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Edward Hatten Oral History Interview

William Davis, Interviewer

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William Davis (WD): This is William Davis interviewing a Alton, a resident of Alton Illinois.
[recording stops and starts again] What's your name?

Edward Hatten (EH): Edward Nelson Hatten.

WD: Where are you from?

EH: Alton, Illinois

WD: How long have you lived in Alton, Illinois?

EH: 64 years.

WD: When I say the term "Cold War," what do you remember?

EH: Um... bomb shelters. [laughs] Uh... I used to live across the street from Alton school and they had this... symbol on the wall that designated it as a fallout-- in fact it was called fallout shelter. And it was designated as a place for us to go. We had air raids, and back then we had air raids. We had sounds like these sirens that would go off in town. And they were usually just... you know... practice and warnings, they weren't real drills, but when they had gone off we were reminded that that was where we were supposed to go. And in the basement of the school, they had stashed all kinds of canned goods and food and stuff down there in case. And we all knew about it. And I [coughs] I also recall the Nike missile bases that used to be up by Pere Marquette. We all knew that those were up there, and they were there, because we were told that Olin was a primary target in the Cold War if they ever launched: one of the targets would be Olin manufacturer where they make ammo and make guns and, not guns but ammo like all the ammunition for the guns. And so, we knew that was supposed to be one of the targets, so everybody around here, when they would hear one of those sirens, we would start thinking about that. Nike... when we would go up here into Marquette, we would look for the Nike missile base. So yeah, there was always a reminder.

WD: How did the fear of Russia affect everyday life?

EH: Me personally, I was a young boy. I don't think it affect me so much, but I could see it going on around us, you know, with the adults and everything. Especially in the news, you'd always, there'd always be talk about it. Now keep in mind we were also getting daily reports about the Vietnam War. So, there was a high alert type mentality in people, all the time, waiting, expecting, worrying about something happening. So, I mean, there was, there was a level of apprehension, I think, on most... at least on the adults' part. Us kids weren't near as informed about it, but we were very aware of it.

WD: Uh... Do you remember anything from school that had to do with the U.S.S.R. or Duck and cover drills?

EH: Yep! Absolutely! The sirens would go off, we'd file into the hallway, and we'd all bundle up like this. In the hallways like: "Oh ok, that's gonna save us?" No, I don't think so [both laugh] Not to be confused with tornado drills, which we had also, but we did, we'd have air raid drills. And that's, you know, when you have those kinds of thing when you're a kid, it... it does make you ask questions, make you wonder; but I don't know that we took it all that serious, we just did what we were supposed to do.

WD: Uh... what was your reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

EH: Oh, it was cool. It was excellent. [both laugh] It was exciting to see something like that, something you don't think would ever change changed.

WD: What would that be?

EH: The Berlin wall came down.

WD: Oh... got ya...

EH: And that separation was gone.

WD: Uh, unrelated, but do you remember anything about the space race?

EH: Oh yeah, yeah. I used to sit in my... my window upstairs and watch for Sputnik. You could see sputnik go by. A little white dot in the sky. And we used to sit up at night and watch for Sputnik to go by. Russians had the first one up and so we used to watch, and we'd think to ourselves, and we'd say, "and they've already got one up, we gotta get one up too." Yeah, I remember Sputnik real well. [both laugh]

WD: Do you have any other stories or any other information that you'd like to share about the Cold War?

EH: [coughs] No, like I said, as children we weren't really... we were aware, but it was because parents made us aware, and because we saw the signs and stuff, and we would hear the reports on the news and all, but as far as anything overtly actually happening; nothing really ever happened. Just a lot of talk and a lot of concern but nothing really ever happened not that I can recall. At some point in time for some reason or other it just became a mute thing, in a way. Everybody quit talking about it. We just moved on and carried on.

WD: So, if I remember correctly, you were a veteran?

EH: Yes. I *am* a veteran.

WD: Still a veteran, oh [both laughs] I'm sorry. [still laughing] you were in the *military*.

EH: Yes sir.

WD: Uh... was that during the Cold War period? Or do you think that the Cold War at all affected your time in the military?

EH: I was in '73, '74, and I don't remember much about the Cold War during that time. It was all about Vietnam, you know. And the threat of communism spreading over in the far east, and that was the big threat; that communism was going to take over the far east and they would have a firm hold over there, and that gives them even more clout and more control to do things. So, in that sense, we were there to stop the spread of communism. Which was the threat of the Cold War: that they were going to spread communism everywhere. So yeah, I guess in a sense that's what it was, but I didn't think of it so much as part of the Cold War. Vietnam seemed to be a separate issue in my mind.

WD: Now, you've brought up Vietnam a few times. As it is part of the Cold War, what were your thoughts on it in general? Such as the politics?

EH: My thoughts changed a lot over the course of time. Originally my thoughts were, you know, we're being threatened in some way, and we need to defend ourselves. But as I got older and became more politically involved and heard more information, it became apparent that the war was really a political war. It was just about the politics of democracy and communism and who was going to have the domain and the control there. And in the meantime, all the civilians were being squashed in the middle.

WD: Yeah.

EH: Two governments striving for supremacy and civilians and citizens getting crushed in the middle. Not a whole lot different than the politics now-a-days.

WD: [laughs]

EH: They sure make things handy, don't they? [in reference to recording device]

WD: Yeah. ... I think that's all I needed.

EH: Okay. Well if you come up with anything else you need to ask me, anything else, feel free to call, okay?

WD: Thank you very much.

EH: No problem. And you're doing this for a history class?

WD: Yes I am.

EH: So you guys talking about the Cold War in history?

WD: Yeah.