

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RICHARD B. EAGER
Intelligence Officer, USA, World War II and Korea
1996

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Eager, Richard B., (1922-). Oral history interview, 1996.
User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Master Copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Richard B. Eager, an Evansville, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a German language intelligence officer in the United States during World War II and his post-war role in Germany. Eager comments on the Enlisted Reserve Corps, basic training at Camp Wheeler (Georgia) and the regional differences there, German language training with the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Clark College (Massachusetts), and intelligence operations at Camp Ritchey (Maryland). Organized into a casual unit in 1945 he was stationed at Schlangenbad (Germany) and later outside Frankfurt (Germany). He relates joining the Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) and the mission of the CIC. He details his duties including censoring mail; as well as finding, capturing, and interrogating suspected Nazis. He mentions cooperation between the German police and American forces, monitoring communists, and contact with Russian personnel. He describes his return home on ship carrying GI's convicted of crimes, use of the GI Bill for law school, and membership in the VFW and American Legion. He briefly relates his Korean War service, and comments on the differences between World War II veterans and Vietnam veterans.

Biographical Sketch

Eager (1922-) served as an intelligence officer with the 970th CIC Detachment in Germany. He was honorably discharged from WWII service in 1947, achieving the rank of First Lieutenant. Eager later joined the Army Reserves and served stateside during the Korean War. He was discharged from service in 1952.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2002.
Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002

Interview Transcript

- Mark: Okay, today's date is May 22, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview over the telephone this afternoon with Mr. Richard B. Eager, of Evansville, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War, and also of the Korean War. Good afternoon. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.
- Eager: Good afternoon.
- Mark: I appreciate it. Let's start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941?
- Eager: Well, I was born in Oak Park, Illinois, but that is because my mother went to her home in Chicago to await the birth. Really, I am a life-long resident of Wisconsin. My father is, and that is somewhat unusual in that I am still a life-long resident.
- Mark: So, you grew up in Evansville, then?
- Eager: Grew up in Evansville. Went to school here through high school, and then went to Williams College, in Williamstown, Mass., for college.
- Mark: I see.
- Eager: Go ahead.
- Mark: I was going to say, you must have graduated from high school in about 1939?
- Eager: '40.
- Mark: And so, you were on the college-bound track then, by this point?
- Eager: Yes.
- Mark: Okay. And so you went out to Massachusetts. To study. And World War II happened.
- Eager: That's right.
- Mark: Do you recall hearing the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?
- Eager: Yes, I do. It was Sunday afternoon, and it was, I think, I believe, it was about two

o'clock in the afternoon. I was in my room, I guess, probably studying, and I think I heard it on the radio.

Mark: As a young draft-age man, did you expect that once we got involved in a war, that it would have some impact on your life, and how did your life change as a result of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Eager: Well, I don't know if it immediately changed. Of course, thought was given to whether you would be involved yourself. I don't know if that was immediate, but I guess that was quickly recognized. And I enlisted in the Enlisted Reserve Corps in August or '42. At college, there. But was not immediately activated until March, '43. So I finished my junior year on an accelerated basis, and then went home. I guess it was indicated at that time we were about to be called. So, we went home to Wisconsin and waited here, I don't know, a month or so. And then was called.

Mark: Okay. So, you went off to basic training, it was in 1943?

Eager: Yea, I reported first to Fort Custer, in Michigan, which was, I guess, the assignment center. And then was sent to, I was interviewed there. We had a friend of the family who was, I believe, a colonel, at that time. And he had indicated that he might be of some assistance. Seeing that I got assigned to some branch that I might be interested in. And I do remember talking to him after I got there. And I was uncertain as to what it might be, and asked him, and he said, "Well, I think it might be good to start in the infantry." Which certainly was not unusual. And I guess I went along with that. And then was sent for basic training to Camp Wheeler, outside of Macon, Georgia.

Mark: Now, I went out to basic training, myself. That was what, about forty years after you did. There are certain adjustments a young person has to make going into the service. Did you find military life particularly rigorous? Or what were some of the things that struck you most about getting into this new life style?

Eager: No, I don't know as I recall any shattering problems.

Mark: Well, for example, some veterans that I talked to mention that some of the language was rather harsh. Not what they were used to at home. Some sort of the social adjustments that one needs to make.

Eager: Well, I was only for a short period at Fort Custer, and I guess, primarily, that was a waiting period. I don't have any particular recollections of contact there except this interview with the colonel about what sort of an assignment I would like. In Georgia, we had sort of a mixed unit, that is, as far as the geographical location.

- Mark: Well, that was going to be one of my questions, actually. Now, you had traveled perhaps a bit more than many young men at the time did. When you talk about the mix of people from geographic regions, why don't you explain to me what it is you mean? And how all these people from different regions got along.
- Eager: Well, I think we had a very mixed group. That is, I think we had a number of college students, such as myself. I wouldn't think they were the majority. But then we had, you know, not a great number, I would say, the majority non-college students. And they were mostly, I think, from the South, including the college students, and maybe from the East. I remember there were a number of them from West Virginia on the Ohio River. And, because I didn't go on with them, I've often wondered what experience they had later. But, I guess I would use the term, there were some red-necks there.
- Mark: There were some red-necks there?
- Eager: Yea.
- Mark: I see.
- Eager: And, well, another thing that sort of amused me was, the infantry training course is sort of rigorous. I guess my call-waiting is still coming in, but I will ignore it. That buzzing. Do you hear it?
- Mark: No, I didn't hear it.
- Eager: I guess it just rings on my phone. I'll ignore it. I was somewhat amused — I guess I shouldn't say amused — that the northern boys could seem to stand the hot weather down there, in the red clay of Georgia, better than the southern boys. Because when we had the forced marches, and so on, a number of them would pass out on the way. Particularly if they were older, you know, in their thirties, or so. Another thing that I remember about the basic training was that there were German POW's there. At that time, all ready, who, I presume, were mostly captured in Africa, and sent over. And they were a pretty good looking bunch, you know, healthy, and sort of cocky. Because it hadn't been decided then who was going to win the war.
- Mark: And were they performing duties? Or did you just happen to see them on the other side of the fence? I know, eventually, they put them to work.
- Eager: I'm not sure about that. We'd see them marching around in the camp, and I suppose they were locked in some place. And had some duties. I think I've learned later, you know, that they were used to do, I guess, if they volunteered, to

do farm work. But I'm not sure about that.

Mark: Yea. I suppose you were a little busy at the time.

Eager: Yea.

Mark: I want to get back to this red-neck comment there, for a minute. This sort of suggests a little bit of regional tensions, I guess you might say. Was there such a thing? I mean, were some of the southern boys still fighting the Civil War, or that sort of thing?

Eager: No, I don't recall that so much. Generally, I would say, we all got along quite well. I remember we had a very imposing platoon sergeant there who had a long German name, and who was very spit-and-polish, and very impressive, and he was sort of, I think he was a little disposed to be critical of the college boys. But I think he was doing his job. But I don't know as we really, you know, were, certainly we were not overly trained. Considering what would have come. Although I never ended up in combat, myself. But I think they were, if anything, somewhat slack, although he was very, very demanding. Much more so than the platoon lieutenant.

Mark: Yea. Some people don't always hold up well to the sort of military discipline. Was there, were there people you trained with, who couldn't hack it, as they might say?

Eager: Well, I don't have any specific recollection of that. I think he was critical, undoubtedly, of those who didn't meet his standards. And I remember he snapped at me two or three times. I forget about what. No, I don't know of anyone.

Mark: Okay. And so, this training lasted how long? And then where did you go after that?

Eager: I think it was three weeks, or three months, thirteen weeks. And just about at the end of the training, the Army Specialized Training Program was inaugurated. And one of the specialties was German Aryan Language. And I volunteered to do that.

Mark: For what reason?

Eager: Well, I was interested in it. And I remember taking, they had a board there, of officers, and I suppose some people who could speak German. One of the things they asked the candidates who were coming to be interviewed, to say something in German. Of course, I had German in high school, a couple of years, and a couple of years in college. But, as was typical then, nobody ever spoke the language. So,

you know, it was pretty much reading knowledge. And nobody ever expected to ever use it again. So the only thing I could think of was, I said, "Ich bin in Camp Wheeler." Which wasn't very impressive, I'm sure, but in any event, they took me in. And I was assigned to a German-area language unit, at Clark University, at Worcester, Mass., where I was sat after several intermediate stops getting there.

Mark: In the AST Program, you went to college and basically just took college courses. You were in the army.

Eager: Yes, that's right.

Mark: Why don't you describe some of the courses you had, and how did army life affect the way you studied? I mean, you were in college, but yet you were still in the army, and I suspect it was kind of a strange combination of both worlds.

Eager: Well, yea. I don't believe it was as rigorous. I mean, there wasn't a constant emphasis on discipline, or anything like that. I think there was only one officer there who was in charge of the unit. But it was more like a college atmosphere. We all went to classes and, of course, there was an intensive course in German, and geography, culture. That sort of thing. Military, German military stuff.

Mark: So, were there regular undergraduates on campus, at all? Or was it a lot of young army guys such as yourself in school at that time?

Eager: If there were, I don't remember them. I would think probably there were some. I guess I'm not sure.

Mark: So, how long did you stay at Clark?

Eager: Well, I was trying to remember that. I moved down here. I was there from, I guess, mid-summer, '43, to first part of '44. And I do remember that was closed down. The program was. And I think that had a direct relationship to the need for more manpower in Europe.

Mark: Right.

Eager: And I think there was public criticism about all these fellows going to school while, you know, the rest of them were in the trenches. And dying. So they did shut it down, and reassigned the whole bunch.

Mark: And where were you reassigned?

Eager: Well, I — it wasn't very clear. I guess, I went, as I recall, to Camp Crowder, in

Missouri. But only briefly. And after a couple of very brief stops at other units, why, I don't know, I went to Warrington, Virginia, which was the Army Signal Intelligence School. Which was, oh, I suppose, fifty miles outside of Washington, D. C., in a very historic area. And there we studied cryptanalysis and cryptology, mostly.

Mark: And how long did that training last?

Eager: I remember they had a facility there. They had a huge radio facility there which could pick up Europe there. Although we didn't hear it, ourselves. We went to, again, it was sort of a school situation.

Mark: Yea.

Eager: And we were there, oh, until we completed that course, in '44. Must have been about the middle of '44, when the whole class was assigned. And again, a number of them, I think, were assigned to units going to Europe. But, again, I was not. So I went to, why, I don't know, went down to Shepherd Field, in Texas. But just very briefly. And then was reassigned, again, back to Camp Ritchey, in Maryland, which is just outside of Washington, in the mountains, there. And that, again, was intelligence operations. And I stayed there until the end of the war, when everybody in the unit, or in the camp, there, who could speak a word of German, was packaged up and, they, what, what do they call that word? Not an organized unit but—

Mark: I know what you are referring to, but the word escapes me.

Eager: Casual. Casual company, or unit. And sent to Europe.

Mark: And this was when?

Eager: This was in the spring of '45. Just as the war ended, because we went to, I think the embarkation point was some place outside of New York City. And I do remember distinctly that we were the first group to go on the Queen Elizabeth without having blackout lights. Which was in June, of '45.

Mark: So, had V-E Day happened by this time, already?

Eager: Yes.

Mark: Okay.

Eager: It had just happened.

Mark: So, how was your trip on that ship?

Eager: Well, the trip was uneventful. And it wasn't crowded, at all. Of course, it's a huge ship. And I guess, you know, when you read about the other ways they packed them in, it was nothing like that.

Mark: I've heard some horror stories about the ship over. But your ship seems to be a little bit more luxurious than most.

Eager: Coming back on a troopship a couple of years later, it was bad. Well, it was heavily loaded, but it was rough, too. Everybody got sick.

Mark: So, you got to Europe and where were you assigned?

Eager: Well, I think I, we were, first we landed in Scotland and entrained there, and went down through Scotland and England to a camp outside of London. And I remember a number of the boys took the opportunity to go into London, although we weren't supposed to. But I didn't do that. And, then, after, I don't know, two or three weeks, we went over the Channel to France, to some camp there. And I remember one thing very sure, I remember about that. Going up a mess line one day, I heard an awful argument. And apparently some enlisted man was really chewing out a master sergeant. And I guess the thing had to do with the enlisted man, who was of minor grade, had been in combat, and he wasn't going to take any guff from the sergeant, who had not. So, it was quite an argument. Any event, from there, after, I don't know how many days, we got on box cars again, open cars, and went over to Germany. I think through Kaiserslautern. And we ended up in a town, bad town, called Bad Schlangenbad.

Mark: It's right near Wiesbaden.

Eager: And there we were pretty much held, and all the intelligence agencies came there to get people for their particular units. The OSS, CIC, which I ended up in, and various other units, AVO, I don't know what all. I remember being interviewed by the OSS man, but was taken by the Counter-Intelligence Corps.

Mark: Now, this is where you kind of lose me, here. I haven't interviewed anyone who has done work like you before. So, if you would, perhaps, describe the difference between the OSS and the CIC. What were the various missions they were in, and eventually, what was your mission when you were eventually assigned to the CIC and got to work?

Eager: Well, of course, I didn't have much of an idea, and we didn't receive any further

training. After being taken by CIC, we were, I forget how, I think driven in a truck way down to Munich, outside of Munich, and from there, which must have been some headquarters, we went to our first assignment, directly. And that was with Krietz Guddingen, which is outside of Frankfurt. Just northwest of Frankfurt. The OSS, of course, was the secret agency. I don't know. They did a lot of spy work, and so on. I think it was generally of a higher echelon. The Counter-Intelligence Corps, as the name implies, was to protect the forces from any forces coming in. Although our first year was spent almost exclusively chasing and catching Nazis. And the situation changed after one year to where we were really protecting ourselves against the Russians. And their intelligence operations. So I was there for two years, and I came in as an enlisted man, but they offered a commission if you would stay an additional year. Which I accepted. And I was then given a commission as a second lieutenant.

Mark: Yea. So, I wouldn't want to be in the position of asking you to divulge any national secrets. But I am interested in what, some more specifics on what it was that your job was, and that's a very applicable question to ask, but describe a typical day, or what it was that you were doing.

Eager: Well, as a field agent, one thing about the Counter-Intelligence Corps which was interesting and, of course, appreciated, was the fact that we didn't wear any rank. And that was primarily to prevent interference with our job by higher brass. And I can remember that I was somewhat impressed talking to a — we had an artillery battalion stationed in this German town of Budigen which had a German barracks there. So it was a natural to place one of our units there. And I was called in, I know, by the lieutenant colonel in charge of the unit several times, at the officer's club there. And, at that time I was still privately an enlisted man. Although we didn't wear rank, we wore the uniform without rank. And he was concerned, I remember one time, about the fact that there were brawls, I guess, down in the town between German boys and the GIs quarreling, or getting drunk, and so on, quarreling about the girls. And he thought that I should do something about that. Although I don't know very specific about what could be done.

Mark: Yea, I was going to say, like what?

Eager: Yea. What could be done about that? It wasn't really that. We also conducted raids from there. The artillery battalion was later replaced by, they renamed the units, it was called the Constabulary. Which were rapid forces. And we'd go out on raids, you know. They'd say, "We're going over to this town in the county. Priecx is county, in German. And they'd go over to some neighboring town at dawn and, you know, check all the houses. And roust everybody out. And look for Nazi material.

- Mark: Someone would have to have given you a tip. That so-and-so was a suspected Nazi.
- Eager: Well, I don't think it was initiated by us. I think it was initiated by the Constabulary. By them. We were, just, the natural one to take along because of the language facility, and so on. Although that is another thing. Initially, and my language wasn't that good. So we had interpreters assigned to us. But they were foreign nationals. I had a Dutch boy. Of course, you know, Dutch is very close to German. So that was no problem for him. He was about our age, and a very nice young man. And he did, well, we'd do a lot of interrogating. We had mail censorship, and a lot of our jobs came out of the headquarters, came out of Frankfurt. Which was the headquarters. They'd get, there was a mail censorship operation. And I remember one of the interesting experiences I had was that the famous Pastor Neimuller lived there. There was a castle in the town, and he was living there at that time. And apparently he had written a letter to Spain, or someplace, and there was something the censor didn't like about it. So he was — I was ordered to interview him about that. And I remember that. Of course, I recognized the name. I think even at that time. You know who he was?
- Mark: I think so.
- Eager: He was a famous World War I submarine commander but was an anti-Nazi, and was a pacifist. Well, not a pacifist. He was an anti-Nazi and was willing to stand up against the Nazis. And was punished for it. I think, put in a concentration camp, but he survived. But, as I recall the interview, he was very relaxed about it, almost — well, I'm searching for a word. A very passive, he didn't really seem to be excited about the thing at all. It wasn't very consequential. And I don't think we did anything about it, except probably I sent in a routine report. I guess it was only interesting because he was a famous man. I guess another interesting experience was probably, well, I would say, key experience I had, was that one day we would get information from our headquarters but sometime from the Germans, and it was reported that a Gestapo member was living on a farm in our area, there. So the police were sent out. The police work was done by the Germans. But they were very, well, obedient. And disciplined, as you might expect. I guess, before I forget about it, I must say that the fear that there would be an active underground over there was certainly greatly exaggerate. Because we had no trouble.
- Mark: I was going to ask you your assessment of de-Nazification. Perhaps we should—
- Eager: Oh, de-Nazification.
- Mark: Perhaps we should just go with that, because we're heading in that direction,

anyway.

Eager: Yea,

Mark: There wasn't as much de-Nazification—

Eager: Well, I think it was pretty well ignored by the time I got there. Which must have been late summer. I don't know when it was officially lifted, but my recollection is, nobody paid any — well, I'm talking about association with the Germans, girls, and so on. That was blatantly ignored.

Mark: The issue of fraternization, you mean?

Eager: The fraternization, yea. The de-Nazification, yea, we worked very, very strongly on that. We were sent lists of all the Nazi organization, which was very complete. Every town had a leader, and a cashier, and a clerk. And so on. So, we'd go to every village and they were what was called an automatic arrest category. So they were, we didn't actually arrest them on the spot, but if they were there, even in, you know, villages of five hundred people. Although I would say the biggest town, the county seat there, Budigen, was maybe seven or eight thousand people. And we would order them to, because they had to be interned, at least initially. Although it was overwhelming for the army. They were ordered in by us to the local jail on a specific day, and then the army would come in their trucks and haul them all off. And that was a very distinct memory of mine, seeing all these people streaming in. Most of them had to walk in. And, you know, saying goodbye. They didn't know what was going to happen to them. Well, practically nothing happened to them. They were — unless they discovered somebody, you know, who was a war criminal, or something. I don't think anybody was. Not the people that I ordered in. So, they were back within a month or so.

Mark: So, there were, there was a substantial Nazi element remaining in Germany after the war?

Eager: There was, you say?

Mark: Yea. I'm asking. I mean, it sounds like you stayed pretty busy hunting down Nazis.

Eager: Yea. Yea. As I say, we spent the first year pretty much doing that. And looking for Nazis. And interrogating them. But I interrupted there to tell you about these automatic arrest categories that we handled. To tell you about another story. This Gestapo man, we sent the German police out there, and they brought him in. And the German, not the German but the Dutch interpreter and myself questioned him,

of course, to identify him, because he denied that he was a member of the Gestapo. And he had a good story, and one of the interrogation rituals was, of course, to make him repeat the story a couple of times. So they didn't, see, if they remembered anything. And, finally, after he denied everything, and repeated his story a couple of times, I said, "Well, we've got an order here on you from headquarters in Frankfurt and we will simply have to turn you over to the French." And, with that, he confessed immediately, on the spot, that he had been a member, because he knew that the French wouldn't be as easy on him as the Americans. But he stayed there [There is a ten second pause on the tape.] He was put in jail there. And he stayed there for quite a long while. And he had worked in France for some time. Well, I guess for quite a long while. And he was interesting in that he would give me reports about the other occupants of the jail. And, you know, if there was anybody that I might be interested in, he would report that to me. And, we really, in a sense, we became sort of friendly, and I was sort of trusting about him. I know, I let him out to get a haircut, and so on. And, then, all of a sudden, one day, I know this was after three or four months, I had a call from Frankfurt and they said they were sending a British unit down to pick him up. So, of course, that was an order, so that was fine. I remember, this British sergeant came in. I don't know if he was alone or not. And we went down to the jail and walked into the cell. And he was sitting on his double-decker bunk there. And the British sergeant didn't say a word to him. He just had me identify him. And he put the handcuffs on him. And that was it. Took him off. Well, apparently he had been involved in some war crimes, in that they had killed some British paratroopers. And they were tried, up in the British Zone. And he wrote a letter, and it came to me down through channels, you know, asking for a recommendation. And I wrote back, and told them that he had been helpful, and furnished all these reports about triangulation and signal intelligence when they were chasing the French underground to ground. But, apparently, it was unavailing, and I never got any further information about it. But they were convicted, and hung. So, that was sort of an interesting story.

Mark: Yea. In terms of the loyalty of the Germans. Loyalty, I guess, is the term we have to use.

Eager: What's that?

Mark: Well, in terms of the loyalty of the German people, you had German police forces and that sort of thing assisting you when you were hunting down Nazis, did you perhaps wonder, sometimes, if the police, the German police, were really helping you, or if the information you were getting about Nazis was always accurate?

Eager: Well, no, I had the impression — well, they weren't really, you know, spying for us, or anything, but if we had to arrest somebody, we would just tell them to go do

it.

Mark: And they would?

Eager: And they would be very obedient about that. They were well disciplined. Of course, by their own people. No, I didn't think — well, you'd have some people who would give you information, but, I think, we had a lot of references through various other agencies, mail censorship, or tips. Well, I guess, to pick up somebody like this fellow, you know, I still remember his name. It was Richard Schnur. That came, that tip probably came from a German. Yes, it would have to be, because he was hiding out, as many of them did, on farms, you know.

Mark: Was there a way, perhaps, to tell which Germans would be more likely to be Nazis? I mean, like a profile, or that sort of thing? Who remained hard-core Nazis after the war?

Eager: Well, I think I share the general feeling of most people at that time that, you know, it was always somebody else. They certainly weren't, they didn't know what was going to happen to them. They weren't about to say, to freely admit they were Nazis. Although I remember another person who was called in one time, was a secretary, a woman, in a Gestapo office. And she was very, it sticks in my memory, she was very hostile. Which was not the normal situation, you know. Normally, they might be fearful, something like that. But there wasn't any, at least, in our unit, there was never any violence involved. There was no hitting, no striking. Whether there was in other locations, of course, I don't know.

Mark: In terms of the persons you arrested, and that sort of thing, was there a kind of social profile that would indicate that someone would be more likely to remain a hard-core Nazi? Would they be young people? Or older people? Or could you sort of come up with a profile of someone like that? You know, for example, would veterans of the army be more likely to remain loyal to the Nazi cause?

Eager: Well, we didn't have much contact with the army personnel. I suppose that's largely because of the reason that they were really doing the fighting, and they weren't in the secret organizations, the Gestapo, or the SS, or things like that. And you would hear from, I remember another thing we heard, that one of the Gestapo agencies that was retreating as the Americans came into Frankfurt, they fled out through this area, and were still up to their, you know, killing people, refugees, and so on. I was going to investigate that once, but never had the time.

Mark: Now, as I think you mentioned, eventually your work sort of switched from being, from hunting down Nazis, to communists.

- Eager: That's right.
- Mark: Describe that transformation.
- Eager: Well, I guess I've got to say that my job changed, too. I was pulled in by the commander of our unit, who was a West Point candidate. I was in the 970th Region, it was called, the CIC, and that was based in Bad Nauheim, which is a famous resort town, north of Frankfurt. Very lovely town. And our commander, somebody else we had in there who was an operations officer, left, or something, so he called me in, and I was reassigned from the field to the headquarters there, as operations officer. So, I wasn't out in the field at that time. I was, you know, controlling the agents who were going out. Into the field. So my immediate contacts were sort of lost at that point. Mostly handling the reports and administration. But I do remember talking to the local communist party leader there, who was a very — his name was Green, I remember — and a very intelligent, pleasant sort of a fellow. I don't recall any other specific communist things, and I don't think there was much infiltration, except we were allowing the communists to be organized there. And I think, initially, you know, nobody knew we were going to have the Cold War.
- Mark: Well, see, that is what I was wondering. I mean, from your vantage point, on the ground there in Germany, could you see the Cold War coming? Yourself?
- Eager: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. And we had very little contact, at least I did, with Russian personnel. Of course, another very common feature there at the time were the huge refugee camps. You'd see a lot of them around. I don't recall going to a camp. There were a lot UNRRA personnel who were administering those camps, and returning all these people, you know. And there were clashes between the displaced persons and the Germans, from time to time, but that was really out of my, I wasn't really concerned with that.
- Mark: And, so you left Germany then, when? About 1947, if I'm not mistaken?
- Eager: '47. June of '47. And we went back. Came out of Bremen, and one interesting thing about that, we were put on an army troop ship, and when we got to Bremen, there was a big train pulled up alongside the ship. Which turned out to be an army prison train returning convicted GIs to the United States.
- Mark: Convicted of what? General crime type of things?
- Eager: Yea. Rape, murder, God knows what all. So, they were locked in on the ship. And I had been ordered to take some maps back to Washington, deliver them there. And I remember one amusing thing. Of course, there was what they call a troop

commander, who was an army person on the ship who had to organize everything. And after, I don't know, the first or second day, I got called in to do something. He wanted me to go down in the hold where they had these prisoners and get one or two of them, and go up and clean the gangways, I guess they were called. You know, the stairs. So I went down and I had a guard with me, a GI who was armed. And brought him up there. We told him, I said, "Go ahead. Start cleaning." And he said, "Forget it." Apparently he had some severe sentencing, and he said, "I'm not going to do it. You can't punish me." Or, you know, "Can't punish me any worse than I am being punished." So, he refused. So I went back and reported that to the colonel, I guess it was. And he said, "Well, I'll take care of that." So, apparently, he put him down in the depths of the hold, where, I guess, it must have been wet, cold, and bad. Because the next day, he came up, and he was willing to work.

Mark: He had a change of heart.

Eager: Yea. When we got to New York we had another little scare because a couple of the prisoners escaped. And, I guess, I think the New York police picked them up on the highway right away. So we went to, I went to Washington, and then back to, I think, Kilmer, New Jersey, for my discharge.

Mark: Now, when it came to your discharge, was your time up? And did you get a free and clear discharge, or did you do the reserves, or what did you do?

Eager: No, that's right. I stayed in the reserves. Signed up for the reserves and was in California, taking the bar there, and was recalled for the Korean. And went back to the East, to, what is the name of the CIC camp. Fort Hollabird, in Baltimore.

Mark: In Maryland, yea.

Eager: And there, however, because I had married a German national, a girl from Frankfurt, they apparently decided I shouldn't be in that anymore. So I was reassigned to a lesser level. Still in intelligence, at Fort Meade, in Maryland, which was, oh, I don't know, lower level of intelligence. But stayed in the country all the time. Went to school for some time out at Riley. Again, for some reason, was never assigned to go over.

Mark: I'd like to go back for a couple of minutes, to about 1948-48, when you first got out of the service. Now, as you mentioned, you stayed in the reserves but you didn't stay active duty, when it came to getting the rest of your life back on track, what were your priorities, and what did you do? For example, I assume you finished college.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

You went back to school?

Eager: No, I didn't have to go back to college because Williams, on the basis of all the educational work I had done in the service, they gave us our degree. The fourth year, which was sort of a break.

Mark: So you had your degree by that time.

Eager: Yes.

Mark: So it was time for you to go out and find work.

Eager: Yes, that's right. Well, then I went to law in Wisconsin.

Mark: You went to law school?

Eager: Went to law school.

Mark: Did you use the GI Bill to finance that?

Eager: Oh, yea. Yes, I did.

Mark: Was it an effective program? Did it cover your expenses and—

Eager: Well, yea. I think it was very effective and I think generally covered it, although I think I didn't live in Madison as much. I think I commuted between here and Madison most of the time. Although part of the time I lived up there. And, no, I thought it paid most of our expenses. Certainly on that limited basis, living at home. Because it paid all the college tuition, and books, and so on. And I think gave us, I don't know, a hundred dollars a month, or something like that. So, yea, no, I think that was a good program.

Mark: So, you were on campus about '48, '49. How long did it take you to finish your law degree?

Eager: It was about '50. I graduated in '50.

Mark: Okay. That's a little later than a lot of veterans, although there were still many veterans, I would imagine. I would be interested if you could describe sort of the social body and how much influence the veteran still had on campus at that time.

- Eager: Well, I would assume, you know, there must have been an awful lot of veterans there. I would assume that the bulk were veterans. But I wasn't interested in, didn't participate in any campus politics, or anything. And I was somewhat detached because I was living out of Evansville.
- Mark: In terms of your law school colleagues, though, were a lot of them vets as well?
- Eager: Oh, yea. Of course, I was somewhat late because I had stayed the additional year in Germany. I didn't get back until '47. And three years of law school.
- Mark: Right.
- Eager: Then went to California. And there married. And got recalled in '50.
- Mark: In terms of other adjustments that you had to make, getting back into civilian life, now you weren't a combat veteran?
- Eager: No.
- Mark: So a lot of the physical and psychological, and those sorts of things may or may not apply to you. But did you have some adjustments that you needed to make to get back into civilian life? Or was it a smooth transition for you?
- Eager: Well, I think I was somewhat tempted to stay in service because I had a very interesting job. And, it was enjoyable. You were traveling and seeing a lot of things. So I was somewhat tempted. I don't know what convinced me to come back but I'm sure that was the right decision. And go to school rather than stay in there as a career officer. Although I was somewhat remiss in later years because after the Korean thing, my wife insisted that I drop out. By that time I had almost ten years in. Which was a mistake. I should have stayed another ten years, you know, and gotten retirement.
- Mark: I've just one last area I want to cover and it may or may not even apply to you. And that involves veterans organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of a group like the Legion, or the VFW, or any of the big groups?
- Eager: Oh, yea. I've been a life-long member of the Legion and the VFW.
- Mark: When did you join these groups, and for what reason?
- Eager: Well, I think I joined them shortly after I got back here. Certainly after law school. After I permanently settled here. I came back here after the Korean War, came

back to Evansville, and I went into practice here. And I presume, you know. was then interested in the community and joined the organizations, and have been a strong member ever since. And very partial to the veterans.

Mark: Yea. Did you join largely under social reasons? To talk to other veterans? Or was it sort of political advocacy? Did you agree with the positions that the Legion or the VFW were advocating? Or were there some other reasons that you joined these groups?

Eager: Well, I suppose it was mixed. You know, I was a veteran. And I think it was also the thing to do. And I think most veterans belonged at that time. Although certainly that is not the case today. But I think there was a lot of strong members, and I think, generally, I supported their political goals. Which primarily was to help the veterans, although sometimes you wonder if they overdo it a little.

Mark: Are you what you'd call an active member? Do you attend meetings, and do you hold offices, and that sort of thing?

Eager: I have. Well, I just go occasionally now.

Mark: Overall, it's been fifty years now, since World War II. It's almost approaching fifty years since you have been out of the service. How have those organizations changed over time? For example, have the Korean veterans, or the Viet Nam veterans, change those organizations and its focus or its make up or did it seem pretty consistent to you?

Eager: Well, I think one of the things that I wonder about, and, you know, I guess other people have expressed this, is in World War II, practically everybody was in the war. And, of course, it was successful. And then it was a matter of pride to have been in. And I don't think it was difficult for us to understand the Viet Nam veterans who, you know, why is it that it was such a bitter experience and they are always complaining about this or that. That is hard to understand. We didn't have any of that with World War II veterans. Although, well, I, you know, I guess I was going to say that the Viet Nam veterans, you'd think, had a more difficult time. And maybe they did. But there were a lot of World War II casualties, too. And I assume, when you think about the people, well, I do, anyway, fighting in the jungles of New Guinea and so on, if you have read any of that stuff. It was really, what is that famous author that wrote the book about MacArthur?

Mark: Manchester.

Eager: Manchester. Yea, that is really hair-raising. And, of course, Wisconsin was very prominent in that.

Mark: Thirty-Second Division, and all.

Eager: And there were a number of people from Evansville, here, and Janesville who were lost over there, captured. Corregidor and the Phillipines. I was getting a little astray from your question, there.

Mark: No. Not at all. I am interested in veterans affairs, and so that is not astray at all, actually.

Eager: Well, I am glad that you reminded me of that. I was beginning to think you were a professor type.

Mark: No, no. So, those are all the questions I have, though. Is there anything you'd like to add, or anything you think we skipped over?

Eager: Well, let's see. I did make. I think we did pretty well cover it. No, I guess, I think that is pretty well it. Except I guess I would mention also this town where I was stationed for the first year, there, in the CIC. Butigen was a very interesting town, with a medieval castle and I've been back there several times. And it is worth seeing.

Mark: Has it changed a lot?

Eager: No. Well, I think, you know, it has grown up around there. Of course they maintain the castle now, for the tourists. Okay, I guess that is it.

Mark: Yea. No, this was very interesting. I thank you for taking an hour out of your day.

Eager: All right.

[End of Interview.]