

James Matthew "Jim" Rapp
Veteran

Wayne Clark WC
Kathleen Vogel Matthews KM
Interviewers

With Comments by Mr. C. MC

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Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo New York

James Matthew "Jim" Rapp: JR
Wayne Clark: WC
Kathleen Vogel Matthews: KM
With Comments by Mr. C.: MC

WC: Mr. Rapp, for the record, could you please state your full name and your date and place of birth?

JR: James Matthew Rapp. I was born May Twenty-Eighth, 1930 in Buffalo, New York.

WC: Did you attend school in Buffalo?

JR: Yes.

WC: All the way through high school?

JR: Yes.

WC: And then you went on to college?

JR: I graduated from Buffalo State, just across the street.

WC: And what did you get your degree in?

JR: Education and I have a Master's degree there also.

WC: When and where did you enter the service?

JR: Buffalo, New York. Sixteen July, 1951.

WC: And you went into the Marine Corp?

JR: The Army.

WC: The Army, I'm sorry.

JR: Yes, I was drafted into the Army for the Korean War.

WC: Whereabouts did you go for your basic training?

JR: Well, I might say one more thing before I answer your question.

WC: Sure.

JR: I took my physical the day that McCarther was fired and then I was inducted sometime later, by as I said, Sixteen July, 1951. I was received... I went to the reception area at Fort Douglass, Massachusetts and then we went to Camp Gordon. I took basic training at Camp Gordon, Georgia, now Fort Gordon.

WC: How long was that basic training?

JR: It was eight weeks.

WC: Was that your first time away from home for an extended period?

JR: Yes.

WC: Do you want to talk about your training? What type of rifle training was it?

JR: Well, we were armed with carbines, M1 Carbines, at the time and it was very hot there... very mountainous... a lot of red clay, sand, and I was very fortunate in my service experience. When I finished basic training, I came to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey and I went to one of the longest schools in the Army. I went to the RADAR Repair Course School... thirty-three weeks. It was fifty-five weeks in peace time and they cut it back during the Korean War to thirty-three weeks, so I was... When I finished the RADAR school, I had about a year in the Army 'cause it was the fifteenth of July that we graduated... that was '52. Then I was fortunate again and I was sent to the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project in Sandia Base, New Mexico and that was further training... further education.

WC: Was that RADAR oriented?

JR: Well, the RADAR Repair MOS was what they call a source MOS and this was the special weapons... you can guess what they were and that was an installation that had all the services represented. The Army was there, the Air Force, the Navy, and even a few Marines were at Sandia Base, and they were all part of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project. So, we were there because we had electronics training, and we had a lot of college graduates in the unit... A lot of people with Master's degrees and math and things like that. There was a guy that was concerned with tracking trajectories of weapons with his experience in calculus. His Master's degree was in math. He was very good at that kind of thing, so they were all very educated young men. I was very fortunate to be in that group.

WC: How long were you there for?

JR: Well, just about a year... And then I don't know if this applied to you during Vietnam, but everybody at that time had an eight year obligation... So I had two years of active duty and six years of reserve obligation... And so, I got out in '53 and I didn't go into a reserve unit or National Guard unit at the time, but I think it was '57 that they called me to go for a physical at Fort Niagara and we used to have to have a physical

every four years. So I said, "As long as I have to go for this physical, I might as well get paid for being in the reserve..." So I joined a unit, which was the 98th Signal Company, at the time, which no longer exists.

WC: Now what rank were you when you were discharged from the Army, before you went into the reserves?

JR: From the active Army, I was only a PFC. when I got out, but then I became a Staff Sergeant in the reserve.

WC: And how much time did you spend in the reserves?

JR: Well, I had a total of thirteen years. I had fifteen years for pay purposes and I had some bad experiences I... which caused me to leave the reserves. I don't know... Are you or were you familiar with the Series Ten Programs?

WC: Series Ten, no.

JR: Well, I think it went back to World War II or possibly before, but it was a way of getting a commission and you could do it by correspondence courses. So, I took a lot of correspondence courses, and they count toward your retirement time, but ultimately, I was hoping to get a commission and when I was in the reserve, one of the things I could say is I had all kinds of clearances. To be in the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project, you had to have not only a Military Top Secret Clearance, but you had to have an Atomic Energy Commission Q Clearance, and that helped me when I was in the 98th Signal Company. As I said, that was a part of the 98th Division, which at that time, was an infantry division reserve. And later on, they converted the 98th Division to a training division, but because I had all those clearances, I got into the Army Security Agency reserve, which I liked very much. That was probably the most rewarding experience I had in the reserve. But then, with this training division, I got into a training... comms specialist training regiment, and we went to Fort Dix that year and I went to Radio Operator School... Intermediate Speed Radio Operator Course. Then finally, I ended up in an engineering battalion and that was my last unit in the reserve.

JR: But as I said, I was trying to get this commission and I was working with a civilian technician, and he was looking at all of the papers I had done, and you know I got superior on every one of them and he was saying, "Well you're pretty close to it now, and you'll be getting it in the near future. This paperwork was supposed to come down." But then the Commander of the Battalion... 969th Engineer Battalion was a Lieutenant Colonel and a General... Brigade Commander... and inspected the battalion and somehow or other, this General and this Colonel got into a big dispute. And of course, what was supposed to happen was that, in order for me to get the final OK on this, this Colonel was supposed to sign the papers for me. But the General and the Colonel got into this big argument and the result was that the Colonel was relieved. So, it's a different Battalion Commander. He had been approving it pretty much along the line, but then he was gone, and I didn't get the commission, and I thought, "Well, I spent all this time in the reserve." And I could mention the fact that we had eight children. And of course...

This was in '66 and Vietnam was going on. So I thought, "I put in fifteen years and I have these outside responsibilities aside from the military." And I wasn't too happy with the Army at the time, so I left and that was the end of my military service and a lot of times, I regret that. Later on, I went to Syracuse and I went to work for GE and I was thinking of trying to get into the National Guard there... or the Air National Guard to... you can retire at sixty, but I couldn't get that time you know, so that's the story.

WC: Do you want to talk about... I know you have an interest in history, and you've done some interviewing yourself. Would you care to talk about some of your experiences outside of the military?

JR: Well, I did a lot of traveling when I was working and that same year of '66... I had been in the Buffalo Police Department as a radio repair man right near here, in Delaware Park, and I mentioned that Intermediate Speed Radio Operator Course School that I went to at Fort Dix and that was in 1959 and I had been working for my father after I came out of the military and I had all these responsibilities and I was looking for a floor under my income, so I took that civil service job for the police radio system and I was number one on the civil service list and I was appointed, so I worked at the Police Radio Station for four years from '62 to '66. Then I went to work for Motorola Consumer Products Division of Motorola Incorporated and I worked there... well, it changed from being Motorola and I think maybe that was '72... yeah, I think so. There was a lot of talk... a lot of rumors flying around Motorola that they were going to sell that division of the company and they were talking about Magnavox and... I don't know... other companies in that same business. Well ultimately, they sold the Consumer Products Division... just that division... you know, because Motorola went on and was very successful and is very successful today and they sold that division to Matsushita Electric Industrial Company of Japan and they renamed... they had been calling our color TV sets quasars and what happened was when Matsushita took it over, they called it Quasar Electronics. They were building those sets for a while and I've been in some television dealer's show rooms, and I don't see that name any longer. It's gone and they're primarily in the cell phone business and that kind of thing. They were laying a lot of people off, and I was a survivor for a long time, and finally, it was December of 1974 that I finally was one of those people who were laid off. And then I went into teaching, 'cause I had gone into college before, but I hadn't finished at that time, so I went back to Buffalo State and I got a degree in Education and I taught electronics when I was with Motorola.

JR: So, I taught for six years, and I then went back... I went back into private industry. I went to work for GE and that was my last full-time employment and I worked originally in what was called the PDPO, which was the Projection Display Products Operation. And we built video projectors that would put up pictures that you might see on a movie screen... that big of a picture. That wasn't always the case. You could adjust the size of the picture by moving the projector back and forth and by focusing. And those projectors, when I came there, they were about \$100,000 each... \$150,000 and they went up beyond that because they put a... this projector used a signal light valve... the original black and white projector used a single light valve, which was a different device for display, not a

CRT. And later on, they developed a three light valve projector which was color and that was like \$350,000. So, I was teaching people about the theory and the operation of those projectors and the maintenance of those projectors, and I wrote manuals. I didn't have the title of engineering writer then, but I was writing service and maintenance and theory manuals. And then, I liked to do the writing and I went over to SONAR. I went to the Under Sea Systems Department at GE, and I was an engineering writer there and that was a good job. I liked that, and through the writing, I got to be a part of the in-house newsletter and I was working as a journalist there. And then, I don't know if you're familiar with this at all, but Jack Walsh was the head of GE at the time, and he just decided to abolish the Aerospace Division... and we were part of that Aerospace Division... so it just disappeared. So, I got laid off... everybody got laid off... it was just gone. But I was fortunate enough, once again. I was sixty on May twenty-Eighth, 1990, and I had just qualified to retire from GE, so I was gone... I would've been gone anyway... I would have been laid off. But I thought, "Well I can retire", and GE did a good thing for people in my situation. They would supplement your retirement pay until you started to be able to collect Social Security. I've been retired since 1993. I left GE as a retiree in '93.

WC: How did you get involved with interviewing veterans?

JR: It largely goes back to collecting [unclear] and of course, I was a kid. I was fifteen years old when World War II went, but when I was a kid during the war. I always admired the soldiers... the Armed Forces members, you know... I thought, "Gee, if I was just a little older, I could be a part of this." And of course, I became part of it... five years after World War II ended. I was drafted into the Army, and I wouldn't say I was happy to have gone but I was proud to be a soldier. I was glad to be a soldier and that's why I stayed in the reserve when I didn't have to. I could have just taken my separation, you know, because... they didn't say you're discharged. They would just say, "You're released from active duty and assigned to the reserve." But I didn't have to go to meetings or anything like that, they never insisted upon that, but I just decided to go into a unit, so I had thirteen years of reserve. But I was always interested in history and one of my avid activities were... I was that teenage kid during World War II who was reading Life magazine and following along with the pictures and text, and I was always very interested in history, and particularly, military history. Now you've always collected patches or the... both?

WC: Yeah, just the patches.

JR: Well, I have quite a large number of patches. I got them mostly during World War II and those are more valuable now, because they go back to the original time and there are a lot more because the Army was much larger in those days than it was in recent times. But I've been interested in those kinds of things for a long time, and I'm interested in other people who are interested in them. That's why I belong to [unclear]

WC: How many veterans' interviews have you conducted?

JR: Just this one, yes. I've tried to do others, but so many people say they won't do it. I actually got involved with this interview through bowling. I bowl during the winter months with a group of old men. I'm an old man myself. But seventy-eight, that's not old?

MC: You're mellow with age. I don't mean to interfere; I'm enjoying the conversation. Never old, mellow with age. Carry on, sir.

JR: The first time I went to this bowling group, I met a number of people who were veterans... this Bill Callahan... if you notice the name there. The first time I bowled there, I said, "My name is Jim Rapp." Bill Callahan said, "Do you have any relation to John Rapp?" I said, "Yes, he's my cousin." I mentioned that I'd been working in the Police Department, but not as a law enforcement officer directly, because I worked in Communications at the Radio Station. I had two cousins who were policemen, and there was a third child in that family... a daughter or sister... and she was married to a policeman. There were a lot of contacts with policemen there. So, this Bill Callahan said that he was a police reporter. He had worked for the Courier Express in Buffalo. If you're not from here, you wouldn't recognize the name. There used to be two papers... there used to be more than two in Buffalo. There was the Buffalo Times, there was the Buffalo Evening News which was around for many years, and there was the Buffalo Courier Express, and he was the police reporter for the Courier Express, so that's how we were introduced. He was, of course, the belly torque gunner on his B-17. He was over in North Africa in '42... 12th Air Force. I had heard about this program and that interested me right away and I said, "Bill, would you be interested in being interviewed for this program?" And he agreed to do it. The man who did the video for us was also a World War II veteran... a Seabee. We tried to get them together again, but for example, there's a man who bowls there in that group... and he must be eighty-one now, or possibly eighty-two. He was a marine on Iwo Jima when he was seventeen. I tried to get him to participate, but he wouldn't do it. There was also a man who was there at the time. He was a Colonel in the reserve. I knew him to some degree from the reserve. I was never in a unit that he commanded, but his name was Joe Varga and he was a principal or assistant principal at Kenmore West High School, where all my eight children went. I had seen him around. There was another Colonel who was a principal at one time there. I don't know what happened to him... he may have died... but Joe Vargas is still alive. He's in very poor health and so is his wife, so he doesn't come to bowling anymore. But I said, "Would you allow me to interview you?" He went back into '42 in the Infantry in the Pacific. He was an infantry officer and I thought it would be great if we could get him to tell his story, but he wouldn't do it. He said, "I don't remember that stuff anymore." So, that's how we ended my pre-interview.

WC: Kathleen, do you have any questions?

KM: I don't have any for you.

JR: Are you doing shorthand or do you...?"

KM: I'm doing a longhand version of your... [Laughing]

JR: You're doing very well. [Laughing]

KM: So, I can transcribe you well.

MC: You sir are a very well-spoken man, so there's no trouble with the young lady taking the script down.

WC: Okay, well thank you very much for the interview.

MC: Also, allow me to thank you for the pleasure of being able to sit here and listen to your conversation... your lifestyle. And also, I'd like to put in another compliment. I understand you said you're the father of 8 offspring.

JR: Yes.

MC: You planted the seed well. I hope they've taken after the father. Have you taught them the finer... the better things in life?

JR: Our children have done well. All of our eight children are college graduates. We have one who was a Ph.D... geology. He's a research professor. He's been all over the world. He's currently at the University in Canberra, Australia. He's been in Japan. He's been in Russia. He's been everywhere.

MC: Does he still have difficulty teaching kangaroos there?

JR: We saw a lot of kangaroos. I've been over there. As I said, I did a lot of traveling with GE. I was in Australia on business.

MC: Have you visited your son there in Australia?

JR: Yes, we did.

MC: How many years ago?

JR: Oh, let's see. two or three. And he's been back a couple of times, and we probably will go again. He is the second of our five sons, and as I said, all of our children are college graduates, and several of them have advanced degrees... of course, he's the Ph.D. He went to UB here, as an undergraduate, and then he was working around Pittsburgh... Washington, Pennsylvania. He was going part-time to Carnegie Mellon while he was there.

MC: My son graduated from there as an architect. He's in Pittsburgh now, as a matter of fact, working with an architectural firm.

JR: Well, he got a research grant at RPI. He got his Master's Degree and his Ph.D from RPI, Rensselaer Polytechnic.

WC: Over in Troy.

MC: Getting back to Australia though, if you know your history, and I take it you're a historian. You've got to remember one thing, the majority of people in Australia were outcasts from England.

JR: Convicts, oh yes.

MC: Right, they were undesirables.

WC: Was there anything else you'd like to add?

JR: Well, talking about the size of the family... we have fourteen grandchildren. We have seven granddaughters and seven grandsons, and we just came back recently from having made a trip to North Carolina because our oldest grandchild and granddaughter just graduated from medical school at the University of North Carolina. Her brother... there's another sister between the two of them... but her brother who is the youngest of the three children, who are children of my oldest daughter, he's going to the dental school down there. The middle girl graduated as a civil engineer, but she's now going to pharmacy school.

MC: There's a big demand for pharmaceutical people.

JR: That same week, we drove down... this girl's name is Katie... Katherine... and we drove down to North Carolina. We've been down there before, because now one of our youngest daughters lives down there. But we drove down and Katie graduated on May Eleventh, which was Mother's Day. Then the following day, which of course was Monday, we drove back. We got back here and that Friday we flew to Denver because another grandchild... grandson... was graduated from the University of Colorado at Denver so it was a pretty tiring week for us.

MC: What question I had, [unclear] interested in Denver more than anything else. What do you know about the honor flight? You too, sir. [Looking toward Wayne Clark]

KM: Mr. C... [unclear] just came back from the honor flight to Washington. I'm sorry, I won't be sitting in on yours.

JR: That was about taking the World War II veterans to see the monuments.

WC: Okay, I'm going to cut this right now. Thank you, sir.