

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Jack Luban
33rd General Hospital, Army, World War II.

1995

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Luban, Jack (1911-2001). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 35 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Luban, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his Army service in the European and North African theaters during World War II and his later work as a County Veterans Service Officer in Milwaukee County. Working as a social worker in Milwaukee County, Luban outlines his drafting in March 1941, basic training at Camp Grant (Illinois), forming the 68th Medical Regiment at Camp Forrest (Tennessee), Officer's Training School at Camp Barkley (Texas), and forming the 43rd Station Hospital at Camp Blanding, Florida. He briefly addresses a "beautiful assignment" in Staten Island (New York) to equip the entire 43rd Station Hospital using equipment, some likely from World War I, from the Brooklyn Navy Yard. As an aside, he mentions that at Camp Grant, he observed smaller men receiving World War I uniforms. The rest of the 43rd Station Hospital personnel joined him in New York and from there; the unit went by ocean liner (the St. Helena) to Africa. Luban discusses setting up as a psychiatric hospital in Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy characterizing the hospital as having no permanent buildings, just large tents and psychiatrists that were "loonier" than the patients. He mentions his role as supply officer for the psychiatric hospital and speaks of "shell shock" among the young soldiers characterizing them as "passive." In Italy, the 43rd was deactivated since a tent hospital was no longer needed with buildings waiting to be commandeered. Luban tells of his assignment as supply and recreation officer to the 33rd General Hospital, staffed largely by personnel from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He characterizes the 33rd as more professional than the 43rd and speaks to the effort by 33rd officers to keep women nurses separated from the men. However, there were dances and Luban recalls a few marriages. He found no hostility among the Italians, feeling they were half-hearted in their support of Mussolini and happy when the Nazis left. He speaks of their poverty, strict hospital rules for casual searches, and his feelings that the theft of bread could have been overlooked. He states that he was selected for military government training at the University of Virginia and was therefore stateside when the atomic bomb was dropped after which he was sent to Presidio Monterey Language School in anticipation of an invasion of Japan. With Japan's surrender, Luban explains that he had been in service for four and a half years and had enough points to be separated as a captain. He expresses his feeling that the atomic bomb saved lives. Upon his return, Luban eventually landed the job as County Veterans Service Officer for Milwaukee County, becoming the first World War II veteran in Wisconsin to become a CVSO, a position he served in for the next thirty-five years. Luban speaks of serving as ombudsman for the veteran in handling claims and characterizes the U.S. Veterans Administration (V.A.) as both the grantor and

withholder of benefits. He also addresses the loan business through the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs specifically mentioning real estate and housing loans. He speaks of strong support for his work and his office by the Milwaukee County Executive. Interestingly, Luban mentions the strength of the various veterans organizations in Milwaukee—VFW, American Legion, DAV—and his efforts to remain neutral, yet involved with each. He discusses at some length the transition in CVSOs from World War I veterans to World War II veterans, saying that most WWI veteran CVSOs were appointed by their county boards and therefore were well-known in their counties. Explaining that they had political power in their areas and many were chosen because they had suffered wounds, Luban reveals that some of them were actually very ill. He speaks of the passing of the World War I Service Officer and characterizes them as “good party boys,” “rough and tumble,” and “very individual.”

Biography:

Jack Luban was born July, 1911 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1933 and worked for the Department of Outdoor Relief until being drafted in 1941. He served mostly in the European theater with the Army until 1946 when he was discharged. Luban served as the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Officer until 1981.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcription edited by T. J. Weinaug, 2008.

Interview:

Mark: I'll start in with some questions. Today's date is November the ...

Luban: 16th.

Mark: 16th. Thank you. 1995. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Jack Luban of Milwaukee, a veteran of the 2nd World War and a former County Service Officer as well. Good morning. Thanks for taking the time to talk to me.

Luban: Good. Go right ahead.

Mark: I appreciate it. Okay. I suppose we should start at the top as they say and have 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.

Luban: All right. Let's start with I was born in Milwaukee. You have my birth date?

Mark: Uhm, 1911. That's all I have.

Luban: July 19, 1911. And what was I doing before Pearl Harbor? I was in, I was drafted early. I was conscripted in March of 1941.

Mark: Now, you were 30 years old at the time, is that right? 29? 30?

Luban: I was, let's see, was I, about 29. I think I was 30 that July wasn't I? I think so.

Mark: Yeah.

Luban: Yeah. I was 29 years old. I was, as I say, I was drafted in March of '41. My first station was Camp Grant, Illinois. I was as green as grass, of course. I had no, absolutely no inkling of what military service was all about. Everybody at Camp Grant was put in the medical department.

Mark: Oh, is that right? Why was that, do you know? Do you have any idea?

Luban: I have no idea other than they were building, of course remember in March of '41 we were just building our services.

Mark: So, I'm curious, when you got your draft notice, I mean you had been working for a few years I would imagine as a welfare worker, is that right?

- Luban: Right, right. I started in the Milwaukee County Department of Public Welfare. Well, at that time it wasn't known as that. It was actually known as the Department of Outdoor Relief. And I started in '34.
- Mark: In the midst of the Depression.
- Luban: In the very depth of the Depression. I got my degree at UW-Madison in '33 and, of course, everybody was scrounging for jobs and
- Mark: Yeah, I was going to say. You must have been fairly busy as a welfare worker during that period.
- Luban: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I still remember there was a civil service examination given and 1,500 of us took that exam. So, anyway, that was what I was doing before I was drafted in 1941.
- Mark: So you were drafted, you had been to college, you were 29 years old and established in a professional rating really. What was your reaction to getting the draft notice? Did you expect that? And how did you feel about it?
- Luban: I can't remember my feelings. I think I took it for granted that there had, apparently, there'd been, of course, there was a lot of publicity. One of my friends was actually drafted earlier. He was the only one that I know of that, in my acquaintance, that was drafted earlier and why, he was put into the horse cavalry. He didn't know one end of the horse from another. But anyway, my reaction was that whatever happens happens. As I say, I was as green as grass.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, at the time were you married?
- Luban: I was not married. I didn't marry until after military service. I didn't want to get married at that time. I recall thinking now here going into military service this is no time to leave a wife.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Luban: So I skipped it until after I got out of military service. But, of course, I didn't realize how long I was going to be in either.
- Mark: So, you went to Camp Grant as you said, and you were put in the medical service.
- Luban: Right. That's where I took basic training.
- Mark: Right. Now, you were an officer, is that, that's ...

Luban: At that time? No I ...

Mark: Well, you went in as enlisted.

Luban: I was a green grass private.

Mark: Yeah, you would have to be if you were drafted.

Luban: At \$21 a month.

Mark: So how did you get to become an officer? I know you later became one.

Luban: Yeah. Well, from Camp Grant after basic training, we were shipped to Camp Forrest in Tennessee, Tullahoma, Tennessee, and there we formed I think the 68th Medical Regiment. And it was during the time that the medical regiment was training that I was picked to go to Officer's Training School. From there I went to Camp Barkley, Texas where the Medical Administrative Corps had its officer training. I got my, I went through that and, incidentally, I still recall how tough that was.

Mark: Why don't you tell me a little bit about how tough it was. I'm curious.

Luban: You know, of course, Camp Barkley itself was a dust bowl; it's up in the Panhandle. Or was in the Panhandle. And, you know, the second lieutenants were all known as 90-day wonders at that time.

Mark: Because you were being trained so quickly.

Luban: Yeah, yeah, in any service. But after we got through we all said it's a wonder we got through. The training was very, very rigorous I recall; to the point that we, when we did get our commissions we wouldn't even talk to our training people although they were just, when I look back and reflect, they were just doing their duty. They did a good job with us. Anyway, that's where I got my commission. And from there I was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida to form the 43rd Station Hospital. And then I got a break. I got a beautiful assignment. I was sent by myself to Staten Island, New York to gather all of the hospital — it was going to be a tent hospital and I was sent there to represent the hospital and to gather the materials, gather the whole blasted hospital of which I knew nothing about, of course. And I remember that every day I would take the boat and go over to I think it was the Brooklyn Navy Yard where they kept all the equipment. Probably the equipment was from World War I. Incidentally, when we were at Camp Grant there were a few of the men who were small who were issued World War I uniforms. They didn't have enough uniforms for them so they were walking around with leggings and whatnot from World War I.

- Mark: That's interesting.
- Luban: And anyway, I gathered the hospital and instead of my joining the hospital the personnel joined me in New York and from there we went to Africa.
- Mark: And how was that voyage overseas? I hear various stories about the trip overseas. I'm interested in yours.
- Luban: We were sent over on an ocean liner —what was it? The St. Helena, St. Helena. The St. Helena was actually a liner, one that was used for passengers prior to the war. And, of course, all of these ships were commandeered for troops. And, of course, we were surrounded by warships; the destroyers and the whatnot, the cruisers, and everything else. I can't recall how long it took us to zig-zag to North Africa but I remember we got into Africa I think in April of 1943.
- Mark: What sort of accommodations did you have? You were an officer. I suspect you had a little more spacious ones than enlisted men.
- Luban: Yeah. We had those, I really can't recall. I didn't feel any great hardship. I recall that there were a couple of alerts, of course, along the way for subs. I remember that. But that's the only thing I do remember about the trip overseas. Apparently, it wasn't too bad otherwise it would have, I would have kept it in memory.
- Mark: Like a lot of guys, some of them got sea sick for example. You don't recall.
- Luban: I did not, I did not. I can't recall that many of us did. There probably were. There must have been thousands, several thousand of us on board ship but I myself was not, did not get sea sick.
- Mark: Okay. So you landed in Africa.
- Luban: Oran, Africa. It's like in Algeria. There we set up, actually the action in North Africa was really they were mopping up already when we got there. I think it was the 1st Division as I remember. I do remember that the general commanding was, did a poor job and was relieved of duty. It got to be quite a scandal at the time. Anyway, we set up there and after — we were there for six months in that area.
- Mark: And what did you ...
- Luban: Around there and in Bizerte (Tunisia) which I remember was a completely deserted city when we were there. And after six months we went over to Italy.

We set up our 43rd Station Hospital just north of Caserta which is in the Naples area.

Mark: And what's involved with setting up a hospital? Why don't you describe what ...

Luban: Then tents, we actually set up in large tents. Everything was in tents. There were no permanent buildings for us. And we set up as a psychiatric hospital. As I recall the medical personnel were loonier than the patients. The psychiatrists were crazy. I recall that we, the non-professionals agreed on that that some of the psychiatrists were a little off the beam. Anyway, ...

Mark: So, as a supply officer in a psychiatric hospital what, I mean, describe a typical day for me, of your duties.

Luban: We had a large tent and we had shelves. I remember we set up shelves. It was not a bad setup. It was, after all, I don't recall that there was, it was any physical hardship that is in the way of weather. We set up, I remember we had shelves and we had them well-organized. We had them labeled so that any time they came and called for a particular piece of equipment or a particular drug we were able to furnish it.

Mark: Now, so I don't imagine that got you terribly close to the patients.

Luban: Well, yes, well close to the base because we were building around. Remember we were, this was a cohesive unit and the patients were all around us so that when we walked out, sure we saw patients. We didn't treat them, of course, but we mingled with them.

Mark: So, I mean I realize you're not a doctor much less a psychologist but I'm interested in your impressions of the psychiatric cases that you saw. In fact, it was in Italy if I'm not mistaken where Patton actually slapped a soldier at one time.

Luban: Was what?

Mark: He actually slapped a soldier at one time.

Luban: Oh, you mean Patton?

Mark: Yeah, Patton.

Luban: General Patton. I don't recall whether that happened in Italy. I guess it did.

Mark: It was in the Mediterranean somewhere I think.

- Luban: Was it?
- Mark: I'm pretty sure.
- Luban: Yeah, well, remember when we talked, you know, they called it, now I think they call it "battle fatigue."
- Mark: Yeah.
- Luban: At that time it was shell, it put the old World War I nomenclature of "shell shock." But it was, after all we were all, many of these were people 19, 18, 19, 20 years old under great battle conditions and they broke.
- Mark: Uh hum. From your position observing this, what sort of symptoms would they have?
- Luban: We couldn't tell, we couldn't tell. I mean there was no raving, if you mean were they raving? No. They were quite passive as I remember. I can't remember that there were any incidents of violence or anything like that.
- Mark: Were there particular times when you would see more or less of the patients? For example, I would imagine in Africa ...
- Luban: You mean after battle?
- Mark: Yeah. I mean, I would imagine Africa when this is the first combat exposure to ...
- Luban: Now I'm talking about Italy because I can't recall that in Africa that we had, what we were doing. I don't think we had too much action. We had more action in Italy.
- Mark: Yeah.
- Luban: Anyway, the 43rd Station Hospital was deactivated, it was a tent hospital and we were now in Italy where there buildings that they could commandeer so we were, the whole hospital was deactivated and I was assigned to the 33rd General Hospital. Now, the hospital, the large hospital, the general hospital actually came from hospitals in the States. In other words, by the 33rd General was actually activated by personnel from the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. I think, it seems to me that I was assigned temporarily to another unit and I cannot for the life of me remember. It must have been very short because I, well, most of my duty then was with the 33rd General Hospital and there I got varying duties. I was a supply, I was recreation officer, I had all

kinds of duties. We went from Caserta, went to Rome, from Rome to Leghorn. At that time known, still known as Livorno. Then I, by now we are talking about 1945 and toward the end of the war with Germany, and I was then selected to go back to the States to train for military government in Japan. So I was sent to the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, and as I said we were supposed to get general training in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia, then we were slated for Japanese language school at the University of Michigan, and from there we were supposed to go to the Presidio Monterey in California. But while we were at the University of Virginia the A-bomb was dropped. I still recall, as we walked down the streets, seeing the headlines about a bomb with the power of 20 tons of TNT as they said. So we bypassed the University of Virginia and were sent directly to the Presidio Monterey Language School and there, of course, they had expected an invasion of Japan and had Japan been invaded, of course, they thought that they would have to send in military government.

Mark: Right.

Luban: But as it turned out, of course, Japan surrendered and when I was at the Presidio — by that time I had been in service, oh, it must have been about 4½ years and they had a point system.

Mark: Yeah, right.

Luban: So I had enough points at that time to be separated. Then I was separated as a captain as I recall.

Mark: I'd like to back track a little if I could. I want to discuss some activities overseas. When you weren't on duty, when you had some free time, what did you and others around you do to occupy yourselves?

Luban: Well, I've still got a few pictures. We did a little sightseeing, of course. We, when we were in Leghorn, of course, we were close to Florence. I remember we visited Florence. And, of course, we went to Pisa. And everybody, the standard picture, of course, there must be thousands of them, is the illusion that you put your arms up so that the picture turns out it looks like you're holding up the Tower of Pisa. There must be thousands of those.

Mark: And you've got one.

Luban: I've got one. And what else did we do? Well, we, not very much. You know there was periods, there was great periods of boredom, too.

Mark: Yeah. I mean, as I do these interviews I hate to bring in television and movie references but in your case I think of M*A*S*H instantly. And the sort of activities around the hospital and the characters and all that sort of thing.

Luban: Well, I'll tell you there were more characters at the 43rd Station than there were at the 33rd General. These were more professionals and being a general hospital, of course, you know that they have all the departments. Well, I shouldn't say that. We're talking about 1945. You're not talking about imaging, you're talking about x-raying and that's about it. But there were various departments and I recall the names of some of the officers but they were all, these were more mature. Now doctors were older than most of us. As you might expect because they had gone through medical school and many of them had practiced. So that the doctors are, in fact, actually older. But nurses, the nurses were, you know, the commanding officers of the, at least our hospital, they were very strict about separation. That there wasn't too much romance going on there.

Mark: And was that effective?

Luban: I remember there was a marriage of an officer and a nurse. As a matter of fact, there were two marriages of officers and nurses in our unit. I often wondered about that and I thought, gee, this is a funny place to get married. Anyway, so it must not. Actually, obviously it wasn't adhered to too strictly. And we had dances. After all, the nurses, you might remember, the nurses had their pick of men here. I mean, the poor enlisted men could only look on although they, I think, as I remember one of the marriages was in Italy. Had to get permission of the commanding officer, of course, to marry the nurse. I think, as I remember, she was an ugly woman.

Mark: Now, I would imagine this is your first trip overseas.

Luban: Uh, that was my first trip overseas, you bet.

Mark: I'm interested to know if you had much contact with the native people of Algeria or Italy. Did you get ...

Luban: Yes.

Mark: Did you get to ...

Luban: One of my, come to think of it, one of my duties at the 33rd General Hospital, I was in charge of civilian personnel. I still have a portrait somewhere. One of the civilians was an artist. Of course, they all tried to cozy up to me — not that I had any power but they thought I did — anyway, and one of them painted a portrait of me. Somewhere around the house here, I can't remember

what I did with it but I'm sure I've still got a water color of me painted by a civilian, I had an office, as I recall, well, this was in Rome, north of Rome, Santa Maria Magora. We took over a, it was either a hospital or else it was a convent. I can't remember now but it seems to me it was one or the other. Of course, I had contact with them. I had absolutely no problem with them. They were glad to get to work.

Mark: Italy, at one time, had been Fascist, but you weren't particularly worried about Fascist sentiment or hostility among the Italians. That wasn't an issue I take it.

Luban: There was no hostility, not the people we had. You know, Italy, if you look in the historically, Italy, of course, had Mussolini but I think that most of the Italians were only half-hearted if at all. I think after the Nazis left and went north, pushed north, the Italians, it seemed to me, were very happy about it. They were not, their hearts weren't in this thing.

Mark: Yeah.

Luban: I had no problems. There was a lot of poverty, of course. So these people, oh, I recall that we did have to, we did have a strict rule that they could leave with nothing. That is, they couldn't leave with bread or anything. They had to submit to a casual search as they left the hospital to go home. I remember we had to, would have a guard search which didn't please me at all. I thought, what the heck if they took bread, let them take bread. But there was a strict rule against that.

Mark: As for the atomic bomb, I'm interested in your recollections at the time of that as well.

Luban: Of what?

Mark: The atomic bomb.

Luban: Oh.

Mark: As you know, this is the 50th anniversary of the end of the war and that's been kind of a topic of discussion lately. I'm interested ...

Luban: Of course. The general population was completely ignorant that there was going to be such a thing.

Mark: Oh, sure. And so when you heard of it do you ...

Luban: The first inkling of anything was that newspaper headline I mentioned before.

Mark: Right.

Luban: Twenty, the bomb was the power of 20 tons of TNT. That in itself, as I remember, did not make a great impression. Of course, I assumed after we took the newspaper and read that it was the breaking up of the atom and so forth I suppose we began to get impressed. But then after the war, of course, we learned all about the Manhattan Project and the making of the bomb but you get confused as to what you did know and what you really learned later. But there was, nobody had any inkling other than probably the personnel on the Manhattan Project that anything like that was going on.

Mark: Yeah. Now, there are some veterans who will tell you that they think the atomic bomb saved their lives 'cause they might have been sent to Japan or something like that.

Luban: Well, I think that's true.

Mark: Is that how you feel, personally?

Luban: Oh, I, let's, I think if I were, let's say that I were an infantry man based in Okinawa, at the time they had taken Okinawa preparatory to going in to Japan and suddenly something happens called a bomb, an A-bomb or atomic bomb that says you're free, the Japanese have surrendered. Now, just think of it as a personal thing. I'm just thinking of here you are, you've gone through the war let's say for a couple of years from island to island and you've seen the people around you either dead or wounded and here you finally are going to be free of this everyday danger, what would your thinking be? I mean, you're bound to have a selfish ...

Mark: Oh, sure. I understand. I'm interested 'cause you were scheduled to go to Japan.

Luban: Yeah.

Mark: And I'm wondering what you thought, personally, about your own.

Luban: I had, well, you see with me there wouldn't have been, we wouldn't have gone in after the troops were in and we would take, we were scheduled to take over from city to city in military government. In other words, to think that there'd be such devastation, that things would be in such chaos that we would have to go in with troops and make some semblance of order before the Japanese could take over again. So ours was more of a, we, as I recall, we didn't have any great qualms about it. We were training for this and it looks like you were, I guess we were training as if we were training for a corporate setup so I

don't recall that we had any feeling about it. In fact, of course, we were relieved that the war was over.

Mark: Yeah.

Luban: As was the general population. But I had no special feelings about it. The thing at that time, looking in retrospect, this 50th anniversary I loose a little patience with people now looking back 50 years and saying should we or shouldn't we have done it. Well, we did it and there's no question that lives were saved, no question. You're going to talk about the morality of it, you can talk from now until doomsday and not arrive at any conclusions.

Mark: Yeah. Okay. So I suppose it's time to move on to the post-war era. You returned home in 1945.

Luban: Right. I returned home in '45. I was actually separated from service in January of '46 because I had accumulated leave.

Mark: And so it's now time for you to get on with the rest of your life. I mean, you've got to make some decisions about finding a job and that sort of thing.

Luban: Well, actually there was a, a law went into effect that if you had a job that your employer had to return you. The funny part of it was that after I got in the military service I kind of noticed that I was terminated, not that there was a reduction in force because people were going back to work they didn't need as many and that I would be terminated. But that was null and void because during the war, of course, the law was passed protecting jobs of people, the jobs that you had before going into the service.

Mark: Uh hum. And so when you came back ...

Luban: I had a short-term job in social service at Milwaukee County Hospital. Then I took this examination for County Veterans Service Officer. I still remember, there were I think 50 applicants and I actually came out second. The guy who came out first was a, turned out to be a good friend of mine later, an attorney who had also taken an examination for divorce council and that was opened up so he got the job of divorce council, I moved up to first and I got the job of County Veterans Service Officer. Now I was not the original Service Officer. The original Service Officer had been appointed about nine months previously, a World War I man who I knew, I had actually worked with him prior to the war, but he died of a heart attack and never did actually serve because he was ill most of the nine months. So I actually came in there, let's see what was there? The two secretaries were handling the thing.

Mark: Now, in fact, I've done a little research and I know that you were the first World War II veteran to be a CVSO.

Luban: Yeah, I guess so.

Mark: Yeah. So, in your term as Service Officer, what were some of the biggest challenges in getting World War II veterans back, readjusted into society, from your viewpoint?

Luban: Well, maybe, we were, this was not really our primary goal as far as what employment was concerned. We were more as an adjunct to Veterans Administration for claims, we were actually administering the benefits. Of course, there was a big employment service which was a separate, completely, from our work.

Mark: Right. And so your office was handling the claims.

Luban: Yeah, right, right.

Mark: And I'd imagine it was a very busy place.

Luban: Yeah, right. We built it up. I guess there were eight of us finally, as I remember, there were eight of us. I had two assistants and then there were some clerical personnel. And we were busy. There were times when we were very, very busy. And, of course, we had this loan business with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mark: With the federal one or the state one?

Luban: Well, there was no federal. At that time it was just the state. Department of Veterans Affairs was the state. And we were very, very busy with one thing or another, as I recall.

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Luban: We had this loan business with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mark: With the federal one or the state one?

Luban: Well, there was no federal. At that time it was just the state. Department of Veterans Affairs was the state. And we were very, very busy with one thing or another, as I recall. There was one other thing that I, you know, being in Milwaukee County the veteran's organizations were, had strong American Legion, strong VFWs, strong DAV, and I saw from the beginning that I'd better be very, very neutral. I recall that some of the upper echelon of the

Legion, I'm not talking about the paid, I'm talking unpaid what knows their way around the office to make sure that we weren't tilted one way or the other. Now, in some of the smaller cities, of course, there was no pretense. They were strong VFW or strong American Legion and they had no problems. I made certain that we stayed away from that.

Mark: Now, a lot of Service Officers will actually join these organizations. Did you?

Luban: Oh, I joined, sure, but I joined both the VFW and the American Legion. But, again, I made sure that I was not active in either.

Mark: Yeah. And was it difficult balancing the two off. I mean, what sorts of things would they be contentious about?

Luban: Not really. As long as I, I felt that I was not going to be participating, I wasn't going to go to any meetings, and I felt, of course, I should belong but because actually the Service Officers were really the foundation in a way of the veteran's benefits so I was in favor of them but I had to remain neutral in a county the size of Milwaukee County where all the organizations were strong. Which I did. As I say, by just staying away. But I joined them, and I'm glad to have joined them, and then not participate.

Mark: So, in terms of the types of benefits that veterans were applying for at the time, do you recall what sorts of programs were most popular or least popular? For example, you think of, people often today think of the GI Bill and they think that every veteran went to school on the GI Bill. But that's necessarily the case. Do you recall what sorts of things the men were applying for?

Luban: Mark, would you just hold it one minute? I won't keep you. I've got a lady cleaning the apartment. I think she's about to leave. Just hold it a minute.

Mark: Oh, sure.

Luban: We were strong on the state benefits, of course. The VA was here but the way we regarded ourselves is we felt that we were the, oh, call them the ombudsmen for some of these veterans. We had the feeling that the VA was both the granter and the, what should I say, the people who withheld benefits, that we ought to be sort of a friend of the veteran so far as the VA was concerned. So we took powers of attorney, of course, but we took them, we were very careful, again, to ask, now are you a member of the Legion or a member of the VFW so that we would incorporate them. And then we would have, we had close contact with the American Legion, we had it with all of the veteran's organizations.

Mark: Yeah.

- Luban: At the VA at that time. So thought we were, of course, we were very strong. After all, we were the only ones who handled the state benefits and the state benefits were very popular, of course, the loans and the grants and the whatnot.
- Mark: I mean were there some things that were more popular than others though? Like education, was that very popular? Home loans or ...
- Luban: I'm thinking of the real estate loan. I remember that there was some deadline, there was some deadline and we sent through, believe it or not, we sent through 150 applications in one day and I can't remember what the deadline but they were loan applications. And we, I think we put in a lot of overtime at that time. That stands out in mind. Other than that, of course, there were ups and downs. I was called, especially on the housing loan, I was called upon by the realtors and by the lending agencies to come and speak to them to discuss the qualifications for the loans so I was called upon to speak from time to time. I made sure that we went pretty smoothly. I had no problem. Of course, I had the complete cooperation of the County Executive at that time. I never, I was never turned down. I mean, my budget was never cut. I don't recall that I was, anything extraordinary but I remember that whatever I asked for I was granted. I had a very good working relationship with the County Executive and with the supervisors.
- Mark: About the power of attorney. Now this is something in my research I've never been able to document exactly when the CVSOs gained official power of attorney. It's my understanding that you had to go through like the Red Cross or the American Legion or something. Was that true?
- Luban: That's right.
- Mark: Did that ever change?
- Luban: We took it in their names. We were not accredited at the County Veterans Service. I think that was one of our bug-a-boos. I think that was one of our goals and one of our complaints but we had to take it in the name of some organization.
- Mark: And when did that change? Or did it change at all?
- Luban: It never changed as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure it hasn't changed.
- Mark: Hm, interesting. Now, in terms of the benefits and your own personal use of them, did you utilize any of these benefits?

- Luban: No, not state benefits. That's another thing I didn't do. I thought it was a matter of, I'm making it impersonal. I never applied for any state benefits.
- Mark: Federal either?
- Luban: I went to, I took some graduate courses and I think I used the GI Bill. I probably did because I remember taking some graduate courses here in Milwaukee at the UW and I assume, I'm assuming that I used the GI Bill. I just don't recall.
- Mark: Now, in terms of your own personal readjustment to civilian life, finding work wasn't a problem for you obviously, but did you have any other ...
- Luban: Oh, there was a little time, I tended, there was a little time before I went to, between the time that I left the service and the time that I went over to social service at the hospital. Just very faintly, it seems to me that there was, I had, there was, I don't know that there was any particular adjustment. I felt out of sorts as I remember. Actually, you see I'd been in service for what? Almost five years. I think four years and ten months. And it was an entirely different way of life. So there was, there had to be an adjustment period. But I mean I had no particular problem. I had, as I say, I could go back to work and I didn't, if there was anything it was a question do I want to go back to this particular type of work?
- Mark: Right.
- Luban: When I got the Service Officer's job I felt, of course, that I was in charge and I had no problem from there on.
- Mark: Now, you served as Service Officer up until about 1980 or something like that. Thirty-five years.
- Luban: I left in '81 I think. March of '81.
- Mark: Now, as time went on, how did your work sort of change? Or did it?
- Luban: I don't think it changed. If there was a change, we took it in stride.
- Mark: I'm thinking for example ...
- Luban: We took it in stride. If there was a change in the law or change in regulation, we just went along with it. I mean, that's part of that line of work just as in your line of work everything, nothing remains the same month after month, year after year but you just go along with it.

- Mark: Yeah. Now, in terms of different generations of veterans, like veterans of Korea or Vietnam, were they, did they have the same sorts of concerns and problems that the World War II veterans did? Or could you notice distinctions?
- Luban: Well, one thing that I think, I must say, I think that the Service Officers of today are a step above us.
- Mark: In what sense?
- Luban: First of all, I think they're better educated. I'm not talking about myself, personally, but I think that they probably come in a little better educated. I'm just, at the tail end of my service, of course, the younger people are coming in.
- Mark: Right, the Vietnam guys.
- Luban: Right, right. And, of course, by that time I was looking at it as a perspective of an elder. And I might be wrong, I could be wrong. But it seemed to me that they were a little more professional.
- Mark: Yeah. Now, that's pretty much what Calvin Hewitt told me. And, in fact, he told me, he also sort of indicated that the World War II veterans were a little more educated than the older World War I guys.
- Luban: Right.
- Mark: So I'm interested in your recollections of the old guard of Service Officers, the World War I guy?
- Luban: They were characters, I thought. Of course, I was unused to this type of person but many of them were rough and tumble. They were, as I say, they were all veterans of World War I. I can remember many of them and they were a hard, let's say they loved life, many of them. And when we had our conventions, and, incidentally, I went to every, I guess I've never missed an annual convention, an annual meeting, in any of the towns. I got to see every small town in the state as I recall. But they were a hard-living bunch.
- Mark: You mean in terms of partying and that sort of thing?
- Luban: Partying, yeah, right, right. They were good party boys. You see they were well-known, obviously they were well-known in their particular areas. That's how they, I think they were appointing. You see, I and I think there might have been one other county were under civil service. The rest were appointed by County Boards. I say they were well-known in their service in their particular areas. I remember, it must have stuck in my mind 'cause they were

very individual, very individual; each had their idiosyncrasies. But I enjoyed them. I think the meetings were well divided; well defined between business and pleasure let's put it that way.

Mark: They got the work done but when the work was done ...

Luban: They played hard.

Mark: Yeah. Now, as the young guy, the kid on the block I suppose, how did you fit it?

Luban: I looked in wonderment at them. I wasn't used to that type of person. I got, I listened, I enjoyed them but I fitted in. I fitted in very well. You know I was elected president of the organization along the way and I fitted in very well. I enjoyed them. They were all, remember they were, they had political power too in our area because there was, the very fact that they were selected means that they had some power in their particular cities so, not that they weren't bright. Many of them were very, very natively bright. Many of them were chosen because they had suffered wounds, some of them were, a few of them were actually very ill.

Mark: And, of course, as time went on more and more World War II veterans became Service Officers.

Luban: Right, right, right. I can't remember who the last World War I Service Officer was anymore but it was sort of a last man's club.

Mark: I know that and the guy's name escapes me actually. I forget. He was up north somewhere. I just don't remember the name off hand.

Luban: I can rattle some of the names of some of the characters. You know the Service Officer, Joe Klein, was an early assistant. He's probably back there very close to when I started as the assistant to George Smitz. George Smitz got into trouble later. I don't know, something with funds, misuse of funds. But there were a number of, as I say, at that time I could almost recite the names of every Service Officer in the state. We did have, we used to have a little game of naming Service Officers from memory and there were a couple of us I think who could remember the names of every Service Officers.

Mark: That was 71 names. That's no small task.

Luban: Seventy-one names, right.

Mark: Uhm, I guess that's pretty much all the questions I had.

Luban: All right.

Mark: Is there anything you'd like to add or anything? Anything you think I've skipped over?

Luban: No. If along the way you think of something or if I think of something, I'll get in touch. But you've really raked my memory. Very interesting. As I thought of it later I thought certainly Milwaukee County ought to be represented in these oral histories.

Mark: Yeah, oh, yeah. We get a lot of Madisonians and that sort of thing. I'm always trying to get sort of out-state people.

Luban: You interviewed Hewitt didn't you?

Mark: Yes, about a month-and-a-half ago. And Moses was about the same time actually.

Luban: I'll be having lunch with them. We have lunch together every month. Tomorrow I'll have lunch with them.

Mark: You were telling me you guys have lunch.

Luban: Yeah. Once in awhile, once in a great while we joined by John Moses, Cliff Wills, once in a great while. Mark, it's been good talking with you.

Mark: You too.

Luban: If anything else comes up, let me know.

Mark: Absolutely.

[End of Interview]