

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Jerome C. Eckers
Hospital Corpsman, Navy, World War II and Korean War
1996

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Eckers, Jerome C. (b. 1926). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy : 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy : 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract

Jerome Eckers, born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin discusses his experiences as a hospital corpsman in World War II and the Korean War. He remembers hearing about Pearl Harbor on the radio on the way home from a movie with his father and brother when he was 15. Eckers discusses his thoughts on the war during high school and the process of being drafted. His twin brother was also drafted and they were able to join the Navy together, they attended boot camp at the Great Lakes Naval Station in 1945. Eckers reports he had a difficult time at first due to a speech defect, but then quickly adjusted to military life and enjoyed having a routine and the camaraderie with other servicemen, who were mostly older. He states that he spent a lot of time marching and learned how to tie knots, and how to care for his uniform and weaponry. Eckers says he spent twelve weeks in basic training then went to San Diego Naval Hospital for training as a pharmacist mate. He explains that after VJ Day he and his brother were sent back to Great Lakes, where he spent all day drawing blood from people being discharged. Eckers reports he was then discharged on August 26th 1945 and attended St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin on the G.I. Bill for one year. He states that he was married and had a daughter while in school then joined the Reserves in 1949. Eckers recalls that when the Korean War broke out he was transferred to the Marine Corps Reserve and went to Camp Pendleton (California) as a medic. He then went to Camp Delmar (California) for amphibious and combat training and on to Korea with the fifth Replacement Draft, Eckers discusses the living quarters on the ship on the way to Pusan, Korea. He recalls being scared about ever seeing his family again, and being surprised at how differently people lived in Korea. Eckers explains that he arrived in November, 1950 and was assigned as a corpsman to a mortar company and that the war was not expected to last much longer so they were not issued winter clothes. He says they used to sleep in a fox hole with two men in a sleeping bag. Eckers reports that within ten days he was sent into combat in the northern part of Korea. He states that replacements were not coming fast enough and that morale was low. Eckers explains that the American and South Korean troops were retreating while the Chinese came across the border. He reports they got into firefights every second or third day and that he had to go out on night patrol as a corpsman, which he did not like. Eckers talks about the medical supplies he was given and describes his job; "My job was basically to stop the bleeding, to get a bandage on them, to get some morphine in them if that's what they needed, and to get them out of there." He tells about being hit with mortar shrapnel in the shoulder during a patrol. Eckers explains that he was discharged in June 1951 because his wife, who was pregnant when he went to Korea, wrote to Senator Joseph McCarthy asking why some men were

coming home and others were not. He discusses what it was like being a Navy man in the Marines and Marine pride. Eckers talks about his free time and says that he did a lot of reading and writing of letters and would always go buy a book when they came into a town. He explains that after being discharged he had a difficult time adjusting to family life and took a job selling paper, then entered the Postal Service as a railway mail clerk in 1952, and later became the supervisor of Belle Plaine, Wisconsin. Eckers compares people's perceptions of World War II Veterans and Korean Veterans. He joined the American Legion.

Biographical Sketch

Jerome C. Eckers (b. 1926) was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was drafted into the Navy as a hospital corpsman in 1945 after graduating from high school. After being discharged in 1945 he attended St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, then joined the Reserves in 1949 and was discharged in 1951.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 1996.
Transcribed by Mary Lou Condon.
Transcription edited by Christina M. Ballard, 2008.

Interview Transcript

- Van Ellis: Today's date is June 10, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Jerome Eckers of Clintonville, Wisconsin, a veteran of the very tail end of World War II and the Korean War. Good afternoon. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.
- Eckers: Thank you real much for calling. I certainly appreciate it.
- Van Ellis: 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.
- Eckers: Okay. I was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The day of Pearl Harbor my twin brother and I went to a movie. And my father picked us up and brought us home, and on the way home we heard over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I was a student at Whitefish Bay High School at the time.
- Van Ellis: You had to have been, what, 15 maybe?
- Eckers: Yes, right around that age.
- Van Ellis: As a young person, did you, when you heard of the news of Pearl Harbor and the fact that we were going to war, did you have an idea it was going to have an impact on your life? Or as a 15-year-old did you think that far ahead?
- Eckers: No, I really don't think I thought that far ahead at the time. I think I was probably more concerned about some of my cousins that were older than I and what effect it would have on them.
- Van Ellis: You mean like were they going to go off to war and get killed?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: So, as the war went on and as you grew older and closer to draft age, how did things change for you, say, in high school? What was a high schooler's view of World War II at the time?
- Eckers: Well, I was in, as you say, I was in high school during World War II, and I think that I didn't have, as I recollect now, I don't think that I had any idea that the war was going to end when it did. I think I was probably looking at a longer war. And I frankly had to admit that I didn't give my all in

high school because I figured when I got out I was going to go in Service anyway. And I've been sorry for that attitude over the years.

Van Ellis: In what sense?

Eckers: Oh, that I could've done better in school than what I did.

Van Ellis: I see. Eventually you did graduate, or you left school anyway.

Eckers: I graduated.

Van Ellis: And Uncle Sam did come a calling for you.

Eckers: Yes, two days after I got out of school.

Van Ellis: Why don't you describe the process of your being drafted and your entry into the Service.

Eckers: Well, my twin brother and I went down to the draft board and we had gotten our notice to appear down there. And they took us on a bus down to the building down on Water Street in Milwaukee for our physical exams. And they told my brother and I, being twins, that we could stay together, which was fine, which is what we wanted, of course. However, during the process of our physical examination my brother's blood pressure went up on him and they put him in a separate room. And he laid down for a while until it came back to normal, and by that time I had already finished my physical and papers were stamped for the Navy. My brother came through and his were stamped for the Army. And we had to find somebody that could do something about this, or would at least listen to us. And finally we had an officer that listened to what we had to say and he gave us a choice, either the Army or the Navy, and we chose the Navy.

Van Ellis: Why'd you choose the Navy?

Eckers: Well, I had a cousin that was in the Navy at the time and he just impressed us, I think. And I had some other cousins in the Army, but I wasn't as close, we weren't as close to them. So we chose the Navy and then he took us down to the Northwestern Depot and put us on a train and sent us over to Great Lakes where we took our boot camp at.

Van Ellis: Why don't you describe that training to me. First of all, in making the adjustment to military life is quite different than living at home, say.

Eckers: Yes, it certainly was. I had a hard time with it. As you'll probably notice through this talk, I have a speech defect. I have a tendency to stutter,

which I did a lot worse years ago than what I do now. And I told them, the first thing I did when I got there is, don't make a radio operator out of me because the war will never end. So it was a little bit of a hard job with me as far as my speech was concerned. And I had a hard time getting used to it. Outside of that, I became accustomed to military life fairly easy. As a matter of fact, I enjoyed a set routine, which I had never had in my life before.

Van Ellis: You mean like get up at six and dinner at seven and training at eight?

Eckers: Get up at six and eat at seven and eat at noon and things of that type.

Van Ellis: Among the other young men you trained with, did they come from different parts of the country or were they all Midwesterners such as yourself?

Eckers: No, most of us were from the Midwest. My brother and I and probably about five or six other people in our company were probably the youngest men. At that time it seemed as though some of the older, we were getting quite a few older men into the company that we were assigned to at Great Lakes. By older I'm talking probably 25, 26 years old where a very small number of us were in our teens yet. And these other men were older than we were.

Van Ellis: And how'd you all get along?

Eckers: We got along fairly well. There was a lot of camaraderie that we enjoyed. We spent a lot of time playing cards. And all in all it was a fairly good relationship. The older people, not that we looked upon them as fathers or anything of this type, but they were a little bit probably smarter than we younger people were. And we took their actions more seriously I think.

Van Ellis: In terms of your daily activities, how much of your training involved the marching and that sort of thing and wearing the uniform, and how much of it did you spend, say, on the rifle range and that sort of thing?

Eckers: I would probably say that we spent probably about 45-50% of our day marching and learning how to tie knots and care of the uniform and things of this type. And probably about 10% of our day was in calisthenics. The rest of the time was on weaponry, not on basically the rifle range but learning about the anti-aircraft guns and so forth.

Van Ellis: And the training lasted how long?

Eckers: I was in boot camp for 12 weeks.

- Van Ellis: That's a lot of time to be marching and drilling and that sort of thing, I suppose.
- Eckers: Yes, it certainly, certainly was.
- Van Ellis: Now, when you were in training did you know what your job specialty was going to be or you were just in sort of a pool?
- Eckers: No, they gave us all a test on different things in the Navy, and whatever you came out high on is where you were sent. Basically my high point was medical. And I went down to San Diego Naval Hospital for training down there as a pharmacist mate.
- Van Ellis: Now what about your brother?
- Eckers: He went the same place.
- Van Ellis: And you went to California you said?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: For more training. How long did that last?
- Eckers: We were down in California for I think it was three months.
- Van Ellis: Now, pretty soon the war is about to end, if my math is correct. So first when VE Day happened and then when VJ Day happened, where were you if you recall?
- Eckers: We were sent back. After we got done with our schooling we were sent back to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. And I stayed in the hospital for, oh, I really can't recollect how long it was, but it was a comparatively short time. And then they started discharging and I was sent over to a discharge center in the, I was stationed over in the blood bank. And I drew blood all day, all day long from people that were getting out of Service.
- Van Ellis: And when were you finally discharged then?
- Eckers: I was discharged in, gee, I have it right here. Just a moment. The 26th of August, 1946.
- Van Ellis: And after that, then, what did you do to get the rest of your life back on track?

- Eckers: I went back up to St. Norbert College. I started school. I had left Whitefish Bay High School in my sophomore year and I was a student up at St. Norbert High School in West DePere, Wisconsin.
- Van Ellis: On the G.I. Bill?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: I've spoken to a lot of veterans who went to college here at the UW, and they describe a campus filled with veterans. At a small school, a small private school like that, was the student body also predominantly veteran or were there a lot of non-veteran students there at that time?
- Eckers: No, I'd say in my class it was approximately at least 90-95% veterans. And a number of our teachers were veterans also, predominantly priests from the Norbertine Order. And most of them were chaplains in the Service.
- Van Ellis: That's interesting. Now, again, I've talked to veterans who went to the UW here and they describe the expansion of the campus and the facilities here and that sort of thing. Was there a similar phenomenon at St. Norbert?
- Eckers: Yes, there certainly was. New buildings were started to spring up all over the place.
- Van Ellis: Was there adequate housing for students at the time? Did they have to build new things for you guys?
- Eckers: No, they built at least two new dormitories that I can recollect right offhand. They had taken over a number of private homes around the campus itself. The Norbertine Order bought these homes and they were making rooms for the students. It was strictly a boys' school at the time, and they were making room in these private homes.
- Van Ellis: Were they affordable?
- Eckers: Yeah, I think they were. I wish I could quote a figure to you right offhand, but—
- Van Ellis: That was quite a while ago.
- Eckers: That's quite a while ago.
- Van Ellis: Yes. So did you finish school?

- Eckers: No, I didn't. I went for a year and I left.
- Van Ellis: You went to work then?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: Did you have trouble finding work after World War II while the vets were coming back?
- Eckers: No, I had no trouble at all finding a job.
- Van Ellis: So when the Korean War broke out, you were just a veteran readjusting to civilian life.
- Eckers: Well, I was married at the time. I had gotten married while I was in school and we had a child, a girl, our first one. And, very frankly, I went in the Reserves.
- Van Ellis: So when it came to your discharge after World War II, this was an option you had?
- Eckers: Yes. I didn't go in the Reserves until 1949.
- Van Ellis: Oh, I see.
- Eckers: And I needed a couple of extra bucks, to be very honest with you, so I went in the Reserves.
- Van Ellis: Which at the time entailed what?
- Eckers: What's that?
- Van Ellis: Which at the time meant what? You had like two weeks in the summer or what sort of commitment did it take from you?
- Eckers: It was a two-week cruise in the summertime aboard an aircraft carrier. That was the only cruise that I ever took. The Korean War broke out shortly after that.
- Van Ellis: So when the war broke out how did things change for you?
- Eckers: Well, I was in the Naval Reserve in Green Bay, but the Marine Corps Reserve Unit, which was attached to us, got called up to active duty. And they transferred me from the Naval Reserve over to the Marine Corps Reserve. And when they left Green Bay for Camp Pendleton, I was with them.

Van Ellis: As a medic?

Eckers: Yes.

Van Ellis: And what sort of training did you do there? I take it it was a little bit different than what you had been trained in during World War II.

Eckers: Yes, it certainly was. However, the first two months that I was there I did duty in a field hospital more or less, and then they sent us over to Camp Delmar, which was on the other side, across the road from Camp Pendleton. And we did amphibious training and combat training there. And it was a known fact when you went over to Delmar you weren't going to stay there too long. And I stayed there about a month. Then they shipped us over seas, over to Korea. I went over with the 5th Replacement Draft.

Van Ellis: Why don't you describe that trip overseas to me.

Eckers: Well, it was aboard a troop ship, predominantly Army, that were approximately 50-60 Air Force personnel aboard, and there were only about 20-25 Navy personnel aboard. We had our, it was a very good trip, really. We had our own stateroom, five of us to a room, and it was just a very pleasant trip. We walked around ship, and the way the Army personnel were living was a lot different from the way we were living.

Van Ellis: In what sense?

Eckers: Their bunks were close together, crowded into a small area, and just no place for them to go except either sit on their bunk or go up on deck, one of the two. And, as I say, we had five to a room, which was a very spacious room.

Van Ellis: How long did it take? Did you mentioned that?

Eckers: It took us eight days to go to Pusan. We stopped at Japan first.

Van Ellis: So when you got to Korea, what were your very first impressions? What sorts of things struck you the most?

Eckers: I think being scared, and having a wife and a child back home, wondering what they were doing, how my wife was getting along. I guess probably am I ever going to see them again, things of this type.

- Van Ellis: Now, at the time Korea wasn't the industrialized nation that it was today. It was pretty primitive by American standards at the time. Did that strike you at all?
- Eckers: Yes, it did. It struck me to the point of I guess it's the first time in my life I realized that people lived differently than what we do, and we had it pretty good in the United States compared to what these people had.
- Van Ellis: So you landed in Pusan. How much longer was it until you went up north to where the front lines were? What sort of preparations did you make for that?
- Eckers: Well, it was in November when we got over there.
- Van Ellis: This was 1950?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: So this was just the Chinese started coming across the border then.
- Eckers: Yes, it was. And I was assigned as a corpsman to a mortar company. We weren't issued any boots or anything because we always heard the war was going to be over. Well then, the Chinese came into the war, which put a different slant onto it. And by that time we didn't have any winter clothes or nothing, no coats, no boots. The only thing that we had as far as warmth was concerned, the Salvation Army, we each got a scarf and a pair of gloves.
- Van Ellis: And I imagine November is pretty cold over there.
- Eckers: Yes, it certainly was. Frankly, we used to sleep in a fox hole, two of us in one sleeping bag to keep warm.
- Van Ellis: So was it very long before you got thrown into combat? I get the impression it wasn't.
- Eckers: No it wasn't. It was probably less than 10 days.
- Van Ellis: So, at this time the front lines were pretty far north. You had to have been shipped up north somewhere.
- Eckers: Yes, we were. I can't tell you where, though. Everything we did, we'd go up a hill and it was a number. It wasn't a name of anything, it was just a number. Hill so and so. And very frankly I don't remember the numbers.

- Van Ellis: And so you got into combat. The American troops were pretty much retreating by this time.
- Eckers: Yes. We came back for replacements two times before finally our company was up to full strength. It seemed as though they weren't sending replacements fast enough to replace.
- Van Ellis: But what was the morale like up there at the time? I mean, this seesaw war must've taken its toll on morale, I would think.
- Eckers: Yes, there was an awful lot of bitching. It was, oh, probably I shouldn't have used that word.
- Van Ellis: Oh I've heard worse, trust me.
- Eckers: Okay. It was everybody always seemed to be angry at something or at some person. And it seemed as though every place we went we walked. And I can remember going down a road we'd been walking since six o'clock in the morning, and this was like two or three in the afternoon. We were tired and we're angry and the whole nine yards. And all of a sudden the South Korean Army came through our lines, and they were in big six-ply trucks, and we couldn't understand why are we walking and why are they riding.
- Van Ellis: They were retreating too at this time.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: In terms of combat, how frequent was the actual fighting? I mean, were there lulls in the fighting or were you pretty much fighting the whole time?
- Eckers: No, we weren't fighting the whole time. We would probably get into a firefight probably I'd say every second or third day. I think probably the thing that I personally, they would send patrols out every night. A corpsman and a radioman had to go with a patrol every third night. And I think that that's the thing that disturbed me the most, going out on patrols at night. I didn't appreciate those at all.
- Van Ellis: So, on these patrols how often was there actual contact with the enemy?
- Eckers: Probably most of the time. I would say at least two out of every three times that you went out on patrol you would make contact with the enemy.
- Van Ellis: And large forces? Small forces?
- Eckers: Small.

- Van Ellis: Small forces. So these are just small units exchanging fire with each other.
- Eckers: Yes, that was basically it.
- Van Ellis: Were the casualties heavy or light or—I mean as a medic it was up to you to have to deal with them, then.
- Eckers: They were fairly light. They would usually be shrapnel from mortars and things of this type. I probably would say once a week somebody would really get it that would die on you.
- Van Ellis: So you're on patrol or you're attacked. As a medic, what was your specific role?
- Eckers: Well, my specific role, there were probably, oh, anywhere from 10-12 men in the patrol itself, and I would stay right with all the radiomen itself. And I would stay right with all the radiomen basically, and he was usually with the officer of the patrol. And the three of us would stay together most of the time until somebody would holler for a corpsman.
- Van Ellis: And then you had to go out and get him.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: A harrowing experience, I would imagine.
- Eckers: Yes, it was. I just hoped that there were foxholes close enough together.
- Van Ellis: What sort of equipment did you have? What sort of medical supplies? And did you find them effective?
- Eckers: Yes, I found them very effective. As far as the supplies themselves were concerned, basic pressure bandage you carried a pile of those. And there was no time, of course, we carried a surgical unit, but there was no time to do anything like sew somebody up or something like that. There was absolutely no time.
- Van Ellis: So your task was just sort of patch them up as best you could, I guess.
- Eckers: My job was basically to stop the bleeding, to get a bandage on them, to get some morphine in them if that's what they needed, and to get them out of there.

- Van Ellis: You had some sort of contact with people behind the lines then, I would take it. You had to somehow get the injured out of there.
- Eckers: Well, basically the injured would come out with the men that were on the patrol themselves. Very seldom did we call, we would call the bat for help after we would get to an area where a helicopter could come in, something like that to take the badly wounded out. And the ones that weren't too bad we would take back to our lines with us and they would go to a base hospital in the rear by ambulance.
- Van Ellis: As I mentioned, that was pretty harrowing duty that you had. Did you get injured at any time?
- Eckers: Yes, I was wounded one night. I stood up when I should have been laying down. I got sprayed with mortar shell, with mortar shrapnel rather.
- Van Ellis: Were you out of commission then or you just had to work?
- Eckers: No, I didn't go out of commission at the time. One of the other, I think it was a radioman, just put a bandage on me. It really wasn't that serious, or I didn't think it was at the time. And I kept on working, and when I got back to the line our battalion surgeon took a look at me and I had some shrapnel embedded pretty deep in my shoulder. It didn't bother me, though.
- Van Ellis: Now, I'm looking over the discharge that you sent me here. And you were discharged in June of '51?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: So you weren't there that long, really.
- Eckers: I was there for—I just had that here—seven months, they have here.
- Van Ellis: I was wondering if you left because you were wounded or something like that.
- Eckers: No. My wife is the one that got me out, very honestly. We were, as I said before I was married, we had a child, and my wife was pregnant at the time. And around that time there were a lot of older men coming home. And my wife wrote to then-Senator McCarthy, just asking why some were coming home and some weren't. And I was probably one of the older men outside of the surgeons, of course. But when we went over to Korea the average age was 19½ and they were all pretty young men. And we got more replacements all the time, and one day I got a letter from my wife saying she got a letter from Senator McCarthy that I was coming home.

- Van Ellis: And I suppose your commanders had to let you go then.
- Eckers: Yes. I came home under a hardship discharge. We had two, my wife had given birth to our second child while I was gone and I was sending a big \$175 a month home. That was the most I could send home. And she didn't have it very pleasant at all.
- Van Ellis: Right. I want to go back and ask a couple questions about the life of the GI in Korea during the period you were there. Or the Marines I guess in your case. Are Marines GIs?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: I was in the Air Force. We were GIs. Marines are a little different.
- Eckers: Yes, they certainly are.
- Van Ellis: I suppose we could start with that, then. The Marines are a little different. In what sense, do you think?
- Eckers: Well, there's an awful lot of pride. Sometimes the pride can get a little bit exasperating, but they've earned it. There is no doubt in my mind about that at all. Being tied in with some Army units at different times, with some of the Turkish units, with a large group of English units, and being able to compare all these different nationalities and people against what the Marines do, they have all the respect I can give them. They're just, as I say, their pride can get a little bit exasperating at times, but they've earned it all.
- Van Ellis: Now as a Navy guy being with the Marines, were you treated with any sort of kidding or less respect? I'd imagine you were a little conspicuous.
- Eckers: Yes, to say the least. No. We were treated with a lot of respect. However, the things that we noticed most, and we used to talk about it, the other corpsmen and I used to talk about this quite a bit, was the fact the Marines treated us with all the respect that you can imagine, which was fine. But it was a case where it always seemed as though they never knew what they could do with us, how they could order us around and so forth and so on, and the Navy seemed to forget all about us. So we more or less did what we wanted to do.
- Van Ellis: I suppose it's not a bad way to have to deal with things?
- Eckers: Sir?

- Van Ellis: I suppose it's not a bad way to have things go for you.
- Eckers: No. No, not at all. We had two battalion surgeons with us, which of course were basically our commanding officers. And they were very lenient with us. And they and the Marine Corps officers got along real good with each other.
- Van Ellis: Now, in the times you weren't in combat what sorts of things did you do to occupy your time? Some of the stereotypical things would be like drinking and gambling and that sort of thing. What sort of activities went on when you weren't into fighting?
- Eckers: I think basically I wrote a lot of letters home. I used to read quite a bit, I still do. I still love to read. And I would pick up any kind of books I could. And I spent a lot of my time reading.
- Van Ellis: Was it hard to find things to read?
- Eckers: Oh yeah. Yeah, it was awfully hard. We'd go through a town and I'd always find a library if there was a fairly big town. And I would buy a book, English books, from the library itself. And some of the fellows in the Marine Corps, their relatives would send them paperbacks. And we'd trade paperbacks back and forth, things of this type.
- Van Ellis: Now in terms of your mail, how good was the service? If you wrote a letter, did they get it in a couple days or a couple weeks or maybe a month? How current was the correspondence?
- Eckers: Well, the correspondence was fairly fast. The only problem, the biggest problem that we had with it is we never got mail when we were up on line. When we would come back off of line we would get letters. And I would probably have 17, 18 letters all at one time to read. But, as I say, we never got mail up on the line.
- Van Ellis: I suppose there was no time to read it then anyway.
- Eckers: No, that's true.
- Van Ellis: What about the drinking and gambling and that sort of thing? Was there much of that?
- Eckers: No, not much at all. I have a son-in-law that was in the Vietnam War. And when he talks about the drug problem and the drinking and everything else, we never experienced anything like that.

- Van Ellis: Speaking of Korea I think of Hawkeye Pierce and their still and all that sort of thing. But that wasn't your experience.
- Eckers: No, not at all. As a matter of fact, we had a commanding officer in the Marine Corps that was, I don't know, I think he was a Seventh Day Adventist or Southern Baptist, one of the two. But we would get a beer ration every Sunday afternoon. And he wouldn't allow it. He wouldn't allow any beer, so what we would do is we'd go down and meet the truck on the road before he got to the base and we'd get our beer there.
- Van Ellis: That American ingenuity.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: So after seven months I think you said, you came back home then.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: But when you got back you had to get your life back in order after a war once again. Was it different after Korea than it was for World War II?
- Eckers: Yes, very much so.
- Van Ellis: In what way?
- Eckers: I was a single person after World War II and I knew what I was going to do. I was going to go back to college, or start college rather. But after the Korean War I was a father again and I was married at the time, and we still are, and I had kind of a hard time getting my life together, really, trying to get back into a routine of being a father and a husband. And I went back to the job that I had, which was a salesman's job, and I didn't find it as, I think if I'm going to compare the two I didn't have any worries after World War II, but I had a lot of worries after the Korean War being married and a father and so forth.
- Van Ellis: Now this sales job you had, you eventually left that.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: On the sheet I had you fill out it says you entered the Postal Service. How long after the war was that?
- Eckers: I went into the Postal Service in 1952.
- Van Ellis: So the war was still going on, really.

- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: There are veteran preference points for government jobs like that. Did those benefit you?
- Eckers: Yes. I'm a ten-point veteran from the shrapnel that I got. I lost part of the use of my left arm.
- Van Ellis: Did you seek that job out because you knew that or it was just something that you wanted to do?
- Eckers: I don't think the ten points had anything to do with it, really. I just had to make a change. I was selling paper, paper products at the time. And the paper industry was going to heck, the company I was working for was being sold, and very frankly I went down to the post office one day to mail some letters at Christmas time and there was a line there and they had a bulletin board. I just happened to see a notice for advertising for railway mail clerks. And I had no idea what it was, I didn't even know what a railway mail clerk was. But I thought hey, this has got to be better than what I'm doing. So I filled out an application and they just sent me the papers, then went over to Manitowoc and wrote the test and got appointed.
- Van Ellis: Now I'm curious because I'm sure there are no railway mail people anymore.
- Eckers: No, they took the mail off the trains in 1972.
- Van Ellis: So you get on a train route and you deliver and pick up mail in different towns along the way. You'd have a certain route and you'd just pick the stuff up.
- Eckers: Yeah, I ran Chicago to Kansas City. I worked the six and eight, six days on and eight days off.
- Van Ellis: That's a long way to go.
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: I was thinking it was some rural route somewhere up north.
- Eckers: No, when they took the mail off the trains I was assigned a stationary unit, which was they assigned me to the Green Bay Post Office because I was a surplus railway mail clerk at the time. And very frankly I couldn't take the politics in the Green Bay office. And it was either that, either leave the mail service or else get out someplace and I did a rural route. So I ended

up in New Franken, Wisconsin, a little town 13 miles east of Green Bay on a 92-mile rural route. And that's where I retired from 17 years later.

Van Ellis: Now, going back to the post-Korean period, this time you were an injured veteran. Did you have any medical adjustments to make after the war?

Eckers: No, not at all.

Van Ellis: So these wounds you sustained didn't affect the doing of your job. Or did you have to go back to the VA for surgery or anything like that?

Eckers: No. I just had to go down to the VA once a year to see if there was any change in the disability itself.

Van Ellis: Now, having been in combat, sometimes veterans experience nightmares and that sort of thing. Did you have any experiences like that?

Eckers: No, not at all.

Van Ellis: I was going to have you compare the sort of social attitudes between people's perception of the World War II veteran and the Korean War veteran. Did you notice there was sort of a reception difference after each of these different wars?

Eckers: Yes, I did. When you would tell somebody after the Korean War that you had been there and, well, you know, it was just a matter of they would more or less look at you and say, well, yeah, so what. After World War II, I think the reception that I got, especially when I went to school, if the people in the community in DePere itself knew that you were a veteran at St. Norbert College, you were given a lot of respect, really. And that respect I didn't see after the Korean War.

Van Ellis: Why would that be do you think?

Eckers: I think because it was called a police action instead of a war. And I guess the way I look at it, when you're dodging bullets that's a war.

Van Ellis: I think particularly after Vietnam we've all come to appreciate that. After Korea it was different, I guess.

Eckers: Yes, it was.

Van Ellis: I've got just one last area of questions, and it may or may not even apply to you, and that involves veterans' organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. Have you ever joined any of the major veterans' groups like the Legion, the VFW or anything?

- Eckers: A year ago I joined the American Legion.
- Van Ellis: And that was the first veterans' group that you joined?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: Why that particular group and why at that time, do you think?
- Eckers: Well, the reason for me doing it after such a long time was the fact that I'm a supervisor in the Town of Belle Plaine. We live in Shawano County. And one fellow'd just been bugging me to no end. And he helped me with my campaign and things to get elected to the supervisor's job, and I guess I felt a moral obligation to him to give him 20 bucks and join.
- Van Ellis: So are what you would call an active member or do you not participate too much?
- Eckers: No, I participate.
- Van Ellis: So you go to Post meetings and that sort of thing?
- Eckers: Yes.
- Van Ellis: Do you hold any offices or anything?
- Eckers: No. No, I don't at all.
- Van Ellis: What is it that you get out of being a member of the Legion besides getting this friend of yours off your back? What sort of gratification do you get out of it?
- Eckers: I think the gratification that I get out of it is the number of men that were in the Vietnam, I'm sorry, the Korean War that I can relate to. I can't relate to too many people in World War II due to the fact that I was never overseas, never aboard a ship or things of that type. But I can relate to the Korean vet because I feel, well, he was over there and I was over there too.
- Van Ellis: And before you joined the Legion you hadn't had much contact with other Korean War veterans?
- Eckers: No, not too much at all.

Van Ellis: Is that pretty much the same experience with other Korean War vets that you've spoken to? Do they say the same basic thing, I hadn't spoken about the War since I joined the Legion or something like that?

Eckers: No, because I find that these people that I'm talking to now that were in the Korean War came from this area, which is Clintonville and Shawano, which is quite a bit smaller than Green Bay is, of course. And in Green Bay I lost track of the people that I went in the Service with during the, that I got called back in the Service with, mostly because they were younger than I was. Quite a bit younger than I was. And I guess that's one of the big reasons why I just didn't keep in track with them. Their lifestyle was altogether different than mine was.

Van Ellis: Those are pretty much all the questions I had. I've run through my little litany there. Is there anything that you'd like to add? Anything you think we've skipped over or anything?

Eckers: No, I really don't. I certainly enjoyed this little conversation that we've had.

Van Ellis: Yeah, me too.

Eckers: I guess I kind of like to talk about it. And I'll be honest with you, I'm kind of proud of it, of the fact.

Van Ellis: Well you should be.

Eckers: So, well, thank you.

Van Ellis: And thank you for taking the time out of your day.

Eckers: Well, I thank you real much for calling me about it. And I hope this program really goes.

Van Ellis: Well, me too.

Eckers: Good.

[End of Interview]