

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
FRANCIS E. EVERSON
Korean War Era Clerk Typist and Veteran's Affairs Service Officer
1995

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Everson, Francis E., (1933-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Everson, a Door County, Wis. native, discusses his Korean War era service with the 188th Transport Company in France and his later work as the County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) of Door County. Everson mentions basic training and specialized clerk-typist training at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri). As a supply clerk stationed at St. Nazaire (France), he mentions recreation, travel, and interaction between service personal and the French. He touches upon race relations and his use of the GI Bill and other state-based programs for veterans. Everson describes his position as a CVSO, including the hiring process and differences between World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans when dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. He also comments on the relationship between veterans' organizations and use of benefits and briefly evaluates the GI Bill, home loans, and home health care system. A member of the CVSO association, Everson discusses the benefits of the association's annual meetings including problem-solving, self-policing, and a collective political voice. Also mentioned is the relationship between CVSOs and the Wisconsin Department of Veteran Affairs.

Biographical Sketch

Everson (b. 1933) entered service September 8, 1964 and was honorably discharged August 24, 1956, achieving the rank of Corporal. He served as the Door County CVSO, and is involved in the CVSO association.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Today's date is February 15, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history with Mr. Francis E. Everson of Sturgeon Bay, a veteran of the Korean War era and a long-time CVSOS in Door County.

Mark: Good afternoon. How are you doing?

Everson: Well, I'm just fine Mark, thank you.

Mark: Let's start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you were raised and what you were doing prior to 1950.

Everson: OK. I am a native to Door County. I was born on a farm near Sturgeon Bay on December 29 in a snowstorm!

Mark: Is that kind of rare to be a native to the Door County area?

Everson: Not really, no. I guess though, we're getting an awful lot of people retiring up there, but I'm one of the few that can say, in Door County you don't lock your car doors all the time. I was born and raised on a farm, went to Sturgeon Bay High School and graduated in the class of '51, went to rural one-room schools in grade school. I worked on the farm, did chores, plus went to school when I graduated until I got married. I stayed on the farm and worked out and did chores too, so, typical rural community is what I grew up in.

Mark: Do you recall World War II at all?

Everson: Yeah. I was about 8 years old when it started. It wasn't deep in the mind of an 8 to 12-year-old. I had a lot of older cousins that were in World War II. No one in my direct family was a World War II veteran. My dad was too young for I and too old for II and I have an older brother but he was just a few years older than I so he was an earlier Korean War veteran.

Mark: Rationing and those kinds of things didn't seem to have made too much of an impression on your childhood.

Everson: Only because I think we lived on a farm and we raised a lot of things ourselves, although I did find out in 1942 being that I was born out in the country in a snowstorm and when the doctor got back to the city he never did record my birth certificate so my mother couldn't get ration stamps for me because there was no record I was born. That was changed.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I bet it was. So, when North Korea invaded South Korea you were still in high school. Do you recall the incident? Did you think it might have implications for your life?

Everson: Yes, but when you're 16-17 years old, it doesn't seem to worry you. Maybe my parents were worried, but I wasn't. I didn't think about it really.

Mark: At the time of graduation there was a draft going on. Did that change as you graduated high school? When I asked your entering into military service you volunteered for the draft. That seemed kind of ambiguous. I'm wondering

Everson: I was scheduled to be - I was 20 years old by the way. I was scheduled to be drafted in the December draft. I went to the draft board and told them that I'd go sooner, that I'd go in September and they said OK. They did send a draft notice to report in August. I was maybe the only one in the state of Wisconsin who went and told them I didn't want to be drafted that month, so I went in September as a draftee but only because by volunteering I moved up my draft by about three months.

Mark: The actual fighting in Korea had been over by then.

Everson: Yes.

Mark: We're still in the cold war. Had you thought of a military career before?

Everson: Never. In fact, I didn't think of it when I was in.

Mark: In 1954 you went into the service then. Perhaps you could describe to me your entry into military service. Where did you go to get sworn in? Where did you get the haircut? Tell me a little bit about boot camp.

Everson: I guess it's like the many thousands that preceded and followed me. We went in through Milwaukee, originally had gone down for examination of course, and then the actual indoctrination and getting into the service was Milwaukee also. If my memory serves me correctly and I wouldn't swear to it, we probably went by bus down to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri where we had our eight weeks of basic training. I didn't consider it tough by any standards. I was fairly involved in athletic things in school and after school. Physically it didn't upset me and I was used to taking orders as anyone in service has to get used to. I had no problem with basic training. I didn't consider it hard. I guess probably because the fighting was over, I really didn't think the training was intense as it could have been.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: I was going to ask, what sort of training did you do? A lot of marching around?

Everson: No, not an awful lot of marching. Just the usual, go to the rifle range and marching, physical exercises, really nothing hard. That's what kind of confused me. If I were going into combat, I would want to be more ready than I was. They just didn't train us very hard in those days and luckily I made a few moves at the right time and instead of running through the obstacle course, I became an instructor telling everybody else what they did wrong. That was the luck of the draw, of being chosen for having done something right. As far as the rifle range, I started out shooting very well and then the firing pin on my rifle, they were all the old M1's from World War II and the firing pin on mine broke and while I was getting it fixed, I thought to myself, why do I want to shoot so well I'll end up in the infantry. So, the second time around I squeezed off less than perfect shots and ended up not in the infantry.

Mark: After basic, you went to some sort of technical training school?

Everson: Well, I continued at Fort Leonard Wood, but in a specialized school and this was administrative. I suppose a simple term was a clerk-typist school.

Mark: So in terms of the Army you were MOS.

Everson: Yes. Of course, Fort Leonard Wood primarily is combat engineers. Their principle purpose was training combat engineers but I lucked out. I don't know how it worked that way. I asked for it and I got it. Just one of the few things that happened right in the Army. Usually you say you want to do something and they'll definitely put you in something else. Then immediately after the second eight weeks of training, we were shipped off to our permanent post. Again, I have no explanation for nine out of ten people were still going to Korea even though the fighting was over. My orders were cut for Europe.

Mark: Did you train with people you served with in France as well?

Everson: No.

Mark: Were you separated and then put into the unit?

Everson: Yeah. Everybody went their own way. It was no unit that stayed together. Everyone was shipped somewhere else. In fact, there was nobody in my training corps that went to Germany with me. Of course, we landed in Bremerhaven, Germany and then went to Zweibrücken and from there we were assigned to our permanent posts and I ended up being sent to St. Nazaire, France.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: That's in Brittany as I recall.

Everson: Yes. It's right on the Bay of Biscay.

Mark: I meant to look at a map but I forgot. I'm pretty sure I know St. Nazaire. My wife is French. I can't pretend to pronounce it. So, in France what were your duties with the 188th Transportation Company?

Everson: I started out as a supply clerk and continued on that until we were away on a field training and I was called back in that the supply sergeant was transferred out and they brought me back into the base and made me a supply sergeant although I was only a Pfc. at the time, which was an E3 in today's world and being that I was doing a SFC's job they at least made me a corporal and I continued as supply sergeant until I completed my term and was sent home.

Mark: So you spent your entire Army career outside of training, in France. I remember being stationed over in Europe in peacetime and off the base or post and going out in the community and those sorts of things. What did you and your colleagues do when you had off time?

Everson: Primarily, we would go--there was a small resort community not too far from St. Nazaire, called Labeau, France and it was a poor man's Riviera. The Army did have a hotel located right on the beach that people could go to. They came from all over France and Germany too and stay there. We would primarily go there for recreation. You learned to not to into the city itself.

Mark: Why was that?

Everson: It was very industrial, as you would guess from a port city and very communist leaning. A single person going into town was asking for it. You'd get clobbered.

Mark: Is that right?

Everson: Definitely.

Mark: That's interesting. One of my next questions was going to be how did you get along with the French people? This is obviously one part of the French population.

Everson: We basically isolated ourselves from them. We really didn't get involved with the people. There was a few hired by the Army to work on the base as civilians, but other than that, we had very, very little dealings with the local communities.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Did you get to travel around Europe much?

Everson: Yes.

Mark: Did you find that this was the same situation in other countries?

Everson: Well, of course, we went to Paris naturally which was more tourist oriented and I think that was fine. I, monetarily, was limited to my travels. I did go to London for about a week and saw all the tourist sites there. Some of my friends would go to Spain and Portugal and into Germany, but--London or England was fine. Absolutely no problems there whatsoever. The community where our base was, was not pro-American per se, that is the general population.

Mark: France, eventually, left and took NATO troops out of France ten years later.

Everson: Yeah. There's not, to my knowledge, a military person in France anymore.

Mark: What about some of the guys you served with. You grew up on a farm in Door County and I take it this is your first venture out into the outside world.

Everson: Pretty much, yes.

Mark: Do you have any recollections of regional differences? By this time is it fairly integrated in the military?

Everson: It was. Yeah. My immediate superiors were African American and we got along excellently. We had no problem. I guess my friends more or less were from the same Midwest and either college educated or in administrative positions seemed like birds of a feather so to speak.

Mark: I'm trying to get a handle on who was in the Army at this time, enlisted ranks and how did they get in there. Were there a lot of draftees such as yourself?

Everson: Well, usually we always liked to say the corporals ran the Army, or did all the work and from what I saw in my little world, it was pretty much true. In the Personnel Section, the company clerk or sergeant and the administrative positions were, for the most part except for the bosses, the sergeants, was run by the draftees, the two year people for some reason. A lot of my friends had college educations and they were privates and Pfc.'s and corporals like I was, but they preferred to put in their two years and good-bye Uncle Sam.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Were there any sort of regional tensions or that sort of thing? At the beginning of the civil rights movement and were southerners--did they tease the Yankees? Was there anything eventful at all?

Everson: Not really. My impression of the southerners, "Ken tucks" and so forth, was they're hillbilly people, very uncouth, not highly educated, usually you figure motor pool people. There is nothing wrong with being motor pool, but it just seems that it brought different standard. But, generally we had people from the east, from Boston, from New York, from all over the country. There was no major problem that I can ever recall.

Mark: Now the cold war was raging at this point. I suppose this might have been one time where you can maybe even say that. What sort of--in terms of dealing with the Russians and communism in Western Europe and those sorts of things what were you trained to expect? Were you trained for the invasion to come across Europe or any of those sorts of things?

Everson: Not a thing. I think you're probably thinking maybe (interrupted)

Mark: Did you go to the field and practice these sorts of things?

Everson: No. We didn't have any type of training like that. I think maybe it's a little bit too early, that the cold war hadn't hit its stride. Basically, I think those stationed in Germany technically were army of occupation and maybe the ones stationed in Germany may have more experience with that, but we did not. Basically we were a port company. We unloaded ships and to tell you the truth, I never went down and saw a ship unloaded, even though we were in that business. The trucks would come in from primarily Germany I suppose or other parts of France to pick up supplies or the main bodies of troops. We were not a big outfit. I'm guessing, I couldn't tell you for sure, but I think if we had 250 or 300 people stationed there that would be about it.

Mark: When I was in Europe, in Germany, they were readiness things all the time. But farther away--

Everson: We basically had none of that. There were more reminders from World War II than there was of a cold war or even no hint of the Korean War for that matter in Europe. Because St. Nazaire if you have any familiarity with World War II that was a humungous submarine pen was located there. You can see where all their bombing didn't do anything. The monster buildings, concrete 10-15-20 feet thick. A bomb isn't going to do anything to it.

Mark: Did you go on the plane up over there and back?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Everson: No. A boat both ways. Unfortunately, on the way over I called it a one massive cork and the second day out of New Jersey where we shipped out we hit a good old Atlantic January storm and about 98% of the guys were absolutely totally sea sick. Didn't bother me. It must have been my good old Norwegian heritage or something because it didn't bother me. I made it a point to eat and get out in the fresh air whenever I could and I had no problem. Coming back, we came back in August and it was a bigger ship. It was a pleasure cruise. In both cases I went and I came back in a ship. I had a good friend that was in the Personnel Section and he said that we could wait and get a plane ride but I said, "No, let's go." So he and left at the same time on a ship.

Mark: Once you left France then you were discharged from the service.

Everson: Yes. We landed again in New Jersey, came to Ft. Sheridan and as quickly as they could process us we were on our way home.

Mark: Then your military career was over.

Everson: It was except for the Reserve time. It was an 8-year obligation at that time so I had six years of inactive Reserve.

Mark: Did you have to do anything?

Everson: No. Nothing. Our names were someplace if they needed us again. They never did. About six months before I was scheduled to get out, naturally they give the pitch about "reuping" and I told them "Thanks but no thanks." They said they would make me a sergeant right away. I said "Thanks but no thanks."

Mark: You were established in a job by this time?

Everson: Well, I was in a job from the time I graduated from high school until I went into service and when I came back I did go to UW-Green Bay. It actually was just an extension at that time because I was married. It just seemed like four years was an awful long time in my life when you're 22 years old. So I was afforded the opportunity, I could have gone back, but chose not to. But, back to the old employer I had before I went in. Not to the same job but it was a step up in a sense but the same employer back in Sturgeon Bay in Door County.

Mark: As someone who works in veterans services, I got some questions about some of the benefits you may or may not have gotten after your military service. When you went to the Extension in Green Bay did you get any GI Bill thing?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Everson: Yes. It was something like \$100 a month, but they did pay the tuition so it made a difference, but my wife worked and I had a part-time job when I was in school. Again, I only used it for a semester.

Mark: But in that short time it was helpful?

Everson: It helped. Sure.

Mark: Did you get a federal housing loan or anything like that?

Everson: No. The only thing federal I used was that semester of GI Bill. I have used the State programs somewhat but the problem was I didn't know they existed until I became a service officer to be truthful. I might as well jump right into a little bit of it. Being the service officer when I found out what was there and what I missed on that I was eligible for I thought to myself that I'd make a point that my fellow veterans aren't as ignorant as I was. So that's been a part of my philosophy all the years that I have been service officer.

Mark: So the Army didn't say "You get this GI Bill and you get all this and that."?

Everson: No.

Mark: There wasn't much of an attempt to educate you as to what sort of benefits you were eligible for?

Everson: No. Not at all. The only thing is they say that you should reup and if you disagree with that then you don't really listen to anything they say. Everybody knew that the GI Bill was there and that's really about all, as far as knowing about housing loans and knowing about VA hospitals and so forth, I didn't. They indoctrinate you on a federal separation point and not the state so they wouldn't have anything about the state. I knew absolutely nothing about the state benefits at the time.

Mark: I suppose it's a good time to move on to your tenure as CVSO then. Tell me how you came to learn about the position. Did you seek it out or did someone seek you out? How'd you get to be CVSO in Door County?

Everson: Quite simple really. There was an advertisement in our local newspaper and I, along with 20 or 25 other people, applied for the job. They narrowed it down to probably about ten that took the civil service test and from that they chose me. It was not that I had any experience nor do I think anybody else had the experience. There is no school that you can go to learn it. You either have a fair amount on intelligence that you derive from to learn the job. There is no

Interview Transcript (continued)

other way. I suppose a larger office, office management would be beneficial. A two-person office like mine though, you don't really need an awful lot of expertise in the operation, just common sense more than anything.

Mark: Your predecessor, was he?

Everson: Well, my immediate predecessor was Larry Kenny who gave up the job to take a position in private industry in Manitowoc, but predecessor-predecessor was Clifford Wills who was Deputy Secretary of Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs for many years and he was four years into the CVSO job and Mr. Kenny was in from '55 through '67 and then I started in 1967.

Mark: Did these guys help you get set up and get established in your new position as CVSO?

Everson: Not at all. They were gone. Cliff was down in Milwaukee, although part of my training of course, was to come down to Madison and go through the department just to get a little feel of what it is all about.

Mark: Yeah. There is a CVSO Institute that you attended.

Everson: They have those on a regular basis, but the new ones do get a short 2-3 day indoctrination. Come right to the department and be shown what's there. It did help that I had a secretary that had been on it for quite a few years, so she taught me more than anybody else.

Mark: I was wondering if you could describe the veteran's community in Door County at the time you took office. Probably a lot of World War II veterans and some Vietnam vets were starting...

Everson: Well, yes. There were, of course, at that time, a lot of World War I veterans and World War II naturally. The Korean and just starting with the Vietnam era vets. I started in '67 and, of course, officially, Vietnam started in '64 but I really didn't an awful lot of them the first several years. For a while, especially for state benefits, if they weren't physically in Vietnam, they weren't eligible for state benefits. That didn't occur until 1968. I don't know if you are aware of that. That's where it didn't make any difference where you served, if you were in the era you became a Vietnam veteran. So, I've seen them all. Like I say, we had many, many World War I veterans and it was just last year that my final World War I veteran died. In fact, when I started we had one Spanish-American War veteran.

Mark: What were some of the major challenges of the work as a CVSO?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Everson: Well, learning the job properly. Nothing is worse than poor or misinformation and to know what's out there and who's eligible and why and be able to tell somebody that. And be honest. So often a person would come in and they may get mad at me but I don't make the rules, and I say, "Well, I'm sorry. You're not eligible. That's the law." I found this out when I did apply for something from the state before I became service officer. By the time I knew about it I was no longer eligible because of net worth eligibility's and so forth. I think when a person is in a job too long, I hope that's not happening to me you tend to overlook the obvious. I know when I first started out I thought there was an awful lot of mothers or parents of those killed in action in World War II veterans that could be eligible for a benefit from the Veterans Administration and they aren't getting that. I did a little letter writing and phone calls and I picked up 16 parents that became eligible for a benefit from the VA that they never knew about it because nobody ever told them about it. I felt that was something I did thoroughly and I've been trying to be involved when some new legislation takes effect. And, being a small county, I probably am more able to do it than a large county. A small county is advantageous I feel in the job. I know there was an awful lot of talk in early Vietnam vets that they didn't want to go to their service officer because he was part of "the establishment." I never felt that we had that problem that people wouldn't come to me because I was "government" and they didn't want any more government. I didn't have that problem.

Mark: What were some of the major problems based by events during your years as CVSO? Economic problems, medical problems, a pretty good mix of problems?

Everson: I get pretty much a mix of everything. I guess probably we had more of it at least it was out in the open more with the Vietnam era vets as to the name they now put on it, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Mark: Psychological problems.

Everson: Yeah, they were.

Mark: Do you notice those in World War II vets?

Everson: Yes. Except they wouldn't talk about it. And Korea. We had a Korean POW very high up in the community in Sturgeon Bay and I don't think anybody ever knew that he was a POW of North Korea. He and I got together just talking one time and he bent my ear like you wouldn't believe. Finally somebody could listen to him. He could talk to somebody that understood what it was all about and that's a large part of the job too, is not only hearing what they want to say

Interview Transcript (continued)

but hearing things that they aren't saying. Like we had a widow of a Vietnam veteran come in for one specific thing and I think when she left there was about six things I told her about that she was not aware of. Being aware of programs and who is eligible for what is very important.

Mark: Do you find that a lot of vets over the years don't know what they are eligible for?

Everson: Yes, unfortunately. I don't know how you can get it to them. I, as well as most other service officers, do talk at different veterans organizations meetings and so forth. The trouble is we're talking to probably about 10% of the veteran population if that. For some reason, I don't know why it is, it seems the ones that belong to the veterans organizations are the ones that use the benefits least. Don't ask me why. I don't know. Either they're established, they don't need the benefits--I think that's probably the best reason for it.

Mark: What have been some of the most effective and least effective programs that you have dealt with over the years? I suppose we can divide them between federal and state.

Everson: Well, federal without a question the GI Bill in it's multitude of forms has had to have been the greatest influence on the United States of American since World War II began. The home loans have done very, very well to get billions of veterans into their own homes. Health care system, federally, is excellent for those who would use it. In Door County it probably isn't used as much as say, Milwaukee County or Dane County that has a facility nearby.

Mark: Where is the nearest VA facility?

Everson: Milwaukee is 114 miles away. Now they have the outpatient clinic in Appleton, which is still 85 miles away, but we do get quite a few using it, but never the percentage that people closer by use it. Those are probably the major federal programs. The state, of course the housing loan program in its many forms, I've seen them all. It used to be that you would get \$1500 toward buying a home and it kept on growing where it would be a second mortgage to getting the primary money from a lender. In 1975 they went to the direct loan program, which has put out well over a billion dollars in home loans. That has been excellent. The part-time study grant program has put an awful lot of people either through school or gave him an advanced education to improve themselves. The economic assistance loan has been good. Probably the worst thing that ever came to mind, I guess they're trying to finally fix it is the fairly recent business loan that the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs put together about three or four years ago.

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: Is it hard to use or--

Everson: Yes. I'll show you how hard it is to use I checked, I don't know what happened in the calendar year '94 but prior to that I think the program had been in effect for three or four years and had a grand total of three loans approved. Set aside a half-million six hundred thousand dollars for the program and didn't spend any. Three loans - but I did get one of them. Just unworkable. Too complex for the money and the benefit received. That was the only really bad one I can think of.

Mark: That brings up the problem of trying to connect the veteran with the benefit and as a CVSO you're kind of in the middle. Is that sometimes a problem? This problem you mentioned with the business loans, do you find that with other programs?

Everson: Generally, they come in knowing they want something and if you, at least, have some kind of idea--they're looking for a loan--well then "What do you need a loan for?" For home improvement or paying bills or farm equipment. You know where to direct them. Just like within a week ago a veteran came in and wanted a business loan. Well, first you ask him how much he needs, if its hundreds of thousands of dollars you direct him to the Small Business Administration. The VA programs just don't come under something like that. But, he needed \$10,000 for starting up an ice cream shop up in northern Door County I think it was. Using the business loan he would have had to get most of the money from the lender and just \$2,000 is all he could have gotten from the state for all the rigmarole you had to go through. But, we could use economic assistance loans where you get half your money there.

Mark: So its a matter of knowing what is available.

Everson: Yes. Very definitely. It's a job you cannot learn by going to school because there is not school that can teach you how to be a veterans service officer. Luckily, and I'm no expert on it, I would have to say that Wisconsin as a whole has been exceptional in the quality of people that have gone into the positions. Of course, there has been a major change over in the last five to seven years of service officers because the World War II'ers pretty much have retired. Maybe two or three World War II'ers that are still active in the association.

Mark: How has the transition gone? You've been in a position to witness it.

Everson: They are kind of dumb on the old stuff but they do very well on the newer benefits.

Mark: Old stuff being the World War II (interrupted)

Interview Transcript (continued)

Everson: Things that have been there and either are frozen, like under federal programs they have about three or four different pension programs and most of them are frozen, they're protected. There are so many technicalities that they just wouldn't learn because they haven't dealt with them. You don't get an application for something like a protected pension because you don't get them any more. But for the most part, I'm sure its very well taught them and they're learning very well. An awful lot of the service officers now are going computerized in their offices. I am not. Not because I'm not too old to learn new tricks, but at this point in time I don't see where it would be beneficial for a small office like I have.

Mark: And cost money.

Everson: Lots of money.

Mark: I just bought a home one so I know it costs lots of money. Differences between veterans of different eras, are vets pretty much the same or are they different? Based on their conflict or generational.

Everson: I guess they're the same. I guess there was originally when the World War I'ers were phasing out and World War II were taking over there was some resentment and I don't think we had that with World War II to Korea because there weren't that many Korean and an awful lot of the Korean people were World War II also. Probably more differences of opinion between Vietnam era and World War II kind of like the World War I and World War II separation and then the World War II Vietnam separation. Not so much--they all are looking for basically the same thing, the philosophies are different and that's gonna happen. Kids in school today are a whole different breed of animal than when I was in school. That's progress. It's not for the bad it's for the good. I know there are bads out there too, but not only being a service officer but also I serve on the School Board so I see that too.

Mark: So the readjustment problems the veterans face are pretty much the same across

Everson: I think so, yes.

Mark: I'd be curious to know if Vietnam veterans--there are some who argue that they are a distinct class, and others who say that they have pretty much the same problems as other vets. You seem to lean towards the later philosophy.

Everson: Yes, I think so. I think those that have problems a lot of time make their own problems. I don't know really how to expand on that but (interrupted)

Interview Transcript (continued)

Mark: For example, did Vietnam veterans in your experience have more psychological problems or were they simply more willing to talk about it.

Everson: They weren't any more willing to talk about it. I think they probably had more because not only--Vietnam, the average age of the kid over there was probably 19 or 20 at the most. World War II you're talking people that were 25 or 26. There's a difference. The type of war it was makes a difference. The readily availability of medical help, whether it be physical or mental between World War II and Vietnam were just black and white basically. A person that would have died in the field in World War II and probably even Korea survived in Vietnam. Physical causes mental too. You get somebody with a major physical disability is going to have mental problems too. It's going to happen.

Mark: I can only imagine. I got questions about the CVSO Association and then politics. Perhaps you could tell me about your involvement in the CVSO Association and what it does for the CVSO.

Everson: To my knowledge every service officer in the state is a member of the CVSO Association which as founded in 1936 by people even before there were officially CVSOs. I became involved naturally when I became a service officer and due to some circumstances that I won't put on tape, I was only a service officer for about a year and all of a sudden I got nicked with the Secretary/Treasurers job which gets you immediately closely involved in the operation of the whole association and I was Secretary/Treasurer for six years and I moved on to be 2nd Vice and 1st Vice and President, past president so 10 of the first 11 years I was on the Executive Committee and a service officer in the association. We do meet officially twice a year in the spring and in the fall. One is called the spring institute the other is our actual conference or convention when the elections take place and so forth. All service officers are invited and encouraged to attend because it's not a time for play. Maybe the evenings are but during the day between business sessions and we usually have federal people in, state people, two basically put on workshops where everybody is in the same place and the association keeps the service officers together for purpose, intent and self-policing in a way.

Mark: What do you mean self-policing?

Everson: We don't let anybody mess up. If things aren't going so well somebody will come with some strange idea and we just say, "No, that is not in the best interest of the association."

Mark: Do you find it useful to meet with CVSOs from different parts of the state? Do you find that different parts of the state have different problem? I can imagine

Interview Transcript (continued)

Milwaukee has a lot different problems than Door County would compare to a medium sized county such as Winnebago?

Everson: I think probably the smaller the county the more all encompassing is our work. For instance, Milwaukee County has very, very little federal work that they do. Why should they when they have the Regional office right at their back yard so to speak. I can't really speak for Dane County or any of the larger counties, but I think in small counties we probably do a little bit with veterans and their families than the real big counties can get into. Just a small thing like being able to read the obituaries and say, "Oh, he was a veteran I didn't know that." And then after about a week I contact the family and tell them that they may be eligible for such and such. We can do that in a small county. Such would be impossible in a large county like Milwaukee.

Mark: The CVSO association also gives the CVSOs a political voice.

Everson: Political isn't really the word because I like to think of politics as either you are republican or democrat and we are not that at all. Political to the point that we must deal with political people just like tonight we're having the Salute to the Legislatures. They are all elected by the contingency but we don't care if they're--what hat they're wearing. We are pro-veteran and that's all they're going to hear from us.

Mark: Maybe I should rephrase that then. The association must deal with elected officials who make the laws and can create the benefits. In that regard, what have been some major problem that you have seen in dealing with the Legislature and what are some of the major fights? For example, we once discussed the 1985 incident. I'm wondering how the CVSO Association deals with the Legislature and how relations have been and what are some of the major problems and good points?

Everson: I'm not going to go into great depth and generally it isn't the Legislature itself that we start having problems with, it's department administration that sets up the recommended legislation and usually we can sometimes nip that in the bud. Not always but they come up with some earth shaking money saving things that would have totally disseminated the veterans programs as we knew them. We talked a little about 1985. I guess that was the prime time where it was DOA that really was composing all the humongous cuts that we had our first ever special meeting and said, "Hey, we just can't and won't live with this." By coming loud and clear everybody heard us and we lost a couple of things, but for the most part, state veterans programs remain the same. So, we do, you can't contact all the legislators as a service officer of a particular district. Because I guess you could technically call that lobbying and we can go to committees that

Interview Transcript (continued)

involve veteran affairs or to our own legislators and say, "Look out for such and such a bill. This is good or not good or what have you." But that's really about as political as we can get.

Mark: I see. Do you find support in the legislature for the veterans programs generally?

Everson: Yes.

Mark: I'm not going to ask for names.

Everson: I'm not going to give names. I really can't ever think of somebody saying--I think that would be politically suicide to say "I'm against such and such because it's for veterans." Nobody has ever said they were against it because it would help a veteran. I think its pretty much nonpartisan when it comes to veteran related things.

Mark: I got two last areas here. CVSOs and their relationship with WDVA. I know we are in WDVA offices and I hope that's not an intimidating factor.

Everson: It's been excellent. I, myself, have been through quite a few different secretary's starting with John Moses and Jack Ellery and John Mauer and of course, Ray Boland now and there were a few short-times in between but for the most part our rapport with the Department has been very, very good. I guess when the Board itself knuckled under to the Department of Administration back in 1985 was the only time that we ever said bad things to them.

Mark: What about veterans organizations? Both on a statewide level and in your own community. What sort of role do the Legion and the VFW play?

Everson: I belong to three different organizations and I'm probably the service officer of that organization which a lot of them are. Basically, I can only speak for myself and I get along very well with the service organizations in Door County. We do have a Door County Veterans Council which comprises all the veterans organizations. We're small, we don't have as many as some of the bigger ones do but we do get together quarterly and any problem we hash them out. Very cooperative group. I guess again, traditionally, I help put together Veterans Day and Memorial Day programs and if I need anything they are right there to help me. I think you're going to find that pretty much statewide unless - I suppose there's exceptions.

Mark: You've exhausted my questions, is there anything you'd like to add?

Interview Transcript (continued)

Everson: No, I guess I'm just about talked out myself.

Mark: Thanks for stopping in. I really appreciate it.

[End of Transcript]