

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT A. LARSON
Military Police, Marines, Korean War.

2003

OH
258

OH
258

Larson, Robert A., (1933?-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

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

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

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Robert A. Larson, a Chicago, Illinois native, discusses his Korean War service as a military police officer with the 1st Marine Division, 5th Marine Regiment. Larson comments on joining the Marine Reserves as a senior in high school, having summer camp at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina), entering active duty in August of 1950, and boot camp at San Diego. Not allowed overseas yet because he was still seventeen, he talks about assignment to a security detachment at a Naval supply depot in Utah. Larson tells of the good food at the depot and, after three months of advanced infantry training at Camp Pendleton (California), his reassignment to a Military Police (MP) company in Korea in 1953. Stationed at Camp Casey (Korea), he talks about patrolling Little Chicago and other surrounding villages. After the cease fire, he talks about duty at Freedom Village during Operation Big Switch, and he details the reunion of a fellow Marine with his brother, who had been a prisoner of war. Larson mentions guarding the road between the Panmunjom truce site and Freedom Village. He addresses wearing white helmets at night, having two orphaned Korean boys attach themselves to the company, the MP markings on the company jeeps, watching movies, and living in tents. He discusses going into an off-limits town with a Korean Marine and eating sukiyaki at a restaurant. Larson tells of another Korean Marine who had a pet dog on base that he ate after it was hit by a truck. Larson tells anecdotes about duty in the brig at the Naval supply depot in Utah and the reasons why some Marines were serving time for going AWOL. He mentions having company reunions, joining the American Legion in Chicago, using the VA hospital in West Bend (Wisconsin), and becoming a charter member of VFW Post No. 7588 in Port Washington (Wisconsin). Larson talks about the establishment of Post 7588 and the beginning of their tradition of running a food stand on Port Fish Day (an annual Port Washington festival).

Biographical Sketch:

Larson (b.1933?) served in the Marine Corps from 1950 to 1954. He eventually became an electrician and settled in Saukville (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt, 2003

Transcribed by Alex Combs, 2009

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

- Laurie: This is an interview with Robert Larson, who served in the Korean War in the Marines. What years did you serve?
- Larson: 1950 to 1954.
- Laurie: The interview is being conducted at his home. What's your address?
- Larson: 604 West Hillcrest Road, Saukville.
- Laurie: Today is February 22. I am the interviewer, I am Laurie Arendt, and this is for the Ozaukee Veterans' Book Project. So the first question that I always start with is, "Did you enlist or were you drafted?"
- Larson: I joined the Reserves when I was in my senior year in high school and I graduated from high school on June 21st of 1950. I went to summer camp on June 24th of 1950.
- Laurie: Oh, wow.
- Larson: And the Korean War started June 25th of 1950.
- Laurie: Surprise!
- Larson: So we were in summer camp and didn't know where Korea was; we were at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We got home from summer camp on July 7th, 1950 and went on active duty August 8th of 1950.
- Laurie: So where did you graduate from high school?
- Larson: Lane Tech high school in Chicago. They had a big ROTC program; it was a 5000 boys high school.
- Laurie: Wow. Because some of the paperwork I have to fill out asks what your hometown is. So you didn't know where Korea was?
- Larson: We didn't know where it was or anything. We went to California to Camp Pendleton and then they split us up. The ones that didn't have time in the Reserves or that went to boot camp, and we went down to Marine Corps boot camp in San Diego. It was the biggest amount of new boots comin' in; there were over twelve hundred come down there in busses in one day to start boot camp training. And then because I was seventeen—my eighteenth birthday was in the last week of boot camp, and they had already given us assignments then. Because I was still seventeen I couldn't go overseas, so I went to a Naval supply depot in Utah between Salt Lake

City and Ogden that had been built in World War II to keep the parts from both fleets off of the coast in case either coast would have been invaded then.

Laurie: 'Cause that was gonna be my question. If it's naval, why is it landlocked?
[laughter]

Larson: That was everybody's question: "Why are the Marines in Utah?" But this was a big Naval supply depot and it was still operating when the Korean War started. And it had three thousand civilian workers, a civilian police department, a civilian fire department, and the Marines took care of the external security. They ran a brig, a Navy brig, and we got Marine and Naval prisoners from Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Colorado and the eastern part of Nevada. And every once in a while the brig would be empty and other times there would be prisoners there. There weren't hardly anybody—ever anybody that was stationed on the base in the brig because there was such a small number of guys. But it was very choice duty. It was like being in a small family because you knew everybody in the barracks by their nickname and it was a nice area to go out in and have liberty in. Far enough away from all other military things that they bought most of the food.

Laurie: They bought most of the food?

Larson: They went out in the market every week and bought fresh produce and fresh meat.

Laurie: Wow.

Larson: And the government has a menu that all servicemen are supposed to follow every day, and everybody's supposed to eat the same thing at the same meal. Well, when they had steak, we had *big* steaks, and when they had fish, we had fresh rainbow trout and like that. We didn't really realize it until you go into another [Laurie laughs] that has a big mess hall that feeds thousands, you know? But, uh, I was there and it was strictly a guard situation, and as I was promoted I received a MOS as a Military Policeman. In December of 1952 they had a dispatch to send one Corporal Military Policeman to California for further assignment, which meant Korea, and I had just made Sergeant, so they sent a dispatch back, "No Corporal MP available." Well, between Christmas and New Year's of 1952 the dispatch came back from San Francisco to transfer Sergeant Robert A. Larson, name, rank and serial number.

Laurie: Now explain; this is something that I never really understood with my husband. You know, you think of the military as this vast, vast thing; why did they just want one? Were you replacing somebody?

Larson: Yup. When they replaced the Marines in Korea it was a monthly deal and they would call replacement drafts, and every month they would send so many over. So they had projected that in May they needed so many MPs and so many of these and so many of those to replace they guys who would be coming home in May, but they already started in December figurin' what they're going to send out there. So I went back to Camp Pendleton in January of 1953 and then there was three months advanced infantry training. Our [unintelligible] was all MPs, cooks and bakers and truck drivers who had been on state-side duty and worked to get in shape. We had a very hard time getting around and everything until we started to get back in shape again, but by the time they were done running us up and down the mountains we were ready. And that--and we got to Korea in May of 1953.

Laurie: Now at that time, what was going on in the Korean War?

Larson: The Korean War was still going on. The truce talks were in process and they had taken the first Marine division off the line and put 'em in what they call "Corps Reserve." They were planning on making another invasion on the east coast of North Korea like they had gone into Inchon when they made the Inchon landing, so when they were in Corps Reserve, two of the regiments made practice landings. And I was in MP Company and headquarters battalion was behind the 5th Marine Regiment at Camp Casey. Camp Casey is a famous place in Korea, but it was just built then. Right outside of Camp Casey is Little Chicago. Now everybody knows about Little Chicago from *M*A*S*H*. The Marine Corps had MPs patrolling the villages to keep the Marines out of the villages. I went on the first tour of duty in Little Chicago, walking around with one other Marine MP who had been there. We saw a butcher shop that didn't have electricity or any refrigeration, and I asked him, "What's that hanging up there, is that a little deer?" and he says, "No, it's a big dog" [Laurie laughs] and, uh, that was--the meat was killed that day and sold that day and ate that day, so that was one of my first experiences with what happens in Korea.

Laurie: Did you ever have bulgogi? That you know of? No? Okay.

Larson: No. And then on July 4th of 1953 the Marines started to go back on the line. The truce talks took a turn for the better, and the Marines went back on the section of the line, the main line of resistance where Panmunjon was; Panmunjon was in our sector and Freedom Gate Bridge. And then the cease-fire was on July 27th of 1953. And after the cease fire the biggest thing that happened was Operation Big Switch. In Big Switch they brought back all the prisoners; they gave back all the Communist prisoners that they had, the North Koreans and the Chinese, and they brought back

all the United Nations prisoners that there were. And every morning they would make the exchange at the Panmunjon Peace site, and then the United Nations prisoners were put into ambulances and taken to Freedom Village. Freedom Village was policed by our MP company. There was one corporal in our MP company who had been in the same company I was in at California gettin' ready to go to Korea and everything. He had a brother who was in the Army when the Korean War started. His brother was in Korea and he was listed as missing in action the whole Korean War, so he got on the Freedom Village detail that went out there every afternoon at noontime. They posted a list of the prisoners that were coming back the next day, and everybody in the company knew his brother was a prisoner [choked up]. Well, it got to be that we had sent back all the Communist prisoners and we were still getting them back and we knew that Big Switch was only going to last so much longer and he had never heard anything about his brother, but on the last day of Big Switch his brother came back.

Laurie: Was his brother on the list or did he just come back?

Larson: Well, they posted this list—

Laurie: Ok. So he knew, he just didn't show up—

Larson: He didn't know until the list was posted the previous day that his brother was comin' back the last day. That was the day they brought back General Dean, the Army General who had been captured. And that night before his brother come back we were waiting for the movie to start and we had a full colonel as a provost marshal, and he came up to this corporal at the movie and he says, "You're not going to be in the village tomorrow," and he says, "Sir, my brother's coming back; I know he is." He said, "I will take you to Freedom Village in *my* Jeep and I'll give you a pass. I can't let you leave Korea, but I can give you a pass that as long as your brother is in Korea you stay with him." [choked up] So he went up there and then when his brother got out of the ambulance he was there to meet him, so that was very interesting thing. That night when the colonel came into the movie we all stood up and saluted him. And then I stayed in Korea until July of 1954 and I came back, I had one month to do in the service and I got discharged. I didn't want to stay in any more.

Laurie: No? [laughs].

Larson: If I'd have stayed in Utah I woulda stayed in, but when I really saw what the whole service was like I decided I didn't want to stay in.

Laurie: Okay. So, I know you came in from high school. Did you choose the Marines?

- Larson: Oh, I was in the Reserves.
- Laurie: The Marine Reserves?
- Larson: Yeah. You can't join that until you're seventeen, but I joined that in April.
- Laurie: Why did you pick the Marines?
- Larson: I don't know.
- Laurie: Still don't know?
- Larson: No. Nobody in the family that I knew of had been in the Marines and I just wanted to be in the Marines myself. I don't know whether it was the uniform or what.
- Laurie: You know it's funny; everybody says it's the uniform, they mention that, whether it was or not. I am so glad you shared this story, because when you told me about it at the meeting I purposely put an asterisk next to your name because there's--
- Larson: I can't remember that corporal's name. We had been together and everything, and why he was in the Marines and his brother was in the Army, I don't know. You work like port and starboard, day on day off, you know. Well, he was always on the other section, so we never really worked together.
- Laurie: Were you there when he reunited with his brother? Did you see it?
- Larson: No. Every day of Operation Big Switch I patrolled the road from the north side of Freedom Gate Bridge up to where you went into the DMZ zone to go up to the Panmunjon Truce site. We were still tactical, so we couldn't go into the DMZ zone, but we had to keep that road open to let the ambulances get down to Freedom Gate, er, Freedom Village, and they had to go across Freedom Bridge, but they were just highballed down there. Then some of the guys were ambulatory, some of them were on stretchers, and it wasn't all Americans, because there were a lot of other prisoners that were from the other United Nations and that. And so when they went into Freedom Village and then they went to counter-intelligence they were debriefed before anybody talked to them. But Freedom Village was right at the railhead that's always talked about where the truce trade used to be, and then there was base camp, which was a big Army base, and that's where all the truce negotiators stayed and all the correspondents and that. And then every morning they go up to Freedom—or up to Panmunjom

across Freedom Bridge and then they would come back in the afternoon; it just depended on how long the truce talks took.

Laurie: So when you were on patrol like that, did you ever run into any problems or was it pretty mundane?

Larson: We, uh, we had problems before the cease-fire. There was a time where Syngman Rhee, the president of Korea, released a whole bunch of prisoners in South Korea, but they all got away and they had a hard time roundin' 'em up. He was kind of a rebel on doin' stuff, Syngman Rhee. And these prisoners were out loose and we had to patrol with white hats on at night. You would wear the white hat until you got out away from the company area, then automatically you put on your regular dungaree hat and put that white hat in the back of the jeep.

Laurie: Why did they make you wear white hats? So they could see it was you?

Larson: That was--the helmet liners were painted white; do you know what a helmet liner is? They painted them white and then they had a red and gold stripe around 'em, and then you had the Marine emblem right in the middle of the thing. I got some pictures I could show [photos rustling]. I don't have any pictures; I had a fire in the house in Chicago, but these are from a friend of a guy that we was in the service with. Here's the entrance to the _____[?] And for a while after the cease fire I was in accident investigation, and this is the Jeep we had. See that siren on the right fender? Well they stole that off of some tank retriever or something. [laughs] We had it on that Jeep but it was tearin' the Jeep apart, tearing the fender apart. They were always yellin' at us. [sound of more photos rustling] Here's two guys with _____[?] and then that bottom picture is the hats we wore in the wintertime with the MP on the visor; that was taken at a Christmas party for orphans. There was an orphanage in a town--a little village close to us; that's the same guy that I got these pictures from. And then this one I can't figure out. He don't know, there's a bunch of names, but these guys, there's two bazookas there. There's a light machine gun, and all their rifles and everything; they look like they're lost. [laughs] He don't know where he got that picture from. [Laurie laughs] These are two orphans.

Laurie: Did you work with the dogs at all?

Larson: With what?

Laurie: With dogs. Did you work with dogs at all?

Larson: No. Them are two orphans that got attached to the company.

- Laurie: Oh, were they like, like boys, Cabana boys or whatever you call it?
- Larson: Yeah. We were putting 'em through school. You had to pay to go to school; we were puttin' them through school.
- Laurie: My husband was in Korea—
- Larson: They attached themselves to the company--
- Laurie: I think he was there in 1988 for a year.
- Larson: Those guys all had to be in the Freedom Village detail, 'cause I don't know any of them. And we got real big to handle the guys in Freedom Village, so these are pictures that--we just found this guy about four years ago in Arizona, and this is one guy went overseas with: Willie Roan[?]. He got to be takin' care of an indigenous stockade we had in the company when we picked up prostitutes or stuff like that, and he would be in charge of that. The girls used to give him a hard time--he's Chinese, but they gave him a hard time because of being Oriental. [Laurie laughs] And here's some Korean Marines. If you look at the back of the truck, or the Jeep, they got, um, Korean MPs on there. That's the side of a reel of Com wire, and you'd put them over the hubcap on the back of the spare; that's what we had on our Jeeps too to mark 'em as MPs. The rest of these are just pictures of different things and that, but we had--this is our movie in the company. It was a big tent that we had made into a movie and it had a marquee, and every day they would put the movie that was gonna be there that night on the marquee.
- Laurie: So this is the movie you were at when the—
- Larson: When, yeah—
- Laurie: —The guy found out that his brother, he'd get a pass and everything.
- Larson: Yeah, yeah. And you could go--we had people that were on duty twenty-four hours a day, and if you wanted to go to a movie you had to sit in the front. If they needed you, the supernumerary guard walked right up to the side of the movie and just yelled out "the Colonel Sergeant North," "the Colonel Sergeant South," or whatever.
- Laurie: Did you enjoy being an MP as a job?
- Larson: Yeah. Well, it was interesting, more so after the cease-fire, because we were more into the towns and that where they were off limits, and you had a little more leeway; you could do stuff, go out and explore and everything.

Laurie: What did you explore in Korea? What did you like? Did you like kimchi?

Larson: No [Both laugh]. I knew a guy that had come back from Korea when I was still in Utah who ate stuff [buzzing sound obscures the talking] and he had worms, and it took him quite a long time to get rid of the worms, so before you went to Korea they told you not to eat anything over there that grew underground. [whistling sound] And I remember this guy having worms, so I was very careful about what I ate until I went to Japan in December of 1953 and had sukiyaki. And then when I come back I talked to the interpreters we had about sukiyaki. There were restaurants in Seoul-- you could go to Seoul and there were a couple places that you could go into, but there was a little town that we had a town patrol in and I went there one night with one of the interpreters and I had a Korean Marine ride with me as my shotgun. We went for dinner one night in an off-limits town [Laurie gasps] and had the MPs walking town patrol watch the Jeep while we went and had dinner. The lady that ran this restaurant thought it was really something that I paid for the dinner with the other two guys.

Laurie: Really?

Larson: Oh, yeah. They thought that was really something, you come in there and eating in their place. We had sukiyaki. And then you asked about dogs. We had a checkpoint where you come into the division area that was ten miles north of Seoul and on Route 1, which was the main route between Seoul and Panmunjon and that so there was a lot of traffic there and there were Korean Marines--they always had one Korean Marine at a checkpoint, two American Marines, and we had an interpreter with us. One Korean Marine had a dog, and he had the dog at the checkpoint when he was on duty. They lived a little ways away from the checkpoint in a little village there. And one day when we were making the change--we stayed down there twenty-four hours and had to eat C-rations when we were there, and we were changing the guard and I just got there and was gonna be there all day. The other guys were getting' on the truck to come back to the company and this dog had been run over by a truck and it was still alive. They didn't care about it, they were going back to the company. So I shot the dog to put it out of its misery, and they come over and picked it up and took it; they had it that night for supper.

Laurie: Supper, sure.

Larson: And when the guy that left with the dog came out on duty that night I says, "What'd you have for supper?" "Dog san." "How was it?" "Very good, very good." [both laugh] He ate his own dog.

- Laurie: Now what about your living conditions? Were you in a barracks, were you in a tent, were you--
- Larson: We were in tents, all the time. That's why I never go camping. I figure in the service I lived in tents for about eighteen months and that was long enough to camp in anybody's lifetime, so if I go anyplace I stay in a motel. We had permanent tents; they had sides halfway up and then they had a wooden frame that the tent was on they called a strongback, so we didn't have any poles in the middle of them, and we had a wooden floor and we had lights. Being in the MP company, we also had the brig there, so there was lights twenty-four hours a day, where a lot of places only had electricity at night on their generators.
- Laurie: [Papers shuffling] Ok. Well, I'll look through my questions, make sure I didn't miss anything. Now you were with the First Marine Division?
- Larson: First Marine Division, MP Company.
- Laurie: Because what I can try and do, which I didn't do for this book, but I did-- one of the gentlemen in the first book wrote his autobiography and I was able to obtain pictures from the government that we were able to use, so I might be able to find some pictures that I could use on your page.
- Larson: I got one picture. When I was in Utah the Marine Corps magazine, *The Leatherneck*, they have a thing called Posts of the Corps, which was real big then. They sent a photographer and a reporter and they took pictures of the base and everything. And one year, or one month, that base was in *The Leatherneck*.
- Laurie: You made the magazine?
- Larson: Yeah.
- Laurie: Did you send it home at all?
- Larson: Oh, we sent it home and it got lost, like pictures I had got lost in a fire, you know, and souvenirs got lost, but then we had the reunion--we still have a reunion with the people in Utah--and one of the guys still had them pictures.
- Laurie: Really?
- Larson: So we got them. Then one of the guys somehow got all the pictures that this photographer took for *The Leatherneck* and when we went out there, he had 'em on a bulletin board at the reunion. Then when the reunion was over he— **[End of tape 1, side A]**

- Larson: —Supposed to go out at night, have a good time and everything, and they didn't work when they were supposed to and they had a hard time with them so they put 'em on mess leave. Well, they weren't working in the mess hall and the cooks and the bakers would find more work for 'em. One morning one of the young kids told the one cook, he says, "If you guys don't get off of me and my buddy, we're gonna go over the hill." So they made him work extra hard that day.
- Laurie: Uh, huh.
- Larson: And when they were cleanin' up after supper, getting ready to close the mess hall, the cook asks his mess man, he says, "You and your buddy still gonna go over the hill?" He said "Yeah," so he made him a dozen sandwiches and gave him six apples and six oranges in a bag and everything, and he says, "Here, you're goin' over the hill, you're gonna need some food." So they took the stuff and they went over the hill. They were gone the next morning; they were gone. This poor cook [chuckles] figured that he would be in the brig if the captain ever found out what he did. And the guys stayed over the hill a long time; they went to the one kid's house in Saint Louis first and said they were on leave, then they left there and they went to the other kid's house in Los Angeles on freight trains, they rode freight trains, and by then they were over the hill thirty days and the FBI was lookin' for them. When this kid got home in California, he just told his mother there must be some mistake and that, so he went--a couple days he went shopping with his sister and the FBI come to the house again and they caught the first kid, and then they got the second one, so they came back to the barracks. The captain wasn't real happy with them, and they were in the brig a long time. But the captain never did find out that—
- Laurie: The cook helped them [laughs].
- Larson: —the cook gave them their apples and their oranges [laughs]. And then when I was working in the brig as a turnkey, you talk to the prisoners and that, and we had one sailor in there—
- Laurie: This is in Utah?
- Larson: —Yeah. We had one sailor in the brig that was from Salt Lake City. When his parents and his girlfriend came to visit him, I questioned why this guy went over the hill, because he didn't seem like the kind of a person who would go over the hill, and so I asked him one time in the brig why he was over the hill. And he says, "I got drafted into the Navy and I have a uranium claim." And he says, "I have to work the claim thirty days a year to keep it." And he says, "I can only get a thirty day leave," and he said, "I

cannot get home and get to my uranium claim, because it takes me four days of packin' in into the mountains to work the claim thirty days and bring out so much uranium, and then four days of packin' out." And he says, "I had to go over the hill to keep the uranium claim." He says when the FBI came looking for him at his house, his mother told them where he was, so the FBI sent a man to get him.

Laurie: Four days?

Larson: Yeah, and he just had a little more time to work the claim and that, so he told the FBI guy, "If you take me out now and I don't get the thirty days in, you're going to have to come back in and get me." And he says, "If you let me stay here long enough to work the claim, I'll come out with ya and we won't have no trouble," so that's what happened. And that's why he was in the brig on our base. And I had to take him one afternoon to the commander of the Navy base, the commander of the Navy barracks' office. The commander of the Navy barracks told me the same story, because his mother and sister were there with papers that had to be witnessed, and he couldn't witness the papers but his secretary and I could. So he told me the same story of the uranium mine and everything. Then that night I asked him in the brig, I says, "Is it really worth all this to go over the hill?" He says, "Yeah," he says, "when I get out of the Navy," he says, "I'll never have to get a job," and he says, "I'll be able to buy a new car every year." So.

Laurie: Well he's probably dead from radiation sickness, too.

Larson: I don't know about that uranium stuff.

Laurie: Oh, ok.

Larson: And I never did find out how he found that uranium claim four days back in the mountains, but this was in the mountains between Salt Lake and Denver; it was up in the mountains someplace.

Laurie: Wow. Well, anything else you'd care to add?

Larson: No.

Laurie: No?

Larson: I've got guys going over the hill I thought was pretty good.

Laurie: That's pretty good [laughs]!

Laurie: Ok, so you came back and you've been involved in organizations, military organizations?

Larson: Yeah, I came back I lived in Chicago and I joined the Legion in Chicago; it was an electric post, it was in the union. I served an apprenticeship to be an electrician, and then I worked as an electrician in Chicago. When I got out of Chicago I was living in Kenosha County and then I got sick and went to the VA Hospital. I had some relatives in West Bend and I was disabled when I got out of the VA hospital, so I went to live in West Bend. It was six adults in the house, and that, so I got an apartment at Chadwick Village, and that's how I got over here. And then when they started the VFW post in Port Washington I was interested in it.

Laurie: So is that a new, or newer post?

Larson: We're a newer post. I got a letter once from Waubeka post, a flag day[?] post but I wasn't interested when I lived over there. And then I got a shotgun mailer, they call it: "Would I be interested in joining a VFW post in your community?" So I wrote back that I was. So I'm a charter member.

Laurie: Ok, good.

Larson: —And, uh—

Laurie: What's the number of that VFW post?

Larson: 7588. And then we were chartered on June 6, 1990.

Laurie: Oh, so you're really young!

Larson: Yeah, we're only thirteen years old. And we had all kinds of cooperation from all the Legion posts around here and everything. The only ones that thought we shouldn't have started that post were from Ozaukee County Memorial[?], and most of their members are from Port Washington. They were called the Belgian Post; they used to own that tavern on the road going down to the state park. I forget what they call that—

Laurie: Oh, by Harrington Beach there?

Larson: Yeah.

Laurie: Oh, Silver Beach or—

Larson: Silver Beach—

Laurie: Or Cedar Beach?

Larson: Cedar Beach. Yeah!

Laurie: Oh!

Larson: They used to own that Cedar Beach tavern.

Laurie: Oh, that would make sense because—

Larson: 5373.

Laurie: —Mr. Peeron,[?] he's in the first book, is a member of the VFW and he talked about bartending there for a lot of years.

Larson: Yeah. I don't know when they sold that.

Laurie: That was like, late-, mid- to late-80s; it was right around the time I was getting married.

Larson: Okay. When we started our post, Jerry Burkle[?] was the state VFW commander and he lived in Port Washington and belonged to 5373, but there's still guys in 5373 that won't talk to us.

Laurie: Oh, how odd.

Larson: Yeah, yeah. And members of 5373 helped us, and it's funny that they had two factions.

Laurie: Sure. Well that's Ozaukee County; it's like that with everything.

Larson: Well, ok. [laughs] Well, I'm not from around here.

Laurie: No, people are—

Larson: Clannish?

Laurie: Yeah, that's a very good word for it. Yeah, in everything. Ok, so you belong to the VFW post, you're a charter member; do you belong to the Legion, too?

Larson: I still belong to the Legion in Chicago. I joined the Legion in Chicago and I was commander in 1968 in Chicago. And then I was commander of Port post I think '95 or '96. We started out, and--you have a bunch of guys, we started out at George's King of the Hill Tavern in that meeting room. Whole bunch of guys come in and I only knew one of the guys that lived

in Chadwick Village; I got him to join. So you all go there and they start the meeting and they swear you in, and then you're supposed to pick out all the officers for the year. Well, they got officers picked out and I was having problems; I was going in and out of the VA quite a bit so I didn't want to take a job, and I'd already been commander; I knew what it was more than the other guys, so I didn't take a job the first year. But the guy who was gonna be commander, he resigned because somebody said that Jerry Burkle[?] just tried to get a post started 'cause he was state commander, and then the guy who was going to be the quartermaster, when he started to get the big box of paperwork that he had and everything, he didn't want to do all that paperwork, so he came and set the box down and he quit. When we had the second meeting we had it in the basement of the Harborside. The guy that was the senior vice commander took over as commander; his name was, uh, Gordy Hartwick[?]. So he started us out and we got goin', didn't have any money and were starting to run up expenses and all. But the first November, November of 1990, we sold poppies for Veterans Day and we got some money. So we're taking money out of one account to pay the other stuff, robbing Peter to pay Paul, [laughter] but, uh, it worked. And then he got us into Fish Day. And the yacht club, a lot of people didn't want to work, the yuppity ones, and all of their members are supposed to work on Fish Day. Well, we got in on the yacht club and we split it 50-50, but we got the experience of how to do stuff for Fish Day. I think we were with them three or four years. Then a stand opened up and we could take the stand. So that's how we got the stand on Fish Day.

Laurie: So where's your stand located?

Larson: We're in the upper part.

Laurie: Oh! That's a good—

Larson: In the pavilion up there, and we're the only ones in the upper part that have got beer and fish and chips.

Laurie: That's a great place to be.

Larson: Yeah, it's gonna get better, but as--because they can't get any bigger on the bottom right there. Has anybody invited you to come and help us on Fish Day?

Laurie: Well, I helped with the Leatherneck Club, 'cause they—

Larson: Ok, alright.

- Laurie: But--see, here's the deal; I had a really good time helping them, but it's also the weekend of the state convention for the American Legion and my husband's probably gonna be commander of the Grafton Legion Post next year. So *if* I'm around I'll do a shift in your tent.
- Larson: Just come up. You know, it's altogether different.
- Laurie: Ok.
- Larson: We don't run no lines; everybody gives beer or fish; with the Leathernecks I don't know. I belonged to the Leathernecks for a while, but I was never able to go there for Fish Day, 'cause I was with the VFW.
- Laurie: Oh. Well, I was a fish packer.
- Larson: Ok.
- Laurie: I put the fish in the—
- Larson: Yeah, and, uh, it's getting' to be where it's a big job for us—
- Laurie: Ok.
- Larson: So we've got some kids helpin' us that are Explorer Scouts and last year we took in some, uh, Amvets from West Bend; Chuck Belmour[?] and a couple other guys belong to the Amvets in West Bend, so they came and they helped us and they never saw nothin' like Fish Day.
- Laurie: Oh, really? [laughs]
- Larson: Yeah, and they're runnin' brat, fries, and that over there and working all day, makin' about \$300. Well, I think they made twelve or thirteen hundred with us, just—
- Laurie: Yeah, Fish Day is *huge*.
- Larson: That's one nice thing about Fish Day—
- Laurie: It's one day and it's over with.
- Larson: You don't have to buy, you don't have to sell no chances or anything. If you go around sellin' chances then other people come back to you sellin' chances, you know. And these little things, doing this and doing that, you make a few cents here and a few cents there. We're able to do all the stuff we do, and we do a lot of good stuff, with the money from that day. That is part of Fish Day, is the money will go back into the Community.

- Laurie: Exactly, yeah.
- Larson: And the Leathernecks do a good job.
- Laurie: I worked the morning shift.
- Larson: And the Leathernecks sell the most beer of anybody because they're in the best spot; it's like an hourglass, and you gotta go past the little part of the hourglass where they're at there.
- Laurie: And since they started fencing it, off people come in and that's the first stand they see.
- Larson: Well now the Lions went down—
- Laurie: Oh did they? Down by the—
- Larson: —in the parking lot where Kentucky Fried Chicken—
- Laurie: Yeah. But if you're comin' from Saint Mary's Hill and come around the corner—
- Larson: Chuck, Chuck tried to move them a couple years ago and they didn't want to move, and they did the best year they've ever had there.
- Laurie: Yeah, well—
- Larson: Chuck _____[?] has been stands chairman for I don't know how long and he can't get *rid* of this job, [laughter] but he's straightened out a lot of stuff, and the stands used to do stuff for themselves. Since he's had the job they work together. He works real hard at it, but he's trying to give the thing up but—
- Laurie: Nobody wants it [laughs].
- Larson: —Can't give it up [phone rings] and then the other stuff that happens there—

[End of Interview]