OCS?

Raschke: Well, because it was the only one available at the time. When I signed up to go to OCS, I think that they gave you a preference sheet—I think they did. I guess I don't really remember. But I guess I put down engineer OCS. I don't really recall. I could have put down infantry, I could have put down artillery, I guess. I don't know. I just don't remember that part of the process, but for some reason I ended up at Fort Belvoir. It wasn't necessarily because I had a burning desire to become an engineer officer; it was just that's kind of where I ended up, by hook or crook, I guess.

DePue: Did you have a desire to go to infantry or to stay out of infantry?

Raschke: Again, it was just totally indifferent. I do recall that in my medical AIT that there was a young man who had been through infantry OCS, and I think he in part was an inspiration to me to go to OCS, because he was bunked quite close to me and would tell stories about infantry OCS and that sort of thing. I don't think that I purposely avoided infantry OCS. For some reason I just ended up an engineer. And again, for the life of me, I can't tell you exactly why.

DePue: Were there stories you were hearing about being an infantry platoon leader was a meat grinder; it's a quick ticket to—

Raschke: No, no, not at all.

DePue: —a body bag?

Raschke: Not at all. I mean—as my story will subsequently unfold—when I got into that situation I just really enjoyed it. I mean, enjoyed it in the sense of it felt like I knew what I was doing. It wasn't an issue of fear or anything like that. I mean, I always just kind of liken it to, again, back as a kid; I can remember friends, neighbor boys and I having BB gun fights or dirt clod fights that consisted of going out into a plowed field, you'd pick up dirt clods and you'd throw them at each other like they were hand grenades, or you'd throw corn cobs at one another. I mean, that was always a favorite pastime. But I can remember on many occasions where I'd just put my head down and charge right at them (DePue laughs) and get hit a lot, but it didn't seem to matter. So, I mean, I don't think it was a matter of lacking courage; it was just again the luck of the draw that I ended up in engineer OCS. I just never had any thoughts of infantry OCS, for example. It just didn't occur to me.

DePue: You got to OCS early in 1968. As far as American history is concerned, it's a pretty memorable year, and it starts with the TET Offensive. I'm assuming that at least you're able to hear enough news to find out about the TET Offensive and how that went.

Raschke: Yeah, there's no question about that. I mean, this was before I got to OCS. This all happened in the latter part of January, early part of February. At the same time of the TET Offensive, there was also the Pueblo incident, and both of those were very much in the forefront of the news. We all knew what was going on then. And we certainly heard the body counts and the standoff at Khe San and everything else like that. I think at that point in your life, you just don't realize the things that you do as you get older. My attitude then was, What will be will be, and whatever God's got in store for me is how it's going to unfold, so.

DePue: You also knew about the anti-war protest, I would guess.

Raschke: Yeah, certainly. I mean, as a matter of location, the anti-war protest really was beginning. They were surrounding the Pentagon, things like that. But I think the more memorable things for us is, Fort Belvoir is located about twenty, thirty miles down Highway One from Washington, D.C., and what I distinctly remember, of course, is the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King and then the subsequent riots that went on in Washington, D.C. I mean, that seemed to be a bigger thing to us than was the anti-war protest.

DePue: That would have happened just about the time you started OCS.

Raschke: Yeah, well, we're talking about May or so of 1968, so I mean we're a couple months into it. But yeah, we were not tabbed to go to downtown D.C. and do anything, but we certainly knew that people from that installation were being sent there. We knew that—you know, we read the newspapers—that they were sending other military units up to that event.

DePue: What were your own views, and other people in OCS, about whether or not this was the right war to be in?

Raschke: Didn't even think of it. You know, just didn't even think of it. I mean, we didn't have roundtable discussions on the merits of the U.S. being in Vietnam or not being in Vietnam. It was just we accepted that our government was there, that they were sending other people over there, and so it was just our turn to go and do something for our country. I mean, I think we looked at it more as a patriotic thing than anything else and pretty much looked with disdain upon those that were protesting, because for the most part, they were not what we were, they were the college kids; they were the kids that had money to buy or not buy, necessarily, but to get the draft deferments. They had the long hair and we had short, cropped military haircuts; and everything that we were, they were not. We didn't dwell on it, but we just in general looked on them with disdain.

DePue: Okay. When did you graduate from OCS?

Raschke: Graduated from OCS on August 31, 1968.

DePue: And what's next?

Raschke: Well, right after OCS, I had been selected to go to an advanced engineering school which was held at Fort Belvoir, so I stayed there for an additional six weeks. From there I went back down to Fort Hood, Texas, and I was with the 1st Armored Division, an armor and engineer outfit, 16th Engineer Battalion. I was a platoon leader down there. I arrived down there on my twenty-first birthday, back in 1968. I remember qualifying with a 45 caliber pistol that same day. (laughs) So it's interesting.

DePue: Well, that almost sounds like you might have missed being sent to Vietnam, at least for a short period of time.

Raschke: Not really, because there was no one from our OCS class that went directly from OCS to Vietnam. I can't talk for the other branches, but I am believing, or thinking anyway, that the policy at that time was once someone's out of OCS or through their Officer Basic Course or whatever, give them a little bit of time here in the States or over in Germany or wherever before they end up in Vietnam. Now, certainly in those critical skills—the infantry lieutenants, the artillery lieutenants—that might have been different, but for us, our expectation was always that we're going to spend just a little bit of time in the States, but every one of us knew that we were likely to go to Vietnam.

DePue: Well, I know that it's not too much later that you get a chance to become an advisor, to go to advisor school. How did that come about?

Raschke: Well, I was at Fort Hood, as I said, had just recently gotten married in 1968, December. Looked around, you know, and Fort Hood back then was basically

a ghost town. I mean, you had pretty much two sorts of people that were at Fort Hood: those that were going to Vietnam and those who had already been. As I said, I was an engineer platoon leader, and my platoon was about half what the normal strength should have been of that platoon. The installation in general was pretty well run down. That was before the all-volunteer army and they started pumping money into the military. But it was really kind of a despicable place. The quality of soldiers—those that were on their way back from Vietnam or waiting to get out or get discharged—they were difficult to deal with. Who am I, some twenty-one-year-old punk telling them what to do, and not having experienced anything myself.

DePue: Drug and alcohol problems?

Raschke: There was some of that, yeah, so it was pretty demoralizing. A couple months after having been married and having lived down at Fort Hood, I had heard from someone—I can't say who that someone is—that what you can do is you can call up your branch, volunteer to become an advisor, and in doing that, you can go to advisory school at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; then if you really want to, you can go to a follow-on Vietnamese language school. So that's exactly what I did. I called up my branch, I volunteered to go to Vietnam, predicated on going to advisor school and language school, and was on my way. I ended up showing up in Fort Bragg in about March of 1969.

DePue: Okay. What was it like at the advisor school? What were they teaching you to do there?

Raschke: Well, they were training us on the history of Vietnam, how it had been subjugated through the years—the centuries, actually. They taught us about the religions of the country; they taught us the courtesies and the customs and the dos and the don'ts. They also taught us about counterinsurgency operations. I mean, not in intricate detail, but basically they compared—I recall one particular class they shows us a classified film on the French experience in Algeria. I never could figure out why it was classified, but nonetheless, it was. They talked about the advisory effort as far as the chain of command within the advisory system in Vietnam. The Hamlet Evaluation System, where you rate your particular area on a number of different criteria. They intensified PT, you know, just to get us somewhat better conditioned to go to Vietnam. Because at that point in time, the Army really didn't have much of a PT program. Concurrent with all these other topics that they're teaching us, they also taught us weapons training. I mean, they had us fire every conceivable weapon they could find in Vietnam, from the German K98 Mauser to an M3 grease gun to an AK-47 to a 57mm recoilless rifle to a 60mm mortar to a BAR[5] to an M1 [rifle], everything, a Thompson submachine gun. Trained us a little bit on demolitions, although I got a pretty healthy dose of that in engineer OCS. But then also we had pretty much a half

[5] BAR: Browning Automatic Rifle

day for that six weeks of Vietnamese language training, and that was just rudimentary language training; in my particular circumstance, it was part of what would become a longer course in Vietnamese language training.

DePue: Not everybody had to get that Vietnamese language training?

Raschke: They all had to get it, but some of them were just there and only for that six-week course; others of us went from that six-week course down to an eight-week course at Fort Bliss.

DePue: Fourteen weeks of language training doesn't sound like much.

Raschke: Well, you know, they weren't trying to teach us to read the Vietnamese newspaper. I mean, our role up there was going to be as advisors, so the focus was on military terms that we would be using, and enough so that we could communicate with our counterparts. Then when you got all done with that—and I'm talking done, now graduating from Fort Bliss, Texas—they would test us; in fact, there ware levels: R-2/S-2 is the level that I graduated at. R-1 was the very bargain basement. You know, you can say 'hello' and 'goodbye.' R-2/S-2 meant you could read it and speak it to a minimal level of proficiency. Actually I thought that was really one of the better classes or training experiences that I had with the military.

DePue: Did you have Vietnamese who were involved with the training?

Raschke: Yes, they were native Vietnamese. In most cases they were Vietnamese ladies who were giving the classes. And we had tapes and we had books and, you know, every bit of it was really pretty good.

DePue: As far as you know, were these people that they had found in Vietnam and brought over to the United States explicitly to teach these courses?

Raschke: You know, I don't know that. That could have been the case. I mean, thinking back, they could have been dependants of military members from Vietnam. I don't know. I don't think that we explored that as students.

DePue: Were you guys trying to pick their brains about what was going on in Vietnam, what they thought about the war?

Raschke: No, not at all. We were there to learn. I mean, that was it. And the thing of it is, we knew where we were heading, I mean, in a sense that we're all going to Vietnam. Again, the class I thought was pretty good at preparing us culturally, and ultimately in their language, that we had enough—we had a pretty big head start over anybody else that was showing up in-country. So, you know, the politics of that, it just didn't really come into play.

DePue: You said you got married in December of '68, so this is before this training we've been talking about.

Raschke: Right.

DePue: Sue has to know that you're heading over to Vietnam. Was there any thought, Well, maybe it'd be smarter to get married after I got back from Vietnam?

Raschke: No, we didn't even think that way. I don't know. Logic would tell me that what you just portrayed is what we should have been thinking, but we weren't. I mean, it just seemed like the thing to do at the time. At that point in time, I was twenty-one; she was seventeen, a month away from eighteen. And it just seemed like that's what we were supposed to do.

DePue: Okay. What did she think about your being in the military and likely heading to Vietnam now?

Raschke: Well, I don't know. I'm sure that she was apprehensive like any military wife would have been or any person associated with the military—I mean, mother, sister, brother, father. I would think that she would be apprehensive about it, but we didn't sit down and have long, deep conversations about it, so I really don't know.

DePue: Well, why don't you tell us about getting to Vietnam?

Raschke: Well, what I remember about getting to Vietnam was I recall that I took a flight from the Quad Cities to Chicago, Chicago to San Francisco. For some reason on the flight, the flight attendants felt sorry for me or otherwise, but moved me from coach up into first class and—I'm talking now the flight from Chicago to San Francisco—spent most of the flight plying me with wine. So [when] I arrived in San Francisco, I was pretty well lit up at the time. But went from San Francisco airport out to Oakland, Travis Air Force Base, and I think we got one uniform there, jumped on a plane, which was a commercial charter, flew from Oakland to Hawaii, Hawaii to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, and eventually ended up in Saigon.

Like most soldiers or most people getting off the airport at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base in Saigon, you just got hit by a blast of hot air as you're getting off the plane. Of course, this is my first experience with a third-world country; seeing what they called a terminal in their capital city versus what you see in the United States was just a big difference. So anyway, got off the airport, loaded us on a bus, and of course, like most other individuals just arriving in-country, you get on a bus and you see this—for lack of a better term—chicken wire that's protecting the windows of the bus. When you realize that the purpose of that wire mesh is to protect you from hand grenades being thrown at the bus or getting inside the bus, you certainly realize that you're not in Kansas anymore.

DePue: One of the things that you mentioned in your pre-interview is that something happened right before you left that made it memorable as well.

Raschke: It may have been memorable then, but it's not memorable exactly right now. (laughter)

DePue: Well, you mentioned before that you saw the moon landing before you departed.

Raschke: Oh, yeah, yeah. Now we're talking about July of 1969. And certainly the Sunday before I left—I believe it was a Sunday—I can recall where I was when I saw it. But we did land the first mission on the moon, and that was certainly memorable.

DePue: That was July twentieth when that occurred.

Raschke: Yeah. And that very next week, I'm on my way to Vietnam, so two memorable things occurred that week.

DePue: Okay. So after the bus ride, what happened?

Raschke: The bus takes us out to MACV Compound; I don't recall exactly where it was at in the city; it probably wouldn't do any good anyway if I did know. But we went there, and what I remember about that is, as I was getting my billet assignment for the evening—I was sleeping close in an open bay next to a couple of other lieutenants, some that are new-in-country like me and others that are on their way out the door. And of course, the ones out the door aren't terribly fond of the country and their experience, and filling our heads with war stories and essentially scaring the bejesus out of us.

But anyway, during that, we went through end processing, which consisted of doing all the necessary paperwork, and we were issued all of our necessary field gear, our weapon, helmet, everything that we needed. We were given our assignments as well; they gave me my assignment, which meant absolutely nothing to me. I mean, they could have told me that I was going to the moon and I wouldn't have known where it was at. But anyway, they were sending me to a place down in the Mekong Delta. So what you did is, if they told you that you need to be at the airport or you need to be at this bus stop at this time the next morning or whatever, you're just there and you're going wherever they're telling you to go. You have your orders; somebody's reading you your orders and telling you what they mean and where you need to go or where you need to stand or what bus you need to get on or what airplane you need to get on. So flew from Saigon down to Can Tho. I know at this point in time it was a military aircraft. We used a lot of C-123s over there, in particular because of the short takeoff/landing that they had, and C-7 Caribous, so I'm guessing it was one of those type of military aircraft.

Anyway, go down to Can Tho, and what they do there is a staging area to, again, get you checked in, make sure you're at the right place, right time, and they schedule you for another flight down to my eventual assignment, which is a small town about thirty kilometers southwest of Can Tho called Vi

Thanh, which was an advisory team province headquarters. Vi Thanh was actually the capital city of Chuong Thien Province. I remember getting off of the aircraft down at Vi Thanh and thinking that the Saigon terminal was bad, because this was really austere. It was strictly an American-run operation. I think they had, perhaps, one or two NCOs running the airfield, and it seemed like we were at the end of the world.

DePue: What's going on in your mind? You're about ready to head into combat. You talked about the guys on the way out filling your head with these war stories. What are you thinking at that time?

Raschke: Well, you know, the issue is, again, I can remember very few occasions in Vietnam when I was actually scared. I mean, I know there were some, but they were really very few. I guess my point there is that when you're twenty-one years old, you think you're going to live forever; you don't think of dying. I certainly didn't dwell on it. Nothing really bothered me. I don't mean to sound that callous about things or necessarily that brave about things, but I just didn't think about those kind of things. I knew that I was there, I was going to be there for a year, I had a job to do, didn't know exactly what that job was going to be, but I was going to do it to the best of my capabilities.

DePue: You mentioned MACV, which is where you were assigned. What is MACV?

Raschke: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, which was the overall headquarters for primarily the advisory element, but also they were the element that had the direct liaison with the ambassador and the other civilian agencies; CORDS is an acronym for some organization that I can't think of right now, but it was big in Vietnam. But that's what MACV was. It was filled with both military and civilians.

DePue: Where you ended up then was Vi Thanh?

Raschke: Right.

DePue: Okay. What happens then?

Raschke: Well, you get there, you're the brand-new kid, and you get assigned a billet, which was certainly better than a tent, but not much more than that. I was at a compound where we had running water, we had three hot meals a day, we had a movie 'most every night. There was a little bar there on the compound. There was probably about, oh, I would say thirty to forty Americans there, and a number of Vietnamese. There were some Filipinos that were working for PAE, Pacific Architects and Engineers—remember that. Some civilians were there; CIA guys were there. There were some Air Force personnel there. They were primarily our light observation aircraft pilots, and then the other support people. I mean, we had radio, telephone operators, you know, guys that ran the radios and that sort of thing. But again, nothing's really registering.

But I check in and get told where to go. I was actually assigned to the province as the province engineer advisor. My predecessor was on his way out the door, and I had a couple of days, I think, to kind of learn from him what I was expected to do. His name was Richard Burke. He was a red-haired Irishman. Good guy. Didn't really get to know him all that well, but good guy, he seemed. But what it amounted to was that he had established the pattern, if you will, that there really wasn't a lot of engineering effort going on within our particular province, and so he had spent a lot of his time out on combat operations. I guess the expectation was that that's what I would do too, and frankly, it just didn't occur to me, or again, that just didn't really register as a plus or a minus. I mean, I just accepted it and went on from there.

DePue: Paint us a picture, if you can, of Mekong Delta , or at least the area that you worked in.

Raschke: Well, it was just absolutely as flat as a tabletop. I recalled at the time, but subsequently too had the map series from that. The highest elevation on any of those maps was three-tenths of a meter above sea level; that was the highest elevation. So needless to say, there weren't a lot of contour lines. A lot of rice growing down there. A lot of canals. A lot of coconuts, mangrove swamps. Just a lot of farming, a lot of places for the bad guys to hide.

DePue: When was monsoon season?

Raschke: Well, you know, I tried to think that, and the truth of the matter is I don't really know. It's easy enough to check, I'm sure, but I think that it ran from let's say September to April or something like that. That's what I think. I don't recall. Or maybe it's April through September. But what I distinctly remember is that every day during the monsoons it just rained like crazy. And we always got soaked. But it didn't matter, because it was pretty warm out. So in some cases it was just welcomed. But again, I don't specifically recall the season.

DePue: It sounds like it would be susceptible to flooding all the time.

Raschke: Yeah, it was. It certainly was and certainly the rice harvesting and planting and that had everything to do with the seasons and that sort of thing. But I can remember in the monsoon season you couldn't go out into the rice paddy because the muck would just suck every bit of energy out of you. Then in the dry season, the rice paddies would be big cracks in them from where the dirt had dried out. So it was really a tremendous difference in how the thing was.

DePue: Recall what specific unit that you were assigned to?

Raschke: Yeah. It was called Advisory Team 73; it had kind of what we would call now a TDA organization, Table of Distributional Allowances organization. Our commander was really the province senior advisor. He was an O-5, lieutenant colonel. There was an operations major; there was an executive officer major,

and then the rest of us. It certainly wasn't like a normal Army organization where I reported to the operations officer for the most part. But the thing of it is, we didn't hold formations, we didn't do much of any military stuff. When we were at the compound, essentially we were all going different directions. For example, you had advisors that were advising the Vietnamese riverboats on what they were supposed to be doing. We had advisors to the Phoenix Program, which was run by the CIA. We had advisors to each of the Vietnamese units, or that would be associated with the Vietnamese units. We had advisors for the Revolutionary Development Cadre, which was the kind of the Vietnamese sense of the militia. We had advisors to the national police force in that area. So pretty much we were all going different directions. In my particular area, as the province engineer advisor I did not have an NCO that worked with me. I had the public works director of the town of Vi Thanh that I would occasionally go and see if there was anything that we could do for him. But I was really pretty much independent when I was there. I got tapped on the shoulder to do a lot of things, but really, the mission was pretty ill-defined and you kind of did it day by day.

DePue: You mentioned the Phoenix Program; I know you didn't work with that, but refresh my memory of what that was.

Raschke: The Phoenix Program was where the CIA, in particular, would target through intelligence analysts, through intercepts, through radio intercepts, through defectors, things like that; we would target VCI, which is Viet Cong Infrastructure, which was individuals that were associated with the Viet Cong that in particular were not just the low-level people, but maybe the village VC chief equivalent or something like that. So the CIA would have this program where they would target these guys, they would identify them, and then they would actually conduct operations to go out and eliminate them. Those operations were principally ran by the Navy SEALs and the CIA.

DePue: Well, you're touching on some things—you're describing combat unlike you were watching on TV growing up, unlike what would have been happening in Korea. It sounds like there were no front lines. Who was the enemy?

Raschke: You only knew of the enemy when they were shooting at you. I mean, the classic thing in Vietnam is you'd say that you could be working shoulder-to-shoulder with them that day and they could be lobbing mortars at you that evening. You just really didn't know. I mean, certainly the ones in the Vietnamese military, for the most part, I never had a problem with them; I never had a problem trusting them. But the VC, they did not wear uniforms, so again, you could only tell them when they were shooting at you or you shot them and they were laying there. I mean, it's kind of that simple.

DePue: Were there any North Vietnamese regulars in your area?

Raschke: The North Vietnamese were just getting in as I was departing. I left in June of 1970, and we had just started a couple of months beforehand tangling with North Vietnamese. Again, there were not many of them. They were not well-organized at that point in time. Our principal fight was against the Viet Cong.

DePue: Now, I know that when TET occurred, as you mentioned in, January or February of 1968. This was a point in time when the Viet Cong—it rarely happened before—but they showed their hands. They came out in force. And some of the things you read, that they were decimated during that time. But it sounds like there were still plenty left in your area.

Raschke: Yeah. Well, the thing of it is, if you look at the maps, where we were located, we were at almost the southern point or tip of South Vietnam. So in truth, when the VC were decimated up in I Corps, which was up north, or II Corps, which is the central, and III Corps central parts of Vietnam, when they were decimated they easily had the North Vietnamese to take their place. Where we were at during TET, there were no North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong did take a beating, but there was really never within the Mekong Delta a strong military presence. We had some Australians in there, and prior to the time I got there, the 9th Infantry Division was there. But they were not in my general area. So there were not a lot of operations against the VC at any point in time in the delta to speak of.

DePue: Other than what the Vietnamese Army was conducting itself?

Raschke: Yeah. And for the most part, those weren't huge operations in themselves.

DePue: Well, I wonder if you can tell me a little bit about the strategy for your region of the Mekong Delta. What was the strategy for defeating the Viet Cong?

Raschke: Our purpose as an advisor was to train the Vietnamese to become capable of taking care of themselves in every sense: logistically, being able to fly their own MEDEVAC, being able to provide their own air support, being able to just manage a war, if you will. We spent a lot of time doing that, but we also spent a lot of time with the public. What I mean by that is that we would go out and build a school or a clinic or fix a road or something that was intended to win—in Nixon's phraseology—their "Hearts and Minds." Those kind of things I truly enjoyed doing. I mean, I just really adored the Vietnamese people. I felt sorry for them for their plight in life, and I just thought that we were a best hope that they had to do something better for their lives and their lives of their children.

DePue: You mentioned Hearts and Minds. Was that an aspect of the Vietnamization process that was—

Raschke: Not really. The Vietnamization process, as I would describe it, had more to do with what I talked about earlier, which is training the Vietnamese army and other components—their navy, their air force—to take care of themselves so

that the U.S. Army and Air Force, Marines, Navy, could basically back out of the war, leaving a full-trained Vietnamese force in its place. So winning the hearts and minds, that was the civilian aspect; Vietnamization, in my opinion, was the military aspect.

DePue: I think this was going on before your time, but I wanted to get your impressions if it still had a lingering impact, and that's the Strategic Hamlet Program of the early '60s, where, as I understand it, they would go in and identify a particular hamlet and reinforce it, protect it, but also forcibly move people into the hamlet.

Raschke: We didn't do so much moving. To the issue of the Strategic Hamlet thing, we did not really do that. What we did do is we spent time—I spent, actually, a lot of time—helping construct outposts in former, or even at that time, present Viet Cong areas or territories. Typically they were the triangular-shaped outposts that you'd go in; there's no building materials to speak of, but you'd dig out the rice paddy, you'd dig out everything, and you'd build it up on a mound to a wall that's seven, eight foot high and five, six, eight foot wide. You'd put a platoon inside that that would have their wives and their children and their chickens with them. But you would put that out in the middle of former, and, as I said, current VC areas. The purpose was to show a Vietnamese presence that says, We own this place now. Well, that seldom was the case, but we did do a lot of that. But we did not relocate people around those areas.

DePue: Okay. I think what would help here is get your impressions. Let's talk about the first mission where you were assigned to a Vietnamese unit and then kind of walk us through that—just the first one as you recall.

Raschke: Well, as I said, leading up to that, my predecessor was an engineering officer who spent a lot of time out on operations, and therefore, it gave the expectation that that's what I should be doing as well. Again, I didn't really think about it; I just accepted that's what I'm over here to do, so that's what I'm going to do. So I did, on a number of occasions, accompany Vietnamese units into the field to conduct combat operations against the VC in particular. The first time I went out, there would always be at least two Americans, and that's typically the way it always was; there's never any more than that. But there were typically two Americans who would go out and advise a Vietnamese company.

I recall the first operation I went on, I was just absolutely loaded for bear. I mean, I had half a dozen hand grenades and probably three hundred rounds of M16 ammo and a nice Bowie knife that I bought at Fort Bliss, Texas, and more stuff than I could possibly carry. I remember that at the end of that operation I was just totally drained. I just couldn't even move hardly. That's when you'd go out and you'd walk around in the rice paddies. You had specific objectives—it wasn't just a walk in the sun, but you had specific

objectives that you were looking for—and sometimes you're a blocking force, sometimes you're an attacking force. But on that particular first occasion, there was no contact of any sort. But I just learned to appreciate how the Vietnamese had learned to adapt—they'd adapted over the centuries. But they were out there barefooted and carrying their M16 rifle and their little boonie cap, and maybe a hundred rounds of ammunition or something like this other stuff that I was carrying. So the first operation was no big deal. In that particular case, it was a walk in the sun.

DePue: Were you going out with ARVN [Army of Vietnam] or with local forces?

Raschke: In the Vietnamese military at that time, they had essentially three levels of soldiers. One were the ARVN, and in our case, we had the ARVN 21st Division that had a battalion stationed in Vi Thanh. They had their own separate advisors, so we did not really deal with them. Our focus was primarily the regional force or the RF soldiers, and they were the equivalent of probably the National Guard or the Army Reserve. I mean, only in the sense of the ARVN's divisions got the better equipment, and then the RF got the less modern equipment, and then below that, there was the PF or the popular forces. And those folks, the popular forces, were basically ones that we would put in the outpost. I mean, they were equipped with the old M1 rifles and Thompson submachine guns and BARs, and that sort of thing. Their level of training was much, much lower than what the RF was, whose training was lower than what the ARVN divisions were.

DePue: Were the popular forces also farming as well?

Raschke: No, their full-time occupation was to be in the Army or be an RF soldier. In fact, when they weren't on operations, they were doing maybe the building of the clinic or the school. But they also had training classes. I remember teaching them on—we called them automatic ambushes, or there's some other term for it—but we'd train them on how to set booby traps. We'd train them on fire and maneuver. When I got there, we were in the process of fielding the M16 rifles to them. We'd train them on how to do those, and the M60 machine guns—just bring them up to speed on that type of stuff. So it wasn't that they were a soldier during the day or night and then they reverted to something else at the off time; they were always soldiers.

DePue: But you suggested that it was tough to tell friend versus foe.

Raschke: Well, the RF and the PF, they in fact wore uniforms.

DePue: But you never had any doubts that they were possibly sympathetic to the Viet Cong, if not Viet Cong themselves?

Raschke: They could have been, but I mean, what are you options? At that point in time, your mission is to go train them, and you can't say "I'm too afraid to go out because they may be VC," you just went out and did it. I can give a couple of

occasions where very likely RF soldiers or PF soldiers in fact tipped the bad guys off and they ambushed or killed some of our advisors, but again, you just couldn't dwell on thinking about that kind of thing. Over there, very early on, after about the second or third operation, you quickly learned that when it was your time, it was your time, and there was absolutely nothing you could do to change that. So the best thing that you can do is just do your job, do your mission, and not think about anything else. I mean, otherwise you just couldn't function.

DePue: What was your opinion about the enemy you were fighting?

Raschke: You know, I really didn't form a big opinion. I mean, it was frustrating to me then as now that they could engage us in a big battle and we'd bring all this firepower and close air support and field artillery and that sort of thing to bear on them, and they would just melt away. That was always the frustrating thing and this was collectively discussed by us as advisors. You heard me mention that we had movies most every night; we could be there on our compound, watching a movie, and they'd be out moving around at dark or be lobbing mortars at us or attacking some compound. They certainly didn't have the amenities that we did. So we had respect for their tenacity and their dedication to what they were doing, but again, we just didn't spend a lot of time thinking about… I guess they were okay soldiers, but we caught them in some big traps too, and, you know, they made some pretty dumb mistakes.

DePue: I wonder if you can describe a typical mission. It sounds like it wasn't that you were always going on missions; there were other things you were doing as well. But let's start with a typical mission; kind of walk us through that.

Raschke: Typically what would happen is that the evening before a mission, we'd all go to the province senior advisor's hooch or his room, and we'd have the intelligence folks and the operations folks and the individuals that are actually going to accompany the Vietnamese on the operation. The Air Force guys would go there, the FACs, the Forward Air Controllers. Then we had Army where they weren't forward air controllers; they were flying the O-1 observation aircraft. Their call sign was Shotgun; I don't know exactly what you would call them other than they in fact adjusted artillery and dropped maps and stuff like that. So we'd typically go to the province senior advisor, and we'd get briefed up on the operational situation.

In general detail we would discuss what the operation was going to be, where it was going to be at, what the mission was. I forget exactly what we called them at the time, but we'd have contact points where we would report, We're here at objective so-and-so. "Objective" makes it sound like you overrun the enemy, but an objective point was really just a reporting point. We'd go over what that was. We'd go over the communications. You know, the basic things that you learned, that I learned in a five-paragraph field order: the situation, mission, enemy, admin and logistics, command and signal. We'd

go over all of those particular elements. Most of those elements would include what time you were going to be at the airfield, who's going to pick you up, how many lifts you're going to go out in, if they're going to have artillery stand-by or strictly have the gun ships take control of the LZs [landing zone], those kinds of things.

So anyway, if it was my mission—and I think that the way you got missions was you just said, "Hey, I'm not doing anything tomorrow. I'll go with you," or "I'll lead the mission." And that's typically what happened. What I can recall is that after having been in-country slightly over a month, I was the lead advisor to the Vietnamese RF companies, and we'd be leading the mission, so to speak.

DePue: Leading the mission from the advisory standpoint?

Raschke: Yes, exactly, exactly. But that essentially meant that you were leading the mission in every respect, because we controlled the assets. We controlled the lift support, we controlled the Medevac, we controlled the forward observation aircraft. They controlled the artillery, but that was pretty much all they controlled, and they couldn't do that without going through us to relay it back to our headquarters to make sure that it was okay.

Typically the next morning, after we got the full briefing, you'd show up at the airfield, you'd be loaded for bear. I always insisted if it was an air mobile operation, and that was principally the way that we deployed, was with helicopters out to particular objective areas. But I always insisted on carrying the radio myself. I didn't learn that until after a couple missions, that you and your radio just don't need to be separated. So I would always carry my field gear. We're stripped down. We're only carrying weapons, ammunition, one hand grenade after the first mission I was on, and then the radio and a couple canteens, map, compass, those kinds of things. But you'd show up at the airfield, jump on the aircraft, and you'd head out and hit the LZ. Most of the times that I went out, we had what we called a cold LZ, which is you go into an objective area, you land, everybody jumps off the aircraft, sets up a perimeter, and there's no fire in the process; that happened on most occasions. And then we would just complete the mission as we were required to. We would go to our objective points, check in—that often consisted of what few wood lines there were, because it was predominantly paddies—but we'd go through the wood lines and make sure there were no bad guys hiding in there and keep moving until our mission was complete.

What was always interesting about the Vietnamese was that… The units that I was with, I consider to be some very good units. I mean, there were some units that I was with that were terrible, but the majority of the time I spent with two particular units, and they were just absolutely top-notch. One was the Province Recon Company, which was a great company, and then another one was the 987 Company, Chin Tam Bay, which is Vietnamese for

987; there was a lieutenant that was a commander there, and he and I just got along so well. I was with both of those companies most of the time, and they were just top-notch companies. But even with those top-notch companies, as we'd be going through the operation you'd hit about noontime, and if you weren't in contact—most of the time we were not—we just pretty much shut down for the noon. They'd go out and steal some chickens, or their soldiers would carry a couple chickens with them, or you'd always have the dehydrated rice and sometimes the real rice, and we'd have a nice little Vietnamese meal. After that, everybody'd just kind of have—not a siesta in the sense that everybody's sacked out—but you'd just sit down and digest your meal and not do much of anything. That was just kind of the expectation with us. Again, if it was in contact, then it's a different story.

But you just follow through, complete your mission, and then at the end of the mission you'd either walk back home, or most often, they would have helicopter lift ships come in. That's what we as the American advisors were most responsible for, is guiding the helicopters in and out for pick-ups and drop-offs, and things like that. But especially too, if you had a Medevac, those are totally in our control and function, so we did a lot of those too. Most of the casualties that we experienced were through mines and booby traps, more so than anything else.

DePue: Were these extended patrols or daylight patrols?

Raschke: They were principally daylight. There's a couple of occasions where we got caught out and had to stay overnight because we ended up in contact or something like that. But for the most part you had an objective area to sweep; you swept your area, and there's nobody there, they'd come and pick you up.

DePue: None of this that you've described so far sounds like inherently engineer in nature.

Raschke: It wasn't at all. I did do some engineer functions over there. In particular, I recall the VC had dropped a concrete pier on a ferry that had been used to take materials back and forth across a pretty substantially wide river. I remember having to go in and go under the water and plant charges and blow the concrete apart so we could eventually raise the ferry, which I did. I repaired an airfield at a district headquarters, which was a pretty far distance away from Vi Thanh. That was a PSP or perforated steel planking that we used. Remember having been called on a number of occasions to go out and blow stuff up. In particular, I remember one time a helicopter gunship dropped a rocket pod of eighteen rockets and had dropped it out in the middle of nowhere in bad guy country, and I had to take a company out there. They surrounded the perimeter, and I went and planted explosives on it and blew that up. We'd get mortared or whatever, and they'd find unexploded ordinance, and I'd have to go blow that up. It was fun blowing stuff up. I had a good time with that. But that was the engineer work I did.

And then as far as engineer work—I'm not sure this was really engineer work—but I did a lot of translation of Agent Orange[6] requests. I mean, they were dumping a lot of Agent Orange in that area, and I would go and translate the requests and send them up through our chain to be acted on.

DePue: Who's "they" when you say "they were—"

Raschke: The Vietnamese, Vietnamese.

DePue: The Vietnamese wanted it done.

Raschke: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Does that mean you guys were walking around in areas where it had been used?

Raschke: Yeah.

DePue: What was the effect when they did use Agent Orange?

Raschke: It killed everything.

DePue: Rice, everything.

Raschke: Yeah, but they didn't attempt to dump it on the rice fields; when you're talking rice, you're talking about something that's basically knee-high. Agent Orange was designed for the mangroves. You know, go in and fly over there and kill all the trees in the mangrove swamp area so that bad guys couldn't hide in there and take advantage of—

DePue: The local people were okay with its use that way?

Raschke: Well, the truth is, I don't know. I mean, certainly in retrospect I'm sure they're not, but at the point in time, it was what we were doing, and the South Vietnamese were the ones that were asking for it to be done.

DePue: Was the compound you were living on ever attacked?

Raschke: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. It was on a number of occasions, but in particular, in September about sixth or so of 1969, Ho Chi Minh died, and they decided to celebrate by mortaring us pretty good. And that's an interesting experience. And then, oh, we probably got hit anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen times during my eleven months in-country.

[6] Agent Orange was a powerful herbicide used to clear jungle areas as needed. Later it was blamed for various serious maladies affecting humans, including American troops, so it's use was eliminated.

DePue: Okay, so you're on a compound, and you described already that the average elevation of the delta region was about a foot high. What kind of bunkers did you have for shelling?

Raschke: Again, it's not substantially different than the outposts that we're building. I mean, we'd go and we'd have sand actually brought into us, but we'd also use a lot of the indigenous, clay is what it seemed to be. You just mound it up and make bunkers out of it.

DePue: So you weren't digging.

Raschke: Well, we weren't digging too far. (laughter) But, you know, then we had timbers and we had that PSP that I was talking about, that airfield planking. We built a lot of bunkers out of that, but by the time I got there, they were pretty much all built. The other thing, too, is that we had fifty-five-gallon drums; we were getting a lot of our gas and POL products in with fifty-five-gallon drums. So what would happen is that we would empty those—and again, we had barges coming up the river bringing us sand—and fill sandbags, and fill those fifty-five-gallon drums, which were a pretty substantial blast barrier.

DePue: It sounds like you also weren't able to dig latrines in that terrain.

Raschke: On our compound we had running water, and I'm sure not going to ask—I don't know now nor did I know then what their septic system was like or not like, (DePue laughs) but it functioned pretty well.

DePue: Okay. Did you have an American roommate on the compound?

Raschke: Actually I had two others. One, his name was Harvey Weiner. He was a Columbia graduate, lawyer.

DePue: Lawyer at the time?

Raschke: Yeah, yeah. He was head of the Phoenix Program.

DePue: So he was not military.

Raschke: Oh, yes he was.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Raschke: Yeah. He was a first lieutenant, and he eventually got promoted to captain. He was actually a JAG [Judge Advocate General], but he went into military intelligence and came to Vietnam as our Phoenix coordinator. He got there a couple months before I did. Harvey was a really good guy. He still is a good guy; he was at our reunion of a couple years ago. I have nothing but kind thoughts about him. He was another person I thought that was kind of

instrumental in my life, because what you've not heard me say to this point is I had any formal education. I had the military schools and OCS and things like that, but I had absolutely zero college behind me at this point. But Harvey educated me on the ways of the world. I didn't know the difference between a liberal and conservative at that point in time, and Harvey was very good in that sense. The other thing is, I did a lot of reading over in Vietnam, and between those kinds of things I just knew I wanted to go to college and get smarter, at least get credit for what little knowledge I had.

DePue: What were you reading?

Raschke: Everything. I mean, *Travels with Charley*, *Catcher in the Rye,*—gee whiz. *The Egyptian Farouche.* What was happening is that the USO, as they do today, a civilian organization will send over paperback books to servicemen, and you'd just rotate through those and read those. I did read a lot there.

DePue: Did you read some history?

Raschke: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Again, I can remember *Catcher in the Rye*, I can remember *Travels with Charley*, but I bet you I read fifty books that year; I just can't tell you what the rest of them are.

DePue: Okay. I wonder if there are a couple of the missions that were especially memorable.

Raschke: Well, yeah. What I kind of marvel at is that I had a tendency to see the humor in things even then, as I do now. On one of my very early missions, I recall specifically of us crossing a canal. At this point in time, I had a captain that was basically showing me the ropes; his name was Howard McCullough. We were crossing this canal, we had a sampan, and we could only go one or two or a couple at a time. So he wanted to go first. He had the radio on his back and was standing up in the middle of this sampan, crossing this canal, à la George Washington. Next thing I see is the sampan just slowly sinking and Howard just eventually sinking below the surface. I thought that was really amusing. So that was an interesting thing.

I can remember on several occasions, one in particular, where I threw a hand grenade down a bunker and started trying to get away. It was monsoon season and I slipped and fell on my butt a couple of feet away from the entrance of the bunker. And how I didn't get killed in that deal, I'll never know.

Remember an event where we were walking through a wood line and all of a sudden come under fire. You heard me say that I would always wear the radio on my back on the helicopters; I'd give it to a Vietnamese to carry once we were on the ground. But anyway, we came under fire, and this Vietnamese private was carrying my radio. I had the handset; he had the rest of the radio. As we came under fire, he took off running. I didn't want any

part of that, so I just grabbed the handset and pulled back on it real hard, and his whole feet just went right up underneath him and he landed right square on his back, but I got my radio back. So those things were kind of amusing.

Then, too, there was a good number of times that it wasn't too amusing. In particular, probably the worst situation I ever was in was—this was, again, right after Ho Chi Minh had died of old age.

DePue: So this would have been early in your time there?

Raschke: Yeah, in September of 1969. I was leading a combat mission at that time. We went out, and there was about three or four different RF companies that were converging on this wood line. We just really caught our lunch that day; we lost a couple of Americans. The frustrating part of that whole thing was just the inability to move and to hear all this tragedy unfolding on the radios and not being able to do much about it. Again, this was probably the worst experience I had there in-country. We were a blocking force, we couldn't do anything, and I kept pretty much asking—or I would like to say demanding, but I'm not sure that's the right word—to go do something to help these folks.

Eventually, later that evening just around dusk time, they came in and picked us up on helicopters and they air-lifted us in close to where one of the units had been pinned down since about eleven o'clock that morning. Our mission was just to go in there and pick up the pieces. It was still a hot LZ. A lot of things were going on at the time. Got off the helicopter and started running like crazy towards the wood lines, which is where the bad guys were, but that's what we needed to do. And now a bit of humor: at this point, just getting off the helicopter, I got the radio on my back, I'm running, I'm afraid, the adrenaline's pumping, but I'm running, and all of a sudden I just disappear from sight because I ran into what had been a shell crater; it was filled up with water, and I just completely went out of sight. That kind of brought me back to reality. But it was somewhat helpful, too, because that was a pretty hot time there.

But anyway, we ended up rescuing two Americans there. One of them had been shot seven times; he was still alive—still is alive to this day. So we went in and got him and eventually, later that evening, got him Medevaced out. The Vietnamese really took it bad. I mean, it's one of those instances where the VC had exercised incredible discipline by letting the Americans, the Vietnamese, walk across the paddy, and waiting until they were just in the real absolute kill zone, and just opened up on them. The Vietnamese lost about twelve guys right there. That doesn't sound maybe terribly significant, but when you consider that their companies were only about forty guys at that point, you know, that was pretty significant.

But anyway, I remember the lieutenant that had been hit seven times was Richard Carlile. We put him on a Medevac, the Medevac flew out, got

shot up pretty bad, and ended up staying out there that night. The next morning, or mid-morning or even early afternoon—I don't even remember now—they came in and relieved us. They brought their Vietnamese and another advisor or so came in and relieved me. Remember, we were just throwing bodies into the helicopter. It's just a totally surreal or totally unnatural experience that you have. When you think of doing this, and you're only twenty-one years old, it just has a real profound impact on the rest of your life. That's also—as I said earlier—where you really truly learn that when your number's up, your number's up, and there's not much you're going to do about it.

DePue: Was that the first time you were seeing KIAs?[7]

Raschke: Yeah, exactly. T this day, I can still picture my very first KIA, a South Vietnamese KIA. He was a young soldier; sometimes they wore boots, most of the time they went barefooted and traveled light. But this kid looked like he was maybe, you know, sixteen, eighteen years old. Down in the delta we wore a patch that was a IV for the Roman numeral four. The Americans wore subdued ones. The Vietnamese wore principally the red-and-white ones on their breast pocket, and he was shot right by that. Again, I remember to this day exactly what he looked like, exactly how he was laying, the fact that he was aspirating blood at that time. Again, that just brings back Sherman's old saying, you know, that war truly is hell. It just was a pretty traumatic experience.

DePue: You said at the beginning of this that because you were the lead advisor you're kind of in charge of the mission. Did you feel a sense of responsibility when it all was going wrong?

Raschke: Well, yeah. I mean, I think anyone that's been in combat, that survives and someone else doesn't, has incredible guilt from that. I need to clarify only from a standpoint that each Vietnamese company, RF company, had their own two American advisors. I principally felt responsible for my company and my other American advisor. I certainly felt badly about the other American advisors: Rich Carlile, for example, that got shot seven times; Lieutenant Stephen Young, who was KIA that day. You felt terribly bad about them, but I didn't feel that that was my fault, if you will, that they were killed and injured in the fashion they were. I mean, it could have easily been any one of us. So it was just, you know, Charlie was much better than us that particular day.

DePue: You also indicated a sense of helplessness during the whole thing.

Raschke: Yeah. Again, when you hear this radio traffic going back and forth… What I specifically remember about that particular day was that we're sitting in this blocking position, and I'm sitting in a hooch with a radio and listening to this

[7] KIA: Killed In Action

drama or tragedy unfold in front of me. I'm hearing what turned out to be the interpreter of Lieutenant Young coming on the phone, or on the radio, and screaming for help. And my countering that by saying, to the net, "We need to be careful. This could be VC taking over the radio." As it turned out, that wasn't the case. But it was just that sense of helplessness, knowing that somebody's getting beat up pretty bad and you can't or are not allowed to do anything about it.

DePue: Okay. We've been at this for a while today, and this might be a logical place to break off, if that's okay with you.

Raschke: Yep.

DePue: We will pick it up here sometime down the road. Thank you, John.

Raschke: Mm-hmm.

(end of interview #1 interview #2 continues)

Interview with John Raschke

VRV-A-L-2011-049.02

Interview # 2: November 1, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Tuesday, November 1, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in the U.S. Attorney's office, and not because I'm in trouble or I know somebody in trouble, but because we're interviewing John Raschke for the second time. Good afternoon, John.

Raschke: Hi, Mark, how are you?

DePue: Good. We had a very interesting discussion last time about your service in Vietnam as an advisor with the South Vietnamese army. And I think we finished off with some of the more painful incidents that you experienced over there. A lot of general questions today, but where I want to start was to get your reflections on one aspect of combat in Vietnam that is very much identified with that war, and that's the use of a helicopter. Did you get moved around quite a bit in helicopters?

Raschke: Yes, almost exclusively that was our mode of getting to and from anywhere. Where I was at was in the Mekong Delta, which is as flat as a tabletop. During most of the year it's covered with water, so our means of getting from one place to another was either by helicopter, which was most of the time, or on a few occasions, by boat. Spent a lot of time in helicopters.

DePue: Once you hit the ground, was it tough moving around in this terrain?

Raschke: Yeah, there's no question about it. You know, especially in the rainy season, you'd jump off the helicopters, which typically came into a low hover, and

you'd jump off; the muck there would just grab a hold of you and not want to let you go. But there was an interesting aspect of that too that I think I mentioned in a pre-interview, which was, one of the most exhilarating feelings or experiences I've ever had in my life was jumping off a helicopter into a landing zone, because there are just so many different sensations going on. I mean, typically you would have helicopter gunships prepping the area, which means they were making mini-gun-runs or firing rockets or whatever. The helicopter would come in, and certainly with the UH-1, which was the helicopter we primarily used, there would be that distinctive *whoop-whoop-whoop-whoop* as you were coming in for the landing. Of course, the adrenaline would be pumping because you don't know what to expect once you get off. And then you'd come in. The helicopter either sets down or comes to a low hover. You jump off, and typically you'd have the sensation of the rotor wash sucking the water from the rice paddy. It typically was always real hot water because of where we were at. And all those number of things combined, it was just something that I've only experienced while in Vietnam. I'm sure that other soldiers who went into battle riding the helicopter had a similar sensation, but it's just something that—it's never left me. I always remember that.

DePue: Let's refresh our memory here. How old were you at the time?

Raschke: I got there when I was twenty-one; I turned twenty-two and returned home when I was twenty-two, so I was pretty much just a young kid.

DePue: A lot of kids that age think they're rather indestructible. Is that how you felt?

Raschke: I think we all felt that at that time. I mean, indestructible in one sense, but in the other sense, you had very much in the back of your mind this concrete idea that whenever it was your time to go, it was your time to go. It didn't matter what you did or where you were or anything else like that. Not to say that we were not cautious or not observant or anything else like that, but it was just the idea that we got to accept the fact that it didn't matter what you did. If God was going to call you home, he was going to come and get you that particular day.

Some of the reasons that fostered that thought were, helicopters, for example, flying around and all the sudden develop a mechanical difficulty and go inverted into the ground and kill the crew. Who would have thought that to be possible? I mean, the pilots that jumped on that helicopter that morning had no thought or idea that they weren't going to come back from that particular mission. Or another time, you'd go out on a mission and it would be nothing more than just a walk in the very hot sun, and a day or two later you would have someone else—not yourself, but someone else—go into exactly that same area, and that particular unit would get shot up. So you just came to realize that, again, nothing you could do; when your number was called, your number was called.

DePue: I've got to imagine that you fly in, you're being inserted by helicopter. No one can be surprised. The enemy's not going to be surprised when you show up.

Raschke: Yeah. There's no question about it. And remember, too, that when we're landing, we're landing in an open rice paddy. We're not talking about wide expanses of ground like we have here in Central Illinois where you can see for literally thousands of yards; we're talking about rice paddies that in farmers' parlance would be maybe five or six acres at most in size and typically were surrounded by a tree line or a canal, and certainly they all had their little rice paddy dikes. But with the flatness of that ground the bad guy, more often than not, had to have heard us coming, and it was his decision as to whether they were going to stay in place and fight or whether they had enough time to escape or to effect an escape. So pretty much everything was of their choosing.

DePue: When you landed, you said you had this incredible sense of exhilaration. Were you looking for combat? Were you looking forward to combat?

Raschke: Well, again, as a young kid—and that's certainly what I considered myself—I mean, I'd watched all the movies, as I think I mentioned in the previous interview, and it just seemed to be the natural thing. You know, you'd see John Wayne in one movie and he'd get killed, and in the next movie, he was still alive. So I mean, the sense of dying just really wasn't part of it; it was more of a sense, I think, of adventure, and maybe doing what young men do. I don't know.

DePue: Okay. You mentioned a little bit about that the enemy seemed to be able to choose the time and the place. I guess in military parlance that would be called the initiative. They were the ones who had the initiative. Did that part of the war make sense to you?

Raschke: Not really. in retrospect, not a lot of the combat portion of the war made any sense to me. That may be a bit strong, but it just seemed like we were chasing a lot of ghosts and not really accomplishing much. Our measurement for success seemed to be enemy KIA versus friendly, which is really a false measurement, or metric they say nowadays. But that part just didn't really make any sense, because we would go in and maybe contest a particular area one day, and that following night or that evening, we would move out of it to have the bad guys move back in.

The part of my experience that made the most sense to me and the one I enjoyed the most was certainly being with the people. Because they're just like us. I mean, they have the same aspirations as we do towards freedom, towards having a better life for their children than they have for themselves, for just providing for their families, and that certainly don't have all the amenities that we do have in this country. But being able to go there and being able to help them—help them in the sense of planting the rice or harvesting

the rice, or building a school, or medically evacuating someone that had stepped on a mine, or just sharing time with them—to me was just very, very rewarding. I just think they were wonderful people.

DePue: You mentioned also that the measurement for success or failure was how many casualties you were inflicting on the enemy. There's been a lot of criticism over this by historians and the military, looking back, saying, This is not a good way to measure it. Did you feel like you had pressure on you to inflate the numbers?

Raschke: No, not at all. That was just never part of any discussion that we ever had. I would like to sit here today and say that I never did that, nor did we, the people I was with, ever do that. It just wasn't something that we did. I say in one breath that the metric was the enemy killed versus the friendly killed or wounded, but we had this other system that was in place. I'm sure it was in place with all of the other advisory teams, but certainly with ours as well, which was called a Hamlet Evaluation System or the HES. Which was something that we—not me, because I was a lieutenant at the time, although they'd ask a question, perhaps—but the Hamlet Evaluation System was where the senior American leadership—and I'm talking both military and civilian—would get together and they would look at the number of villages and hamlets and basically terrain or area within the province that we were responsible for. They would make an educated guess as to a number of factors: being the number of people that were there, the relative safety of the village or hamlet during the day, during the evening, who owned it, things like that.

I really can't sit here and talk with any authority on all of the different measurements within that Hamlet Evaluation System or HES, except to say that once that document was completed, it was sent through the region higher command and in turn, eventually up to Saigon. And that was the report card, if you will, for our particular area. I guess that made some sense. I can't talk to whether there was inflation in that or not. I really don't know. But that also was a tool that we used. And the ultimate or bottom line to the thing was essentially the level of pacification of that particular province, and that's how they measure it through a number of different criteria.

DePue: Pacification—that's an interesting word to use. Generally that means if they were pacified, they were supportive of the South Vietnamese government?

Raschke: Supportive and there were no bad guys around. I mean, pacified means we own it, "we" being the friendlies, the South Vietnamese through their assistance by the Americans.

DePue: What did you think, then, of the tactics? Did you think we were using the right tactics for that war, at least the war that you were fighting?

Raschke: Well, it's really hard in a sense to talk about tactics in an advisory role, because what we were doing is that we as Americans—and remember now, this is 1969 and 1970—there are no American combat units within fifty miles of where we're at. They had been there, they did what they were supposed to do, and they left. Our area was completely covered by Vietnamese combat forces. So the tactics were developed by them; some of them had attended American courses at, say, Fort Benning, the Infantry Basic Course or Advanced Course or something like that, so they were certainly using our tactics. The effectiveness of those tactics goes back to what I said just a bit earlier, which is we would go into an area, sweep an area, make sure there were no bad guys there or engage the bad guys and several days thereafter leave. Now, on some occasions, the tactics that made the most sense to me were where the Vietnamese would go into a contested area, secure that area, and establish an outpost. My way of thinking is that if you have an outpost in an area that formerly was the bad guy territory, we have some sense of ownership of part of that. Now having said that, we had many of those same outposts that were frequently attacked and on occasion overran. But there were many that were attacked and withstood the attack. So tactics as you and I know them from the American military, it just really wasn't something that we even thought a lot about. I mean, again, our simple tactic more often than not was we would go from point A to point B with checkpoints along the way. On several occasions when you had multiple-unit operations, we would be the moving force or the hammer and the other force would be the blocking force or the anvil and we'd hopefully try to catch the bad guys in the middle. But more often than not, that didn't happen. So again, tactics wasn't really, really come to play, I would say.

DePue: Was it frustrating, your conception of what war was all about growing up, watching news and TV where there's front lines and there was clearly good guys and bad guys? Were you frustrated that the war that you were involved with wasn't like that?

Raschke: Not really. I mean, frustrated is the wrong word, because again, I'd look at the other aspect of it, which is the one that I talked about that I really enjoyed more, which was being with the people, helping the people. And I got far more satisfaction from that. And my training prior to going over there I thought well prepared me for that. I mean, I was attuned to the issues of the Vietnamese people, and it was so easy for me to transition that way, from a "we're going to take the hill" as in *Sands of Iwo Jima* to doing what we were doing over there, which was again part of the great pacification effort. So I really wasn't frustrated at all.

DePue: Did it feel to you like we were winning the war?

Raschke: I guess yes and no. I mean, there were certain signs. Areas that were once bad when I got there were not as bad as I was coming close to leaving. We were doing things. We were rocking roads or putting rock on roads to make them

better, we were building schools, we were improving the air field that we had. We were turning over much more responsibility to the South Vietnamese. And what I mean by that or is most evident by that is, when I first got in-country, it was exclusively American airpower in the form of close air support; it was American helicopters that were taking us into battle. Towards the end, it was getting much more to be a Vietnamese show. For example, the Vietnamese Air Force was the helicopter pilots that we were using more towards the end. They were starting to pick up on the Medevac missions, although not as much as some of the other things. So I guess success, as I saw it, was just turning more of the things we Americans were doing over to the Vietnamese. So in that sense, I guess that's how I measured success and could say that it was better.

Now, having said all of that, I can say too, that when I came home from Vietnam it was really an interesting—and I'm going to go to an aside here. I was out standing on the airfield. It was a Sunday morning, real early, and we were prepared to go into an area. The fact of the matter is, it was a similar area, or very close to the area, where I talked about having one of my first and worst experiences. We were waiting for the helicopters to come in and pick us up, and someone drove up in a Jeep, says, You have an emergency phone call; you need to go back to the orderly room and take that. So I did and found out that I needed to come home on emergency leave. As it turned out, the transportation, or the way that I went from where I was, which was the small town of Vi Thanh, up to Can Tho, I was riding—I went over to the Vietnamese hospital because there was helicopters coming in and out of there. Went over to the Vietnamese hospital, and they put me on a helicopter that was going up to the American Evac hospital up in Can Tho, and it was carrying some of the same people that a couple hours before I was standing out on the airfield to go into battle with. So my point is, that as there was some improvement in certain areas, some things just remained quite the same.

DePue: I wonder if there were any other especially memorable combat experiences that you recall that we haven't discussed yet.

Raschke: Not really. I mean, I certainly don't profess to be any kind of hero or someone who was in days' worth of combat or weeks' worth of combat or had anything terribly difficult. There were so many young men that I've read about, that you've read about, that had some very terrible experiences in Vietnam. What I experienced just pales in comparison to them. You know, I had bullets shot at me, but I didn't get hit.

But I guess the memorable thing to me was that my province senior advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Levasseur, knew that I had spent many, many occasions out in the field with the Vietnamese, and I think he had a sense of their feelings towards me. He put me in for the Combat Infantryman's Badge on at least two occasions, and on the two occasions it came back denied because I was not in an infantry position. So we had the

assistant RF, regional force, and PF, popular force, advisor extend in country for another six months, and in doing that, you got a thirty-day leave back in the United States. So when he went home on leave, they put me into his position, and just ironically during that period, we had some pretty tough fights, and ultimately I did end up getting a CIB from that thirty-day period. Again, it was interesting.

I guess that when I think of combat, I think of some bad things, but I can think of some incredibly funny things or things that seemed funny to me at the time—or, seemed funny to me now. I mean, like, for example, I had a thirty-round magazine that we had cobbled together from an M16 magazine and an AK-47 magazine, and it seemed to work fine when I tested it out. Get into a fight, and get about two rounds out and it jams on me. You stand there like a complete idiot, you know. You got to fumble around and get your real magazine out, throw that one away. Or some person takes off running fifty meters away from you, and all you've got is an M79 grenade launcher that you foolishly are carrying that particular day, or going on an operation with nothing more than a flak jacket, helmet, and .45 pistol and compass. Again, I think more of some of the silly things than the really bad things. The bad things—they don't need to be remembered anyway.

DePue: You mentioned one time about even falling off a helicopter. How high up was the helicopter?

Raschke: I don't know, about eight foot or so. I think I said before that I always insisted on when we would go into an area in the helicopters, I would always wear the radio. The reason or purpose for that was if we got into contact, I would want to immediately be able to do something, you know, talk to my higher or call the gunships in to a certain, particular place or the helicopter pilots to come back and get me the heck out of there. You would sit on the floor of the helicopter with your feet sitting on the skids. And this particular time, the helicopter came in to an LZ. I don't know if he got a little excited or something—but you know, you're getting ready to jump off anyway—and he rocked the helicopter, maybe six, eight foot up. I end up falling out of the helicopter. It was really no big deal because it was right into a rice paddy at rainy season, so it was less than diving into a swimming pool except the fact that you got a radio on your back and quite a bit of gear that you're carrying with you. I wasn't hurt at all. But again, it was amazing what adrenaline and that exhilaration thing I was telling you about would do for you on those occasions.

DePue: You said you didn't get injured. Sounds like even on that occasion you didn't get injured. Was there anything else that would cause you to have to go see the medics?

Raschke: Actually I ended up in the hospital for about a week up in Can Tho, and it was really kind of an interesting story. I remember the outpost that I was talking

about where we put them up out in Injun territory. One of those outposts got hit, and they called us up on what's called an eagle flight. An eagle flight at that time was where–typically the early morning hours—you would be jumping onto a helicopter, and you'd fly out to either try to ambush the bad guys or follow up, try to make contact with them because they had overran an outpost or whatever. So that's what happened on this occasion. We went out to kind of a remote area. Because we got up so early and it was unexpected for me, I just didn't take any C-rations with me. So we got there early; I mean, it was still dark when we hit the ground; we were scouring all around the outpost, trying to find blood trails and track down the bad guys. We chased them for a while and never seemed to catch them, but this whole time I'm just starving, literally.

So it was about noontime or so. The Vietnamese cooked up this concoction that was some kind of gumbo stuff, and I can still remember it. I was so hungry I just kind of wolfed that down and about a week or so later, less perhaps, ended up getting food poisoning. Essentially what it was, was caused by eating food that was contaminated with human feces. That particular aspect was amazing over in Vietnam because you would have these latrines that were nothing more than little shacks being built over a canal or over a waterway in some fashion; they'd go out into these little shacks and do their business, and that was it, that was their sanitary condition. What was always amazing to me was that fifty feet downstream from them you'd see some guy along the bank brushing his teeth in the same water. But anyway, long story short is that that food poisoning, it just really ripped right through me, to the point where I just couldn't hardly wear clothes because you were going at both ends, vomiting and diarrhea so bad.

So eventually they shipped me up to the American hospital, the Evac hospital up at Can Tho. I was up there for about a week, as I said. Checked in, the doctors took their samples and everything else like that; they really didn't pay much attention to me, and that pretty much bothered me. Certainly there was no physical signs—I mean, I didn't have a bullet hole in me or anything like that—but I just really wasn't getting any kind of attention. To make matters worse, about the fifth or sixth day in, the bad guys decided to mortar the hospital. So that was enough for me.

So fortunately I knew that I had a friend of mine that was from OCS who was a transportation lieutenant in Can Tho. How I knew that I still don't recall to this day. But somehow I was able to get a hold of him, told him to come over and pick me up; I was getting out of there. His name was Allen Vigil. So he came over, picked me up, and just took me to the airfield. I still wasn't appreciably any better off than I was when I got there, but anyway, I caught an aircraft from Can Tho back down to Vi Thanh. Lingered down there for a couple days, and finally an American civilian said that he had had something similar in the past and that the way he got cured was he went over to the Vietnamese hospital, whose doctors were Korean doctors; they gave

him an IV solution, and miraculously it cured him. So I thought, well, I'm going to try that as well. So I went to the Vietnamese hospital, talked to the Korean doctors. They hooked me up to an IV and pumped me full of something, and several days later I was cured. So that was my only brush with the medical profession in Vietnam.

DePue: Were you in the Vietnamese hospital for some time, then?

Raschke: No. Basically what I was doing is I was just laying there on an operating room table with an IV flowing into me, and that was it. I went there early in the afternoon and got out of there late in the afternoon, and whatever they gave me worked.

DePue: So went back and got some bed rest in your own hooch.

Raschke: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: I'm going to give you a chance here to reflect on the people you worked with or you fought with over there. And let's start with your fellow advisors. I know you've talked quite a bit about most of these categories I'm going to go through, but I wanted to give you a chance to reflect some more.

Raschke: Well, we had a good group. I mean, the thing about most advisors at that time back in about 1968—my numbers could be a little bit off—is the Americans realized that there was a need to get some good quality people in as advisors. You know, and not only that, but then they developed the schools that I talked about earlier on going to basically a cultural school, an advisor school, and a language school. So, many of the individuals that I served with over there had attended one or both of those. Many were like myself, volunteers to become advisors, and those that were not had some particular specialties. For example, the head of the Phoenix program, I think I may have talked to you about earlier, was a Columbia Law School graduate, Harvey Weiner. My roommate, who was the S-5 or —I'm trying to think what that means now— basically it was the propaganda minister, I think, he was a graduate from Lehigh University, had worked for the State Department before he got drafted. He just did a great job over there. And many of the others and certainly the career folks, and I'm talking now about in particular the majors and above and the E-7s and above, had all been to Vietnam on at least one other tour, so this was their second tour, mostly. So again, the quality of people I thought was pretty good.

It was a different army back then, though, as I may have mentioned before, in the sense that the army that we have today, and I have some basic understanding of that even twelve years removed from it, I think is an incredible army. I mean, the level of training, the level of equipment, the level of leadership is just amazing. That has everything to do with the amount of money the government has spent towards that, but also this commitment to an

all-volunteer force. It wasn't that way back then. The training that you got mostly came through the school of hard knocks, of having done something and it either works well or it fails, and you try the right thing the next time. That's what I kind of sensed from the senior NCOs and certainly from the majors and above, is that their level of training then would not equate to the type of training that our soldiers have now.

DePue: You mean they were figuring things out as they went?

Raschke: Yeah, kind of. I don't want to oversimplify it quite as much as that, but that kind of connotes what was happening over there. That's not to take away from them and say that they weren't competent individuals, because they were, but it was just a different army at that time. But again, and I have reflected on this many, many, many times, that is, how fortunate I was to have served as I served, with who I served with. What I mean by that is that again, I considered them to have been very high quality people, despite my comparison between then and now, some high quality people. And it was just a great experience doing what I did. I consider myself so very fortunate in so many ways. I could not have asked for it to be better or different in any way.

DePue: I don't know if you can answer this one, but I wonder if you could develop a profile of what it took to be a good advisor versus a profile for somebody who was in your traditional combat unit.

Raschke: Yeah, I think the key difference would be patience. And what I mean by that is, certainly in a combat environment, as a combat leader, you have to make quick decisions and you have to go with those decisions and you have to ensure that everyone that you're leading understands what you're doing and accomplished that mission. That's not to say that we advisors didn't have a sense of mission, because we did, but our mission was always more abstract than taking that hill number 874, for example, or blocking that pass, or whatever. Our missions were to advise the Vietnamese, and what you have to do is, you have to recognize the cultural differences between us and them. Certainly in Vietnamese history, if you look back, they've been subjugated by many other peoples in their history. Their approach to things was typically a more cautious, thoughtful—I don't want to use the word **thoughtful**—but a more **cautious** approach to things. In retrospect—and I think you and I have on other occasions had this discussion—we Americans knew that essentially, unless we chose otherwise or **God** chose for us, 365 days from the day we set foot on the soil in Vietnam, we would be going home. The Vietnamese: they were home, and they were going to be fighting or pacifying or doing what they were doing long after John was there and gone, and many other Johns prior to and succeeding him. So I think that had something to do with their caution.

They also knew the terrain much better than we did—and I'm talking the South Vietnamese. As American military officers, we have certainly a

terrain appreciation and understanding, but there are so many things you cannot get from looking at the map. For example, I mentioned the muck, how it would just suck all the energy out of you after being there for a while. They seemed to be able to gauge the length of their operations so that you wouldn't be dead because of just physical exertion by the time you were done. As Americans, I could just easily see us going over there and saying, From point A to point B is four kilometers; no problem, we'll cover that four kilometers in 1.5 hours or whatever. The Vietnamese had a much better sense of that than what we did.

And again, I think that if I were to boil down to one word as the difference between us as American officers leading American troops versus us as advisors advising Vietnamese troops, the key word had to be patience and understanding, too. I mean, there's the old saying that you can't push rope, and I would like to say that for the most part, I didn't have to because I developed a good rapport with my Vietnamese counterparts and really stuck close to the ones that I respected and I think that returned that respect. And if we needed to do something and do it fast, I could easily convey that message to them and they would do it. But again, that was the thing, too, just developing that rapport, which in an American combat unit you don't really have to do. In an American unit they look at your shoulder and say, You've got more on it than I've got on mine, so I guess I have to obey you. In the Vietnamese or advisory role, we had to prove ourselves and compel them, through our actions and through our competence, to do what we asked them to do or wanted them to do.

DePue: How immersed were you with the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese culture?

Raschke: I would say probably as well as any of the others in my team. I mean, it was to the point towards the end that I didn't need an interpreter to go with me. I understood the do's and the don'ts of their culture. I just felt very much at ease with them and perhaps too much so. I mean, now, as I'm in my early sixties, I think back and think how easily my naïveté or trust could have parlayed itself into going into an ambush or being abducted or something like that, but I never thought of that, never experienced that certainly.

DePue: Were you on occasion sleeping in their hooches with them? Were you eating their food? Were you going to their religious services, or…?

Raschke: Religious services, no, but all of the others, yes. That was just the things that we did; we lived with them, we ate with them, we slept with them, and I don't mean in a certain way, a sexual way. But we pretty much did what they were doing. And they were, again, great people, I thought.

DePue: Well then, tell me about the food.

Raschke: Well, the food is interesting. The anecdote that I often would use is that prior to Vietnam, I would not so much as have mustard on a hot dog because I just didn't like the taste of things like that. But when you get to Vietnam, their food can be spicy or it can be bland; I mean, take your choice. But in particular I like their food, and one of the reasons I like their food is they have this sauce called nuoc mam which translated is "water fish." What they do is they take fish, they put them on little racks outside in the sun, basically bakes them, and they have a pot down below collecting the drippings from that fish, and that's the fish sauce that they have. There may be other processes that I'm missing here, but basically that was it. But it was very spicy, not hot spicy but fishy spicy. I got to just really like that, to the point where, when I go to a Vietnamese restaurant now, I'll ask for it because you can't eat Vietnamese food without it.

The other thing is that they had just exotic foods. I mean, I can sit here and say that I've eaten rat, and most people would cringe at that. My response to that would be, Well, who of you had not eaten squirrel? I mean, the rats that I'm talking about are not the rats that are running around out in some garbage dump; I'm talking about a rat that was fed by rice out in a rice paddy and then caught with little rat traps that were really kind of interesting in their own right. They would cook them up, and they were just great. I've eaten snake, I've eaten eel, squid. I'd like to think not cat and dog, but (DePue laughs) I'm not terribly sure of that.

One thing I distinctly remember was, when we would go out on an operation or when I was with them, say—"them" being the Vietnamese—and we would have lunch, it was always considered an honor to have the chicken head. I mean, when they killed game for food, whether it was a chicken or a duck or pretty much anything else, you get the whole thing. And I remember, for example, seeing duck's feet floating around in something that they called some kind of soup. But on this particular occasion—and I hadn't been in-country terribly long—but distinctly remember the unit commander of the unit I was advising reached over with his chopsticks and picked up the head of this chicken, that still had the comb on it and the beak on it and everything else, so imagine what else is there, and very nice and precisely puts it in my little rice bowl. Going back to my days at Fort Bragg and the cultural awareness thing, it dawned upon me that I was being honored (DePue laughs) by being given this chicken head to eat. I gave it a try but just couldn't seem to do it and was somehow able to get him to turn the other way and get it out of my mouth. (laughter) I think I put it in my pocket or something like that. It was just an interesting thing. But they had what I thought was good food.

DePue: I would assume, though, that you don't want to be drinking the same water they drink.

Raschke: Yeah, for the most part you took your own water. And being on an American compound, I'm not going to say a distillery, but somehow we had good water.

Highly chlorinated, I'd say that. But that's typically what we had. Now, typically when I went on an operation, I would always carry two canteens, two one-quart canteens, and more often that not that wouldn't last you the whole day or the operation, but it was a good start. You got to a certain point, you know, we were passing canteens back and forth between us and the Vietnamese. What's interesting about being in Vietnam was out in the middle of absolutely nowhere, along this canal bank, at the junction of several canals, perhaps, they would have a little shack that was selling Pepsis or selling Cokes or iced teas or something like that. And how they got that stuff there was way and always beyond me, but on occasion we would get a Pepsi or get a Coke or have an iced tea. And yes, they actually had ice in the delta in the middle of the hot season as well. So unfortunately, we did break that rule. I never did fill my canteen up from a canal or from a river or anything else like that, but I did share water with the Vietnamese.

DePue: How about alcohol? Every culture has its own distinctive alcohol.

Raschke: The Vietnamese had an alcohol, it was called—oh my gosh—ba si de. And it was I think—I'm not sure, because I've only had sake on an occasion, or maybe two—but ba si de, I think, was derived from rice, some sort of process that they used for that. But it pretty much tastes exactly like kerosene. And again, when your counterpart handed you something, you couldn't exactly say "No thank you," "Not today," or whatever, so you would have to indulge. I remember my first experience with ba si de; I think I probably ended up barking at the moon later on that night. (DePue laughs) It was not a pretty thing. So that was one of the things that they had, and it was again, some kind of wine—or not wine, but some kind of hard liquor.

Another thing the Vietnamese had that I did like, was they had a beer called 33, which in Vietnamese is Ba Moui Ba. I can remember on more than one occasion my counterpart and I or my interpreter and I would go out, inspect the troops or the events or whatever, and then invariably on the way back to the base or the compound would stop at one of these little roadside shacks—and now we're talking about something that's more in a urban, although that's stretching the term a bit, area. But we would go in there and start out with Ba Moui Ba.A little favorite of mine was they had like pickled shrimp. So we would drink Ba Moui Ba. Ba Moui Ba, I'm sure, ranged in alcohol content anywhere from 0 to 20 percent within the same case. It was a beer, but there seemed to be no consistency in how strong it was. But I can remember on several occasions getting pretty well blitzed on Ba Moui Ba and eating pickled shrimp; or squid was like beef jerky so we had a lot of that as well.

DePue: What was the general attitude the Vietnamese people had towards yourself and other advisors? Was there any resentment?

Raschke: I would say no, because anecdotally, I'd hear the stories. I knew my experience with the Vietnamese I was dealing with. Typically towards the, oh, last three quarters of my tour I spent pretty much with two companies, and that was as much my own choosing as anything else. But my experiences were extremely positive. Again, anecdotally, I can say, both by my vague recollection of back then, as well as reinforced by a reunion we had of our advisory team in 2009, that the relationship that the other advisors had was equally as good. I guess that was kind of a difference, I think, between us as advisors and perhaps other American troops. I mean, you come back to the United States and you'd be at a training installation or whatever years after you got back and hear words like dinks and slopes and gooks and all these pejoratives on the Vietnamese people. And I couldn't even call the bad guys that because in my opinion they were people, and the ones I was dealing with were very good people. We as advisors, I think, had a much greater appreciation of them—"them" being the Vietnamese—than what the other American combat troops or even combat service support troops had.

Now, having said that, that's not to suggest that all Vietnamese soldiers and all Vietnamese officers adored Americans or were straight and honest and had the same core beliefs as what we did with regard to honesty and taking care of soldiers and all those other things. But I think in general they were good folks, and I think that my American counterparts were equally as favorably disposed towards the Vietnamese as I was.

DePue: How would you figure out who you could trust among the Vietnamese people and who you should not?

Raschke: You couldn't. And you heard me say just a few minutes ago on how I spent most of my time with two companies for the majority of my time there, just someone that you felt comfortable with. I mean, the point being is, that the bad guys weren't wearing uniforms where I was at. Eventually, or very shortly after I left the area, the North Vietnamese army started moving troops into that area en masse, and they were uniformed, but the folks that we were fighting were primarily Viet Cong, and they just looked like the peasants or the other civilians. They really had no uniforms. The only way you could tell they were the bad guys is if they were armed with AK-47s, although that was no giveaway either because they'd overran these outposts and taken a lot of M16s. So the answer to your question is, you really couldn't tell who the bad guys were. Could there have been infiltrators in these companies that I was with that were watching our every move or telling what was going to happen next or what? That's certainly possible. I mean, it never was exposed while I was there. I guess I go back again to this thought that we had, that when your time's up, your time's up, and that's just the way it was.

DePue: What was it like that last day or two that you're with these Vietnamese units?

Raschke: Well, if you recall, a bit earlier I said I came out of Vietnam on emergency leave, so I knew that I had orders because as you got closer to your DEROS, which is Date of Estimated Return from Overseas, your DEROS date, you know, like every other American, we were counting days, so I knew how many days I had left in-country that day I was standing out there at the airfield. But I really didn't have time to tell them, because I was about a month out from my actual DEROS date. I didn't have time to go around and say goodbye to them or thank them for everything and that; I just took off. It was getting out of there that fast. So had I had time, I would have certainly done that, and I can assure you that they, I would think, would have had some tough feelings, not in a negative sense, but just, because again, we formed a pretty strong bond.

DePue: It would have been emotional for both sides.

Raschke: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

DePue: Okay. Your kind of experience in Vietnam was so different from a regular unit, but I wonder if you saw or you experienced some of the morale and discipline problems going on that we read so much about that were going on in a lot of the military units, especially '70, '71 timeframe.

Raschke: You know, I really didn't see that. I will say with a high degree of certainty that there was at least marijuana on our MACV compound where I was at in Vi Thanh. But was there overt hostility between the enlisted folks and the draftees—and I'm talking now, we had a lot of radio operators, radio telephone operators, and analysts, and enlisted folks like that that were draftees and enlistees that made one term. And I'm not saying that in a negative sense, but there were a lot of those individuals running around. They were good-quality people. I'd never noticed where one of them was disrespectful towards me or any other officer. And we shared the same mess hall with them, we shared the same movies with them and the same club, if you will, with them. And again, I don't want to make it a we–them thing, but just for the purposes of answering your question. I mean, we were all one pretty cohesive organization because we were pretty much stuck out in the middle of nowhere by ourselves. We had to get along.

DePue: Were there blacks who were serving with your unit?

Raschke: Yeah, absolutely.

DePue: Korea was the first war that was integrated, and again, there was a lot of tension towards the end of the war between black troops and white troops. Did you see any of that?

Raschke: Not at all, not at all. Again, everybody that was there… Back then I think they had these little wristbands that they braided out of their shoelaces—and I'm talking about the black soldiers. I saw this. Every month or pretty much every

month I'd have to go up to Saigon. I was in charge of an AIK or an assistance-in-kind fund, where we had so much money that was given to us by the government; we would take it down and we would use it to help the Vietnamese, you know, where they had to buy ice for this or fix an airfield or repair some damages to something. But I had this fund that I had to take care of, and every week or every month I would go up to Saigon. I would see folks up there of all races, and in particular the black soldiers were wearing these little wrist bracelets that they seemed to have braided out of their shoelaces. And I think that had something to do with Black Power, although I just don't know. I'm pretty naïve still. And the black soldiers in Vi Thanh, a couple of those had that, but we thought nothing of it. I mean, they had great attitudes; they were very responsive; they were just great soldiers. So the answer to your question is, I never saw any of that.

DePue: How about the whole experience of new arrivals? Now you were one of these people, and towards the end of your time there were obviously other people who were coming in, always as individuals. How did the unit treat these new individuals?

Raschke: Well, it wasn't like the American units where you'd hear the stories—including stories from World War II, I would add—that when a young man came into a unit they would shy away from him with the understanding that he probably wasn't going to live very long anyways, and if you did, then you could make their acquaintance. In our case, it was different. I mean, we're talking about a group of about fifty soldiers—and we had airmen, we had a couple Marines, we had on occasion sailors coming in there as well—that were, I would say, a pretty professional group. They were there for the express purposes of supporting the Vietnamese soldier and the Vietnamese army. They had a very specific job to do in pretty much every case, so they couldn't just come and blend in and not be known. They had something that they had to do. I mean, every time we had a new soldier come into the place, a new advisor come into the place, typically that week there would be some sort of gathering at the club that would recognize that person, and more often or not that was consistent with the same time his replacement was leaving country. So you would have a hail and farewell, we would call it back then.

DePue: Okay. How were you able to stay in touch with your family. You're newly married?

Raschke: Yeah. You really didn't. I mean, you had letters back then, and I recall on one occasion making a MARS phone call, but we were just so far out in the middle of nowhere that communications was difficult. It's not like you see today—the soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan where they can e-mail or Skype their loved ones back home. I don't envy them for that; I just marvel at the technology. But back then we did it the old-fashioned way, with letters.

DePue: Were you hearing from your wife very often, what her feelings were about your being stuck over in Vietnam?

Raschke: I'm sure of that. I mean, that's not a specific recollection; that just makes sense that she was sending those kinds of letters. Frankly, I just don't remember that much about it. The mail was irregular in receipt, say it that way. What I mean by that is, if somebody remembered to throw the mailbag on the airplane that was going from Saigon to Can Tho and Can Tho to Vi Thanh, then fine, you got mail that day or that week, and if they didn't, you didn't. It was really that simple. But I'm sure she was relating the events going on back home and that sort of thing. But it was just really no big deal. I mean, I guess mail was always a welcome thing, and you'd look forward to getting something, but it's just not a big event that stands out in my mind right now.

DePue: How much were you and your buddies aware of what was going on back in the United States, as far as protests and politically?

Raschke: Very much so. We had *Stars & Stripes,* which is the military version of what they want you to hear, and that was fine; it was an informative thing. But we also had *Time*. We had subscriptions that somehow the government or someone provided for us, of *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* and those sorts of things. So we were receiving and reading those things. I would just consume those just to see what's going on back home. There was absolutely zero television. I guess there was AFVN, Armed Forces Vietnam radio and TV. Never really listened to that or never saw a TV while I was there. But we knew what was going on.

I think for the most part, in a sense, one side says, These people are damaging everything that we're trying to do here, and so, therefore, we resent them. But in another sense, we were saying to ourselves, I don't know if we're going to win this thing, and maybe they're right, "they" being the protestors, are right. Just didn't really know which particular emotion to have at the time. Now, I would say that in-country, in Vietnam at the time we went into Cambodia, I don't think there was anyone that did not welcome that action, going in there and taking the gloves off, so to speak. I think too that in our perhaps somewhat juvenile minds, when we heard about the protestors that were shot at Kent State, we thought, you shouldn't have been there in the first place or whatever. But again, we knew what was going on, and I think kind of had mixed emotions would be the best way to sum it up.

DePue: Okay. A little bit different kind of question: Do you remember the music of the time period? Were you listening to the same rock and roll that the kids were listening to at home?

Raschke: Kind of. And I think I may have lied to you, because I think we may have had AFVN radio. I think that because what I can remember is the two songs that

really hit us the hardest, I think, were "San Francisco" by Scott McKenzie, because for most of us, San Francisco was our debarkation point and hopefully our arrival back in the United States point, and there was a song by Simon & Garfunkel—I'm not sure I recall exactly the name—but it was "Leaving on a jet plane, don't know when I'll be back again," which of course to us meant that we were leaving Vietnam and heading home. And we liked that one quite a bit.

DePue: What was it about the "San Francisco"? I don't think I know that song.

Raschke: Well, it says, "If you're going to San Francisco, wear a flower in your hair." And for us, the symbolism was going to San Francisco, because, again, when you're going to San Francisco, you have Oakland Air Force Base, which was a transit point into Vietnam and out of Vietnam that many soldiers went through, myself included. So if you were going to San Francisco, that means you're on the way—in our case, since we're already in Vietnam, there's only one place that San Francisco will put you, and that's home. So it was a pretty good—that was kind of a tearjerker, actually, for some of us.

DePue: But for any kid who happens to be going to college at the time, it would have a completely different connotation, I would think.

Raschke: Well, I can't talk about what—(DePue laughs) or I really don't know what they were thinking about. But I'm giving you how we looked at it.

DePue: Did you get any entertainers while you were there, USO trips?

Raschke: You know, we did. We actually had Georgie Jessel come to our place. And I couldn't have been there much more than a week or so, and he came down. All I remember from that is he was sicker than a dog. (laughter) But I would guess that perhaps we may have had anywhere from four to half a dozen USO-type shows. I mean, it wasn't the thing that you see on TV where you've got Bob Hope standing down in a valley in the midst of thousands of Americans. We're talking about our audience at most would have been fifty or sixty soldiers. So they would come in, and just the fact that they were there, and in some cases you saw pretty faces—and the thing back then was always round-eyed girls, because the Vietnamese, of course, they have almond-shaped eyes—so we were always talking about round-eyed girls. On occasion, they would come with those shows. So that was always interesting.

DePue: You appreciated that?

Raschke: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Remember, I'm twenty-two years old. (DePue laughs)

DePue: How about leave? Did you get a chance to go on leave?

Raschke: I did. The Army had a policy that they would give you two—if I'm saying this correctly—two one-week leaves, and they'd fly you wherever you wanted to

go. Typically the choices were Hawaii, Australia, Hong Kong, perhaps another one or two that I can't think of at the moment. But about midway through my tour, perhaps a little further, I met my then-wife in Hawaii for a week, and could have taken another one-week leave, but I just didn't want to. Had I had that opportunity—to think about it now—I would have probably went to Australia or Hong Kong or something like that just to see what that world looked like.

DePue: Why didn't you want to?

Raschke: I don't know. I really don't know. So many other people that were on our advisory team in fact did that, but I can't sit here and tell you I remember what my logic was. It wasn't for lack of money, because again, the government was sending you there for free. I just don't know. I wish I could say that I was just too dedicated to what I was doing, but I really don't remember the reason I didn't do that.

DePue: You recall what you felt when you were on leave in Hawaii with your wife, knowing that you had to go back to Vietnam?

Raschke: You know, again, maybe being twenty-two is different to your sense of surroundings or things, but just so much of that sort of thing I accepted back then. It was almost like you're just marching and doing whatever you're told to do without really thinking much of it. I mean, certainly we had a good time in Hawaii, but I knew when I left that I had a week, and a week later I was back in-country; I enjoyed my one week, and let's move on to the next event. You know, saying goodbye is always hard, but there was no sense of, well, do I really want to go back or should I go AWOL or something like that. It was just, okay, this is what I'm supposed to do, so I'm going to go do it.

DePue: Well, some people in those kind of circumstances comment that one place or the other just didn't feel like reality to them.

Raschke: Yeah. I think that's a fair statement, but if you stop and think of it, Vietnam certainly wasn't reality, because in the United States we're not running around killing one another with armed groups running all over the place. So that wasn't reality. But by the same token, going on vacation, whether it's Hawaii from Vietnam or Las Vegas for a week or Disneyworld or something like that, that's not really reality either. So I guess it could force the philosophical question, What is reality? Reality is, I think, being with your family.

DePue: Mm-hmm. You mentioned also that while you were there, you, like everybody, was counting the days.

Raschke: Absolutely.

DePue: Were there any rituals that people did in that respect?

Raschke: I think that what each of us did was something… Someone would come into country, and you would always say, "How many days have you got left here?", and they'd say, "Three hundred and forty-seven." And you'd say, "Oh my gosh, I don't think I could stand it if I had that many." Or we'd wake up in the morning and say to one another—and we got there at different times too—"I've got seventeen and a wake-up," or "I've got fifty-six and a wake-up." I mean, you always knew what it was. So we would kind of kid each other back and forth on that. So we had a very good idea. I mean, that was perhaps the only reality that we had—the number of days that were left.

DePue: But did that all get disrupted when you went home on emergency leave?

Raschke: (laughs) My calendar got thrown away, I mean, yeah.

DePue: Did you not come back to Vietnam after that?

Raschke: No. The way it worked out is, that I was about a month short of my twelve-month or 365-day tour, and the Army in this case, in their great wisdom, decided it wouldn't make sense to send me back for thirty days, so they didn't. Consequently I went to my next duty assignment, which was Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

DePue: What brought you home for emergency leave?

Raschke: I had a nephew that was involved in an accidental shooting, and it just so happened that it happened in my house at the time, and it happened with my pistol, so everybody was pretty upset over the whole issue. Was it a tragic event? I mean, my nephew lived and there was no charge filed or anything else like that. But was it an event that necessarily today would get someone on emergency leave? I don't know. But it was bad enough at the time that the Red Cross and the Army thought it was okay for me to come back home.

DePue: Remember being reunited with your family when you came home?

Raschke: Not really. I'm sure that I flew into the Quad City airport, or the Moline airport at the time, and I'm sure it was a great homecoming. I can't say that my mother was there and my father was there and my brothers and sisters were there because I don't know that. But again, there was some impromptu in the fashion in which I came home, so it wasn't like they were able to go out and plan a welcoming-home luncheon or something like that for me. It just happened the way it happened. So anyway, I made it back to the United States.

DePue: How much more time did you have on active duty still?

Raschke: As you heard me say earlier, what we would do is we knew our DEROS, our Date of Estimated Return from Overseas. We knew that, and I knew also that my term of service with the Army would have expired at a certain point. What

I did was that, while I was still in Vietnam, I extended for one year my service time for one year. I felt what that would do for me was it would get me a chance to get back to the States, get somewhat stable, and allow me the opportunity to look for a job rather than come back from Vietnam at the end of my tour and then be out in the street looking for a job and not having a clue as to where to look. So I extended for a year and went to Fort Leonard Wood. Part of that extension promise, if you will, in those days was, you went from second lieutenant to first lieutenant in one year. A year time in grade as a first lieutenant, you would become a captain. So part of that extension package was that I would become a captain after my second year. So that was helpful too, because even then, it was a good job, good money. I don't mean to make it sound so passé, but it just gave me something to get my feet on the ground is the best way I could say it, once I got back home.

DePue: Okay. Any challenges that you had personally in readjusting to a different pace and a different environment of life coming back home?

Raschke: Well, even to this day—and I think it's getting worse as I'm getting older, although I've had it ever since—is if I hear a noise, an unexpected noise, primarily from behind me, I'll essentially jump through my skin. I still have a tough time with that. My first and current wife have caught me on more than one occasion in the middle of the night speaking some foreign language which they believe to be Vietnamese, you know, reliving something. I don't recall the particulars of that. But I think not. I think that, in retrospect, I'm glad that I served. It's something my country asked me to do, something I was proud to do. I have absolutely no regrets over it; I'm thankful for it. I just took that experience and went on with the rest of my life. I mean, there are some soldiers—I'm sure you've seen them in your past—that just can't let it go. They were in Korea and came back with shell shock or they had a horrific experience, or perhaps they were unfulfilled. I don't know, I'm not trying to psychoanalyze anyone. But for me, I did what I was asked to do, I think I did it reasonably well, I came home, I went on with the rest of my life, I let it go. I don't dwell on it; I don't often think about it. I guess my expectation is that that's what everyone should have done, but I certainly understand that God made us all different, so whatever composition of person you are, that is what makes you do what you do.

DePue: Were you one of those who would talk to your wife or talk to others, try to figure things out or just to share some of the stories?

Raschke: Not really. There's a saying amongst veterans, and I'm sure it's veterans from back before wars were even thought of, you know, that basically said, If you haven't been there, you can't understand. That's not to suggest that we're lofty or high in what we've accomplished or necessarily demeaning towards any one other person, it's just that it serves no purpose to talk about the bad things, or even the good things. I just chose pretty much, like I think many

other veterans, just to keep it locked up in the back of my mind and not bore people with.

DePue: Then why do this interview?

Raschke: Doing this because I think it's important for what you're doing. I would hope that people would hear this interview and see that there were perhaps some good things or certainly some very well-intentioned things that were going on during that conflict. I would hope that for my posterity that they have an occasion to hear this or to read this. And I guess, kind of in summation, although we're not necessarily finished, I guess my thought would be that if you're going to send young men to war and forever after change their lives—and war does change your lives—that it would be well thought out and especially necessary, because it's the young men and now women that bear the burden of those wars, not the people that get us necessarily into them.

DePue: You mentioned you still had a year in the military. What did you want to do with your life after that term ended?

Raschke: You know, I really didn't know. The only thing I knew with any degree of certainty was that I wanted to go to school. A person very instrumental in forcing me to that decision was my roommate, Harvey Weiner. Because we had some great discussions about that, and he was very helpful. He was almost like a teacher to me there. But I had a sense of myself that I could do things, that I could succeed at things if I applied myself, and that was something that I really hadn't known as a kid growing up. The Army allowed me to learn that about myself. So I knew that I wanted to go to school and be something. And I didn't know what that something was at the time, I just knew that I wanted to be something, something where I could be successful, that I could be reasonably happy, that I could make a good living for my family.

DePue: Well, and of course you would have had the GI Bill as something you could use as well. Did you?

Raschke: Absolutely. I think pretty much every dime of it. Again, when I first went into the Army, I had exactly zero days of college credit to my credit. I came out, I went first to Black Hawk College up in Moline, received an Associate degree in accounting, and from there, they had a satellite course from Western Illinois University that was in the Quad City area, and I went and enrolled in them and eventually got a Bachelor's degree in accounting from Western Illinois. And I thought I wanted to be an accountant. Never really used it, although I think it's a very helpful profession.

DePue: Was there a moment in your life that it really hit you that you are back home or that the experiences of Vietnam came rushing back to you in an unexpected way?

Raschke: Yeah, there's one in particular, absolutely.

DePue: Okay. Okay, we are back after a very quick break. I think the question I was asking you before is if there was any moment in your life that that experience in Vietnam caught you by surprise.

Raschke: Yeah, it really did. It's still a little bit painful. If you remember, the early part of my life I spent out on a farm near Geneseo, and after I got out of the Army—and this now is 1971, so we're talking probably 1971, perhaps 1972—but I was out on the farm and I was squirrel hunting. As a kid I just loved to hunt, whether it was hunting squirrels or rabbits or fox or whatever. I mean, I spent a lot of time hunting. I'm not necessarily good at it, but I still like to do it. There was just some sense of being at peace with nature. Perhaps the game didn't think that, but that's the way I looked at it. Anyway, on this particular day, I distinctly remember it was kind of an overcast, slightly drizzly day, and I was out hunting. I don't remember, I may have already gotten a squirrel or so. But on this particular occasion, I saw a squirrel up in a tree and I shot it, and I hit the squirrel in the head. Immediately when I did that, just something came over me and I just completely broke down. I attribute that to what I had seen in Vietnam, but it just shook me to my absolute core. I mean, something just told me that what I just did was wrong. And again, just those rush of memories back from Vietnam. After I got that out of my system, I mean, I was okay again and really haven't had anything like that since but that one day, that one moment. And that would have put me at most, if it was '72, that would have put me two years out of Vietnam, so everything was pretty fresh at that time. But again, I've not had anything like that since.

DePue: If you were to put one or two words to the emotions or the reason that that happened, do you think you could come up with that?

Raschke: Yeah. When you're in the middle of a rice paddy and you have woods around you and you have bad guys shooting at you, what's the most exposed part of a person? And more often than not, that's what you saw.

DePue: What I'd like to do now is to have you take just a few minutes to kind of wrap up the rest of your life. I know you had a long military career, but you also had an important civilian aspect to your life as well, so if you can lay that out for us.

Raschke: I'm sure it'll be equally as boring as (DePue laughs) the previous part, but just somewhat quickly. I did get out of the Army initially in August of 1971, went back to school almost immediately. In September of 1972 I started working for International Harvester again at the Rock Island Farmall plant. At the same time, that same month, I went into the Illinois Army National Guard in Rock Island, an artillery unit. As it turned out, I spent the next approximate twelve years at International Harvester Farmall, entered as a painter and left there in 1984 when the plant closed as a mid-level manager, supervising at one point

about 150 people in the production scheduling area where we were getting parts to all the different assembly lines. The reason I left that job was that, if you recall, in December of 1984, International Harvester made the decision that they were going to close that plant, so subsequently the plant was closed.

Concurrent with that, I was faithfully a member of the Illinois National Guard and did that eventually up until 1999. But certainly during that time period too, in 1980, my first wife and I were divorced after having three wonderful children, John, Tom, and Jill. We just fell in love young, and I think we fell out of love because of that lack of understanding. But anyway, I met and subsequently married my current wife, Jane, in 1982. She was a process engineer down at International Harvester, which is where I met her, and she and I have been together since that time. Had a wonderful son, Ryan, who's living in Indianapolis. My other son Tom is living in Alexandria, Virginia; my oldest son John is living with his family in Richmond, Virginia. John and Ryan are married to wonderful ladies and have their own families started and established, and they're well on their ways.

But anyway, back to 1984 when Farmall plant had closed, I went to work for a one-year period as an assistant plant manager with a wiring harness manufacturer just getting started in the Quad City area. And as it turned out, the handwriting was kind of on the wall; if you recall, we're in the 1980s kind of still in the grips of a pretty bad economic time, and the farm manufacturing plants around that area were starting to lay people off and, in our case, close.

DePue: Those were some very rough times for agriculture in the United States.

Raschke: Yeah. So I saw where that wasn't going to probably survive, and quite fortunately at that same time there was an advertisement for an Assistant Inspector General to the Illinois National Guard, which was a full-time active duty position. I applied for that and was subsequently chosen for that. So I started to work full time as an active-duty officer for the Illinois Guard in February of 1986 and spent the next thirteen years there on a number of different assignments: Inspector General, Training Officer, Mobilization Officer, eventually the Director of Plans, Operations and Training, and then upon my retirement as the Director of Resource Management. Retired from there in 1999. I must say, though, that perhaps the best period of my life ever was our one-year tour of duty out to Tufts University out near Boston, Massachusetts. My son, wife, and mother-in-law made that journey, and we just had a very, very great time out there.

But anyway, retired from the active duty in 1999. Immediately went to work for the Illinois Commerce Commission as the manager for procurement and facilities over there. Did that for about five and a half years. As you recall, now we're into the Blagojevich administration. Things are not going really well for the state. It happened that right across the street from the Illinois Commerce Commission is the U.S. Attorney's office. They had an

advertisement out for an administrative officer, and I applied for that and was again lucky enough to get that in 2005. So I've been here about six and a half years as the administrative officer, pretty much loving every moment of that.

A couple of the highlights that I forgot to mention that I would like to talk about is, just did complete the Army's Command General Staff College in 1982. Had a great time with that. My second-best time in the Army was as a battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion 123rd Field Artillery up in Rock Island, the original unit that I joined. Great organization, great people, and it was just a wonderful, wonderful time up there. As I mentioned, I went to Tufts University. That was on an Army War College fellowship. Completed that in 1994. And I guess I forgot to mention too that I graduated from the University of Illinois Springfield in 1990 with an MBA from them.

So in retrospect, I sit here as tomorrow is my sixty-fourth birthday, looking back, and think it's been a pretty good run. And, you know, the old saying is, Who would have ever thunk it, that someone like myself would have done all these great, wonderful things. I attribute that not to my abilities but more to luck and certainly the guidance that I was given, in particular by the people that shaped my life: my mother; John R. Raschke, as I mentioned in the first interview; and my grandfather. I just have far exceeded what I expected to have done for myself.

DePue: I don't want to dwell on this much at all, but simply to ask you quickly whether you think your first divorce had anything to do with your experiences in Vietnam.

Raschke: I really don't want to blame it on that. I mean, I don't think so. I would say that one thing that you take from that experience that's not helpful or healthful towards a marriage is holding things in, and certainly that's what happened to me. I'm not saying that is it. It possibly has something to do with it. But I certainly know that about myself, that I have a tendency to hold things in. Because again, certain experiences you just don't talk about.

DePue: Kind of a few sum-up questions for you: Do you think that your time in Vietnam—I mean, you saw some combat over there, saw some tough stuff. You played it down a little bit, but like so many other people, there's a huge variety of different experiences over there. You sacrificed a lot. Do you think that year was justified?

Raschke: Absolutely. Not any question about it whatsoever. Because again, what we were doing or what I was doing I thought was good and noble—you know, helping other people out. I didn't subscribe to the domino theory, didn't hardly know what it was back then. But I knew and got a great sense of accomplishment in helping the Vietnamese people, and for that I have absolutely no regrets whatsoever.

DePue: But we lost. And I think you would say the South Vietnamese people lost.

Raschke: True. And to me, that's one of the greatest problems or issues that haunt me, if you will, is that there were some tremendous people—again, people just like you and I—that had aspirations for their families, for their children, that their whole lives changed. I really have no idea of knowing what happened to them. Some of them, I mean, you're not as close as a brother, but you're close as your closest friend to, and all of a sudden they're just in a black hole. You don't know what happened to them, you don't know what happened to their families, you just don't know how they turned out. And let's face it, the ones that you have the strongest bond to are likely those that are close to you in their approach to the world. They want to make something happen, they want to succeed, they want to be able to contribute to their society, and you just don't know what happened to them. That's really kind of sad that it turned out that way. And it goes to this notion of politics and war. I know what Clausewitz said, but if we're not going to do it right and complete, we should not do it at all.

DePue: Well, that's the perfect lead-in to my next question, then. What are your feelings—I guess you just explained them to a certain extent—about the way the American involvement in that war ended?

Raschke: I think it's tragic. I think that when you look, for example, at the battle of An Loc, when the 18th ARVN Division is having to ration artillery rounds because they have five or six North Vietnamese divisions, some of them armored divisions, surrounding them at that town.

DePue: This would be at the end of the war?

Raschke: In 1975. That they're rationing bullets because the U.S. Congress has voted to cut off all aid to them. I think it's tragic. It's tragic, certainly, for those that lost their lives during that particular battle, but those that subsequently lost their lives because the communists took over. I think it's tragic to see the telling moment of Vietnam, as we have the Iwo Jima memorial out in Washington, D.C., which is the hallmark for the Marine Corps, which is a wonderful monument and a wonderful photo from which the monument was made, but the hallmark moment of Vietnam is seeing a UH-1 Huey helicopter sitting on top of the American embassy, evacuating soldiers from that embassy. Or right outside, away from that frame, U.S. guards punching Vietnamese in the face for their trying to get into the embassy so they could get out. I think that as Americans we should all be affronted at that. I think that that was just tragic, the way that thing came down.

DePue: You mentioned before that you came back changed from the experience. How would you explain the changes that you felt?

Raschke: Well, I think the changes were internal in the sense that you heard me mention a bit ago about how you just become much more careful with your feelings. You don't talk about things as much. You just have the ability, if you will, to compartmentalize things. I don't want this to sound as crass as it's going to sound, but your perspective on life is that, what happens, happens. I mean, I don't know that other people have that feeling. I'm sure veterans of all other wars to a degree have that feeling. But you have a sense of resignation to events that is a change in you. Those are the bad parts. But again, having done what I did or we did as advisors I think can only be summed up as noble, can only be summed up as honorable, and for that I'm extremely proud. I wish the results were different, but I'm just very happy to have served and think with great fondness on having spent time with the Vietnamese people.

DePue: Nobility, honor were not words that the American public were thinking of when the Vietnam veterans came back home; it was quite the opposite. Any feelings about the way many of your fellow veterans were treated when they came back home?

Raschke: I can't speak to many of my fellow veterans. I can remember the Hard Hat protestors out in New York, for example, that were perhaps counter-protesting the protesters, talking to the honor and nobility of what the military was trying to do and of the Vietnamization process. I hear these stories about soldiers coming home and getting off the airplane and people spitting at them and calling them baby-killers and that sort of thing, and I'm sure some of that happened. It never happened to me. And I don't know, if it did, I think I would have just shrugged it off and just let it go. Because going back to what I was saying, I think I've internalized all this good that we tried to do, and I'm really proud of that, and there's nothing that anyone could say or do to me that would take that away. How other veterans feel about their experience? I just have to leave that up to them.

DePue: What are your thoughts when you see how today's veterans that are coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are greeted and treated by the American public?

Raschke: I think it's wonderful. I think it's wonderful. I think that going back to something more distant than that, back to the Gulf War when the veterans from the Gulf War came back and they were able to march down, I believe Fifth Avenue, or certainly here in Springfield to have an event at the state capitol building to honor them and their service. I think that's wonderful. I think that's the way it should be. But do I think that because they got that and I didn't, I should resent that? Absolutely not. I just think that's the way all veterans should have been treated. That some of us weren't—so what? It just doesn't really have any effect on me.

DePue: I wonder if you can sum up this way: G ive us a couple lessons that you've learned, not just from Vietnam but from your lifelong experiences in the military, and maybe find some comments to close things up for us.

Raschke: I think that military service in particular—and we could say public service, but I'm going to say military service—is perhaps the highest type of service that one can do. We put our lives on the line. We go into this knowing that the outcomes may not always be good. We go into it knowing that you're going to have separations from your family and loved ones. It's kind of a tough life, but still, I think that it's a very rewarding life. Just to this day, I get somewhat emotional when I hear the National Anthem and pretty much go to pieces over hearing "Taps" sounded at a funeral. It's just a great thing. Being able to be with what I consider some of America's best young people—and I'm talking now the young soldiers—and leading them, I just can't think or remember anything as rewarding. I have so many fond memories of days with them. I think that military service certainly is not right for all, but for those that it is worth, or that have that calling, it is a calling. It is truly a noble and honorable profession.

DePue: Thank you very much, John. I think that's a great way to finish off.

Raschke: Thank you, Mark.

(end of interview #2)