

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
FRED A. RISSER  
Pharmacist mate, Navy, post World War II

1996

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**Risser, Fred A.**, (1927- ). Oral History Interview, 1996.

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).

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

**Abstract:**

Fred Risser, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the post-World War II Navy Medical Corps. At age fourteen, Risser recalls listening to the radio with his family during the attack on Pearl Harbor, but not thinking the war would last long enough to affect him. With a political upbringing and a father in the Wisconsin State Senate, Risser reflects on his awareness of the political situation and isolationist leanings. He talks about his family's history in politics going back to his great-grandfather, Colonel Warner, who served in the Civil War. Uncomfortable with the idea of killing people, Risser details the process of deciding to enlist with the Navy as a hospital corpsman. Because he was farsighted, he speaks of memorizing the eye chart in order to pass the eye exam. Entering the service in 1945, he discusses graduating high school a few weeks early and missing prom and the graduation ceremony. He talks about basic training at Naval Station Great Lakes (Illinois) and mentions boot camp for the Medical Corps was a bit different from regular boot camp. Risser points out marching was largely to build discipline and claims his favorite part of his Great Lakes experience was getting cookies in the mail. After losing quite a bit of money in a poker game, he says he lost any interest in gambling. He reflects that because he was not a smoker, heavy drinker, or gambler he was something of a loner, though he made a few close friends. Coming from a homogenous community, he discusses being in an integrated unit and being confused by segregated "gold" and "silver" drinking fountains and bathrooms in Panama. He comments on Corps school in San Diego (California) and being able to choose a hospital for getting good grades. Risser recalls that some people earned an income by charging hitchhiking sailors and soldiers for rides to Los Angeles. Sent to Rhode Island, he states he was put to work in the commissary filling food storage bins and reflects that he never really used his medical training. Risser jokes that he won the war because, "Once I was sworn into the Navy the Germans quit right away. Then I went to Boot Camp and just about the time I was ready to get out of boot camp, the Japanese surrendered." Because he wanted to travel, he volunteered to go overseas, and he describes his eight months in Panama. He talks about working a "crash boat," spending a lot of time pulling debris out the ground and swimming, and being uncomfortable with how the whites and Panama natives were segregated. Having spent some time working on the venereal ward, he comments that sexually transmitted diseases were recorded on paper as "a cold or respiratory problems." Risser also reflects on his time in the psychiatric ward, saying many were validly ill, but a few people faked it in order to get out of the service. He states he was lucky to be discharged just before a freeze on medical corpsmen. He reports that he did not enjoy the military, but that, due to educational benefits, "I got

much more out of the service than the service got out of me.” Risser speaks of being talked into signing up for the inactive reserve and his fear that he would be called to serve in Korea. He describes using the GI Bill to help pay for college and relates how some people would abuse the system by signing up for expensive classes, dropping them, and selling the books that the government had paid for. He mentions the large number of veterans attending Carleton College (Minnesota) after the war and says he made friends with a veteran who lost a limb because, as an amputee, he was allowed to have a car on campus. Risser tells of using the GI Bill to take flying lessons and for a great life insurance policy. He explains why he joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars, but is not an active member.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Risser (b. May 5, 1927) enlisted in the Navy as a medic in 1945. The war ended while he was in basic training and he continued with his military service until being honorably discharged in 1946 to attend Carleton College (Minnesota). After earning his law degree at the University of Oregon, Risser set up private practice in Madison and was elected first to the Wisconsin Assembly where he served from 1956 to 1962 and then to the Wisconsin Senate where he has served from 1962 to present.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, ca. 1998.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Mark: We will start with some questions. Okay, today's date is April the 19th 1996 this is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Fred Risser, Senator Fred Risser of Madison, a veteran of the US Navy in World War II. Um, good morning and thanks for coming in.
- Fred: Good morning and I am pleased to participate in your program.
- Mark: I appreciate your stopping over and sitting in our dank cool basement on a really nice day. I suppose we should start at the top as they say, and why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor?
- Fred: Okay, I was born and raised in Madison and, I was born in, May of 1927. I went to the public schools in Madison. And ah, I can remember specifically listening to the radio—we didn't have TV in those days—about the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was unbelievable. It was just incomprehensible. I can remember my mother and father and my only brother and myself sitting in the living room, in fact we even took pictures that day. Somewhere in my file I have a picture of us listening to the radio. And, I can remember what went through my mind in addition to the fact that it just didn't seem real. I can remember thinking personally, "Here I am only, let's see, fourteen years old. Wars don't last that long." Wars that we have been in have always be over in a couple of years; it was no question that we were going to win and the war would be over before I became draft age. I remember thinking that for some reason. Ah, I just said, "Well, fortunately I was too young to get involved in this war." This went through my mind. I was always very interested in civics by the way. My dad had been in the District Attorneys Office and was in the State Senate I believe at the time. And ah so, I had a political up-bringing and international relations was interesting to me. As a young fourteen-year-old I thought I knew it all and ah, I remember my views were that ah, I tended to belong to the Isolationist Wing. I used to read the Chicago Tribune because they had such interesting cartoon guys, I think Parish and Gore and a few others. I just remember those names. They would come up with cover cartoons and they would come out on the front page of the Chicago Tribune. I probably still have a few of those papers, anti-war isolationist. There is a big ocean between here and what is going on and we should not get involved. And of course I was a follower and I was as a fourteen-year-old thinking I knew it all internationally. Ah, I was sort of on the Isolationist wing, Wheeler, Clark, a few of those United States senators. I used to listen to them. Lydinburg used to turn out some real good speeches at fourteen. Now at this point in time I am a very strong

Internationalist. I realize that this is one global economy, one global world, and we cannot draw fences around what happens in any part of the globe affects the rest of the globe. And I realize for instance, you can move a cow from Madison to Tokyo quicker that you can move a cow from Madison to Milwaukee when we became a state. And the cow is probably in better condition too! So, my philosophy has changed quite a bit. Prewar I was quite as a young teenager, pre teenager and Isolationist; now I much I consider myself a very strong Internationalist.

Mark: Now, I was going to ask you about your father because if I was not mistaken he was the last progressive in State Legislature?

Fred: You've got it, my father was, ah, originally a Republican but he belonged to the LaFollette wing of the Republican Party. And um, he then followed the Phil LaFollette into his progressive party, Phil LaFollette had a Progressive Party going. My dad was elected to the State Senate a third time in 1944 as a Progressive four-year term. In 1946 the Progressive disband and LaFollette joins the Republican Party in an effort to liberalize Republican Party as his father had tried to do. And my dad followed him back into the Republican fold but he was the last elected progressive office holder in the state of Wisconsin because he was a Progressive throughout his term and his term went to 1948. And interestingly enough, he was defeated in that year by Gaylord Nelson. But my father did not, was not a veteran. He was a farmer. My grandfather had run a three, 500 acre farm up near Fountain City. And the days of World War I ah, Wilson as I remember was telling the farmers to keep producing food. So, my dad had somewhat of a farm deferral or was on the farm when World War I was involved so he was not a veteran and had no direct veteran relationships at that time of life. Oh if I might take a minute to add this for posterity I am the fourth generation in the legislature, the fourth political party, and my great-grandfather Colonel Warner was very active in the Civil War. And so, Colonel Warner served in both the Senate and the Assembly and he served as a Unionist. My grandfather Earnest Warner after whom Warner Park in Madison was named served as a Republican.

Mark: Oh yeah, really.

Fred: My dad served as a Progressive and I served as the Democrat. We have had four generations all representing this area geographically in the legislature and it's not that my ancestry has changed it is that the parties have changed philosophy. But that is beside the point.

Mark: All I am actually kind of curious about that, we will save some of this until the post war period.

Fred: Okay.

Mark: Um, in terms of your father um, as the world situation was brewing in the late 30's and early 40's, as you mentioned you were a little more aware politically than perhaps most fourteen year olds. Do you remember your father's positions on what was going on?

Fred: I think my father was more attuned to reality. I say that now ah, he was one who would always let my brother and myself express our views. In fact I published a newspaper of my own in which I ran editorials on. It was a family paper, neighborhood paper. Ah, my father was not militaristic in nature but I think he felt a little more concerned about what was going on than maybe I did. Ah, he had as I say escaped World War I because he was born in 1900 and he was seventeen or eighteen and he was on the farm. He was a strong supporter of LaFollette. I think he had his more or less philosophical beliefs of ah, but internationally I think he ah, was a little more for the motive of realization. In fact, he served-- he went to the Republican National Convention as a delegate and pledged to Earl Warren the year that I guess Eisenhower won the nomination, Warren being the governor of California at the time. Ah, interestingly enough he was a delegate from this district to the Republican convention and ah, eight years later in 1952 eight years later in 60 I was a delegate from this district to the Democratic National Convention. But in answering your question I think he was more realistic though he really never imposed his views on us. He discussed them a little bit um, and let us make up our own minds.

Mark: Um so, you as World War II was going on, you were in middle school and then in high school.

Fred: I was in grade school and then in high school. We didn't have middle school when I was in it.

Mark: Oh okay.

Fred: I was a student at Highlands Mendota Beach School that had, I believe our class had ten to twenty people in it and it was a one room. Well, I guess it was a four room school; they had two classes to a room. Highlands is now Crestwood School and we were tuition pupils to West High School. I entered West High School I believe in '41 which was the year the war started as far as our country was concerned. But I was interested in Geography and in maps and I used to make, ah, look at maps all the time and draw maps showing the advancement of the

Germans and the advancement of the Russians and what not. I was fairly well briefed on geography.

Mark: Which I am sure was very interesting um, but as time went on um, perhaps you started to realize that this war might involve you after all? I suppose, describe the process of how you started to--

Fred: As I said, initially I felt very safe because I was so young and wars were always over with in a couple of years and we always won. Ah but, as I went through high school as each year went by we would see our high school seniors leaving and my friends started leaving for war. And as the war didn't end as fast as I had anticipated and ah so, I started thinking about whether or not what would happen. Quite honestly I am not one that spends a lot of time with guns. I don't really consider myself a pacifist by views. I would use the words semi-pacifist at times. But I mean I am not an aggressive, physically aggressive personality. And I couldn't really see going out and shooting someone else. I mean, that is when war gets down to the basics; it's someone shoots you or you shoot them. That was something that I had a hard time visualizing. At that time the draft had been instituted; actually it had been instituted in 1940. And ah, as it turned out once a person or a man turned eighteen he was subject to the draft and once he is subject to the draft and everyone is subject to the draft, ah, then the military establishment could assign you any way they wanted to. They could assign you to anything to technical school to the front lines and ah, you had no choice. And as we got closer to that period my own concerns as to where do I fit into the picture, I remember discussing this with Reverend Swan with the First Congressional Church—a wonderful man, he never told me what to do or what not to do. But he himself I think was pacifistic in views and ah, he never ever never told me anything he just let me talk to him. And I had a real, real problem. What happened was that there were certain programs that you could get into before you were eighteen. In order to siphon off some of the brainpower I must say they had a V12 program or something in which you could a program where you could get a farther education if you signed up before you were eighteen. Once you were eighteen you were subject to the draft. And one program they had was one you could join the Hospital Corps, Navy Hospital Corps. And actually I had this program was in existence and they guaranteed that if you signed up in the Hospital Corps before you were eighteen that you would be a hospital corpsman. You might end up with the Fleet Marines in which means you would be in the front row getting shot at helping people out but you wouldn't necessarily have a gun and shooting other people. And so, actually I took a few courses in high school. You might call them pre-med courses, just science courses, just to see if maybe I might want to be a medic someday. I knew I was going to be a professional

man; I had always intended to follow my father's footsteps, be a lawyer and be a politician but ah, realizing the opportunity of possibility signing up for the Hospital Corps I took a couple of courses in high school that would be along that line. I kind of liked them, I never had much experience. Most of my ancestors were professional more in the legal field. But ah, to make a long story short I came to the rationalization that if I could, ah, get into the Hospital Corps I would do that. It would be my contribution.

I had a problem there though; my eyes weren't that good and at that time the Navy had certain requirements, eye requirements. And the idea was you should be able to function without eyeglasses for some reason I guess at that time. And my eyes didn't meet that test and I remember that, ah, I took when I made the dissuasion—I made the dissuasion some months before I turned eighteen that if I could get into the Hospital Corps that would be the way that I would go. I, um, had some eye-- I mean my eyes were farsighted stigmatism. I actually made that dissuasion. My Dad actually sent me to some fellow who was, whose job it was to straighten one's eye. He said you eat carrot juice, you practice visual aides and what not. I don't think it did any good. I don't admit this but ah, I flunked the first eye exam. I asked for a retest and memorized the chart and passed it. I mean I knew what I did and I never told anyone this; what I did I flunked the first test when I was trying to get in and I put on my glasses when they sat me back. My glasses were good enough that I could see where the line was so I sort of memorized the line that I needed to remember so on the retest I passed. Don't tell anyone.

Mark: I won't. That is an interesting story actually. Um, I suspect there were also some sort of scholastic or intellectual tests that you had to pass to get into the program?

Fred: Well, I was a fairly, ah, fairly good student and for a non-- I wasn't constantly on the honor roll but I was in the upper division in my class. I-- Yes they gave us some tests.

Mark: Which I suspect wasn't a problem for you?

Fred: I don't remember having any problem. I remember taking tests, all sorts of tests, but I don't remember any serious problem. I had gone to high school and was planning to go to college; there was no question in my mind that I was going to end up in college sooner or later. And that I would be a professional man either a doctor or a lawyer, probably a lawyer so I could go into politics.



- Mark: Um, if we go back to sort of the moral wresting you were doing with yourself um, I don't imagine you were the only seventeen-year-old kid in Madison or anywhere in the country who wasn't also going through the same sort of thing? It might not be something that a lot of seventeen-year-olds talk about. I know that you can only speak for yourself but perhaps do you know if there were others?
- Fred: Well, I had some people went through the conscientious objectors' approach and, ah, at that you could sign up for some kind of service. That really while I looked at it I never really seriously considered that. I am trying to wrestle with what I could do, which would not be morally repugnant to me. And I am just the sort that is against killing people. And ah but, I did have some friends, not many, that went through the conscientious object rule. And ah, they had strong beliefs. As I say, I came to the conclusion that if I could get into the-- And I never really thought about what would happen if I couldn't. And I was sworn into the Navy just a few days before I turned eighteen. At that time, they would guarantee that I could finish high school. My birthday is the 5th of May so I was sworn in around the 1st of May or there about. And I was supposed to get through high school, which would be mid-June. But the war ended in Europe and they started calling up the service men that had signed up fast earlier. So I missed the last couple weeks of school and that hurt, that bothered me. I remember I thought, "Gee I am missing the social program, I am missing walking across the stage and getting my diploma." But then on the other hand I missed all those final tests too so I had some advantage. I remember I walked around with some other students at that time in the middle of a May and the last part of May. We went to each of the student's teachers and the teachers gave us a final grade even though we didn't take our tests. And we could take those final grades and we got a full-scale diploma.
- Mark: And that is how high school ended for you?
- Fred: Yeah, and I always sort of-- I never went to the prom, never went to graduation, and I walked around with-- There were some others that walked around because of their birthdays. We got our final grades and we turned them in and I was at boot camp Great Lakes when my class graduated.
- Mark: Um well, I suppose it is time to sort of walk you through your entry into the military. Um, I went into the military myself but forty years afterwards, um, I am sure some things were the same and I am sure some things were different. Why don't you just walk me through the steps: to which office you went, to which bus you got on to go where? Just sort of give me your introduction into the military.

Fred: Well, I knew I was going to Great Lakes which was one of the bigger boot camps and I also knew that I was going to be in the Medical Corps. They told us in advance that we would have, I won't say preferential treatment, but we wouldn't have quite the same thing as some of the others. We had to do the marching and what not, but we were treated a little differently.

Mark: How is that?

Fred: Well I, I can't explain it, we were assigned to a Medical Corps; I mean they had I won't say units they had, ah, groups. Our group was all Medical Corps and because we knew that once we got through boot camp we would go to school, we would go to course school. And so ah, while we did all the marching that the other people did, it just seemed that they were preparing us to go to Corps school. In the back of my mind without remembering specifics it just seemed to me that our group had a little different deal than some of the others. I don't think we had to do some of the shit work, let's say, that some of the others did because we were going to be going to Corps School. And ah, we knew that boot camp was just that period of time and after that all the others didn't know what was going to happen to them. We were going to have the opportunity to go to Corps school. I, ah, wanted to get as far away from Madison as possible. I had never done much traveling so I ended up in San Diego at Corps school. My boot camp experience doesn't seem to stand out particularly I know that we were doing the marching and the theory behind the marching. I remember someone telling me later was not to give the exercise, it was to make you do things without thinking. In other words they would shoot directions and you are supposed to about face or turn left and the idea was to have you do it upon command without thinking any more than what you needed to do so that was the whole-- It was constant discipline; they cut your hair for instance. You remember the hair cut. The thing that I liked the best about, actually, the thing I liked best was mail order, mail call. My parents would send me cookies because I wasn't married. I didn't have a particular girlfriend at the time. I had a number of different girls I was writing to at that age. And I would write letters and look forward to getting letters and look forward to getting cookies. That was the best part of the Great Lakes experience that I can remember.

Mark: Um, did you have any troubles adjusting to military life? For example some veterans will mention there is an adjustment in language shall we say and perhaps you were raised in a little more rarified environment. Um, some of the language sometimes was rather course? Was that your experience and ah did you have any sort of other--

Fred: Well, interesting enough I got all the way through my military experience never drinking or smoking.

Mark: Hmm.

Fred: Um, I very prejudicial against smoking; no one in the family smoked and at that time they used to, ah, have cigarettes. They used to ration cigarettes. And I used to give my ration coupons to other people because I never used them. And ah, there was a little gambling going on and I remember I was cured of gambling at Great Lakes and that just brought up a subject matter. I remember getting involved in a poker game that, ah, losing weeks pay or a month pay or what ever it was and realizing and feeling how stupid and dumb. Boy, here I waste a whole day and it wasn't that much fun and it cured me of gambling. I wasn't interested in gambling. Ah, I didn't smoke as I said and I actually don't remember drinking any more than a beer. Of course in our family drinking beer was appropriate at any age. My German ancestry, we always drank beer and kids always drank beer but I didn't get into the hard liquor until I got out of school, out of the military. And so I guess maybe I was somewhat of a, I won't say a loner but I wasn't necessarily part of the gang. Because as I say I didn't take smoking breaks and I didn't go out and spend time gambling. I wasn't much for drinking so I was somewhat, I won't say a loner, but I would pick up close friends and I have several close friends that are somewhat like me. Ah, let me jump ahead.

Mark: Absolutely.

Fred: There is an experience that I had that I think is unique. I was a white Anglo Protestant from Wisconsin and I didn't really have much experience in cosmic. And this is jumping way ahead but I remember this was about the time by the way that Truman integrated the services. As you remember some of the units at Great Lakes were all black or all white but about the time we came along he declared an integration. So our unit was one of those, one of the first units that had some blacks in it. And we had some people from the southern part of the United States that, ah, couldn't understand that at all. They said I would never take any orders from blacks and they weren't called blacks at those days, they had other names. I can remember such things. I can remember going to a show once and ah, they did everything else alphabetically. One of my close friends was a guy by the name of Rice Reiser. Rice, he was from Georgia; he couldn't stand blacks. I remember we were sitting down in a long, ah, sitting in a theater once and he wouldn't-- He had me sit between him and some blacks. He was supposed to sit next to a black but he just couldn't; he said they smelled because he didn't

like them. And I can remember, ah, an incident when further on when I was sent down to Panama and I got off of the plane and thirsty and, ah, I saw two drinking fountains. One said gold and one said silver. And here I was dying of thirst and here I-- Which fountain would you drink out of, gold or silver? Well, I rationalized silver was white and gold was colored so I took a drink out of the silver fountain and I was grabbed a hold and yanked back and, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "I was taking a drink you know." "Well, you are drinking out of that silver you know." "Well which is worth more, gold or silver? You drink out of the gold fountain." That was my first experience, real interesting. And then of course down there at Panama at the time, they used to have gold and silver washrooms. And it wasn't that the color was gold, was my rationale; it was the color was gold was worth more so the whites took the gold and the blacks took the silver because the silver was worthless then. I don't know why I just mentioned that but I--

Mark: That is interesting though. I had never heard that before.

Fred: And it was my first experience with integration because in my high school I think there was maybe one black out of this over 1000 students or two blacks. One black in my class by the name of Green I think and that is all. Now of course my wife is a teacher and it is twenty percent are minorities more. But at that time we were more of a lily white cooping and I had been raised in that atmosphere. Well I am getting a digression from your questions.

Mark: No, I think it is this is very interesting actually. I think it is time to go to San Diego though.

Fred: Okay fine.

Mark: After you did basic training you went to San Diego?

Fred: Yep. And ah, they had turned over what is now the zoo to a Corps school. And I enjoyed that activity, um, that it was in a-- It was a very concentrated, I mean we had dorms up there and we were on the base or hospital area all of the time. It was very concentrated. They taught us in a matter of months how to stitch people up, how to dispense drugs, and other things that now takes doctors years to get the permission to do they were teaching us to do. And ah, near the-- We had a situation where if you got high grades you could choose the hospital to go to and if you got lower grades you didn't have the choice. I know by about halfway through I started thinking of that because, ah, and they had it worked out where we, they would actually chose. If they had, say, hospitals in three sections of the country on the basis of your grade

level you walked by and you would choose which hospital you wanted to go to. And they broke them down into the A students and the rest, the A students being the top students. And my grade point was on a sort of a low, low A level. And I knew I wasn't going to get my choice so I just dropped it down to a high B level so I got my choice. And I wanted to go as far away, I wanted-- I had been on the West Coast; I wanted to go to the East Coast. And so ah, in order to get first choice I had to drop my grades down a little bit to be on the high B level so I got my first choice on that. And I ah, ended up after Corps School I ended up at Rhode Island.

And ah, here I had been given all this training to patch people up and they put me in a commissary and my job was to ah, dispense food and ah, fill up the storage lockers and absolutely nothing to do with medicine. And at that time the way the Navy was organized, ah, the Hospital Corps took care of everything. They had their own little command and all and they took everything from stacking up the food in the food bins to and I ended up in a commissary and got to doing pretty good in filling up storage bins with food. Food would come in and we would have to find space for it and it was good exercise. I was in San Diego as I say; I like San Diego. It was a nice small town. Now it is a big city. The weather was just gorgeous; it always got cool at night it was nice during the day. We looked forward to, um, to weekends. I would sometimes, ah-- I did two things, one time, couple of times I would just go and rent a room in town and just sort of be by myself. Ah, I had a distant relative up in Los Angeles and I would sometimes hitchhike up to Los Angeles on the weekend. And yeah, I was somewhat of a loner. I was not one of these people that was a party person. And I can remember that route from San Diego to Los Angeles. And I can remember that there were a lot of sailors and soldiers hitchhiking that route. And they had people, I remember this very clearly, they had people that would come in cars and say and charge them. They were making money by running this route back. And if you were a sailor and you wanted to get to Los Angeles and people wouldn't pick you up and the guy would say, "I will take you up for ten bucks." And you probably give him ten bucks. And I did that a number of times. We had, I can remember people in cars and they would tell us that this was their income. They would just run that route back and forth and pick up sailors and soldiers and charge them ten bucks or whatever it was to make their round. They made good money that way. And ah you know you got to Rhode Island, you had signs that say, "Sailors and dogs keep off of the lawn," because there were too many sailors around, too many dogs around. But anyway yeah my-

Mark: Very different mentality there I guess?

Fred: Yes. My San Diego experience I consider good. I did not have, as I say, I was not married; I did not have any special girlfriends. I enjoyed a little social life and I enjoyed writing letters back home. And um, I got into the Navy in May and so I got out of Boot Camp about August, and so I went to San Diego and as I remember I was in San Diego for August, September, October—anyway three or four months. Then I was shifted over to the facility and it wasn't the hospital in Rhode Island it was a Naval Airbase.

Mark: So, the Japanese had surrendered by the time you got to San Diego?

Fred: Well, what I tell people is as I told you before, I really won the war. Because once I was sworn into the Navy the Germans quite right away. Then I went to Boot Camp and just about the time I was ready to get out of boot camp the Japanese surrendered. And so then, they kept me in for another year and a half or so to maintain the peace. And so, you are right. I was actually I was in Boot Camp when the Japanese surrendered, and I you know you regret certain things in life you think. And at that time I remember seeing all of the pictures about the sailors being hugged in the street and my being confined to boot camp. I didn't get a chance to get out there and celebrate like some of the others. And at that time I thought I was deprived of a celebration and it doesn't bother now.

Mark: So, you went from San Diego to Rhode Island and then to Panama, um-

Fred: There again I tell you I was traveling, I mean I wanted to travel. I had never done any traveling so I used the service as a means to, ah, to do some traveling. That is another interesting thing. When I got into Rhode Island, as I say, the war was over and so they were bringing people back from overseas and they weren't sending that many overseas. But the Medical Corps, ah, Corpsman had built up points; you had to build up points to get back. And so they were sending some and I remember the kid, I couldn't stand him, who had charge of shipping people out. I didn't exactly bribe him but I worked him to try to get a change. I wanted to travel before travel wasn't. I thought, actually I was on my way to Africa and I had put in for as far away as I could get. And there was some opening in Africa and I thought I maybe going to Africa but I ended up going to Panama. And that was, I spent Christmas in Rhode Island and I remember I could have had Christmas off. But there was a married man on the same doing some of the same work and he wanted so much to get home. And I said I would take his spot so I spent that Christmas in Rhode Island and it didn't bother me that much. I got back for New Years and saw my family

then. And like I say, being unmarried and not having necessarily a special girlfriend I didn't have that so I was willing to give up my Christmas for this friend of mine. And so then early that next on, before they were ah, just sending out a few people to overseas, and I was trying my best to get on one of these trips. I thought they were going to send me to Africa but they ended up sending me to Panama solo.

Mark: You spent how long in Panama?

Fred: Well then, I spent, um-- I got down to Panama and it was shortly after Christmas and New Years season. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and when I got down in Panama it was a different kind of ah-- And I visited Panama probably eight months, so again policies kept changing in Washington. And they were beginning to discharge people on the basis of points. And ah, you got something like a point for every month and then maybe an extra half a point if you were overseas. In Panama was classified as overseas so I picked up extra points by being in Panama. And jumping ahead to the end of that experience there was an opportunity. There were several policies; one policy was that if you wanted to go back to school you were given somewhat of a preference. Another policy was that if you were building up points you were given preference. I went into the service with a good friend of mine who went into the Medical Corps. And we went in on exactly the same time, we went to boot camp exactly the same time and I got out one year ahead of him. Because the week or within a couple of weeks after I got out they froze all hospital corpsman; they were running short and so they kept them in another year. A good friend of mine who ended up as a doctor, ah, had gone through the whole process, but I had been overseas. And I had been overseas and I got a couple extra half points and so I was-- I got out just before they froze all hospital corpsman. And also got out, I had been applying for college and so I had been already admitted in college if I could get to college. So ah I ah, I went to Carlton College my-- I had my dad send me some brochures in different areas so I went to Carlton College. So actually I spent less than two years in military service and I spent, ah-- And when you sign up at that time you signed up for two years of duration whichever is longer I guess. And I didn't have to spend two years because the point advantage, the advantage that I was going into college change in policy in Washington and what not. And I just beat the freeze.

Mark: Now it sounds like in your experience, um, being in the Navy after the war is over was kind of an adventure almost. You got to go to Panama and see some sights you wouldn't normally of seen. I would imagine with someone that had been in the service for awhile that they were

pretty anxious to get out? I am sort of interested in the mood of the Navy and the sailors in the Navy at the time? If you had been in the Navy through the whole war--

Fred: Interestingly enough I was in the Navy but I was never on a boat. Because they--

Mark: I was in the Air Force and never on a plane.

Fred: And I, they flew me down to ah-- They flew me down to Panama. And actually I shouldn't say that when in Panama I had, ah, I had a job that was abolished when I left. Actually my job in didn't feel like it was very needed. I was riding a crash boat in the Panama Canal. And the theory was that if any plane came in and crashed, this crash boat would be around to help out. We spent most of our time pulling logs and debris out of the ground and swimming off of the boat. And ah, Panama experience to me was better than the experiences that I had in the states. And the reason was in part, at that time, the military used the Panamanians as cheap labor. They did all the dirty stuff; they did all the cleaning and all the things that the Americans didn't want to do. And so we lived quite the life of luxury you might say. I can remember, ah, bowling and then these Panama kids setting pins. We didn't have automatic pin-setters at the time. And I ah, I wanted to set pins for him so he could bowl and I tried doing that and I was told quite bluntly that was inappropriate and you don't do that. I mean that in the Canal Zone it was an entirely different process! At that time the Canal Zone you still had the whites in the front of the bus and the Panamanians sit in the back. As soon as you crossed out of the Canal Zone and into Panama the divider was pulled away and they mixed us. And ah so I had this experience living in a segregated area which I didn't like. I sort of detested it. I, um, happened to have a friend who had, um, was tied in with the Panamanian railroad. And at that time there was no road highway across Panama; the only way you could get across Panama was by train. And so I had a pass on the train and I zigzagged back and forth across a couple of times just because I had the pass and I liked to travel. I had a good time in Panama and I guess I had a good time. I was on a crash boat, also I had other experiences for a young teenager. I worked on a venereal disease ward and at that time prostitution was, was actually-- It was legal in certain areas for awhile. And they used to, we used to try help prevent it. Tell sailors what to do to and what not to do. But they would get venereal diseases and the interesting thing was if it was an officer it was a cold and if it was an enlisted man it was a venereal disease. They never put, in my experience, the fact that an officer in the Navy ever got a venereal disease; they always had a cold or respiratory problems but nothing else, and they adjusted those. I worked in the psychiatric ward for



awhile. In fact I spent quite a bit of time in the psychiatric ward, which gave me an interest in mental illness. It carried over into my legislative activities so people would look perfectly normal most of the time and once in awhile they would go off of the deep end. I can remember one corpsman that figured that was his way of getting out of the service. He figured he knew enough about how to ah, how to play the system and that he would get a medical discharge and he did. Um but ah--

Mark: Let me interrupt for a second. Now the war is over and people a lot of the people are trying to get out of the service. And you mentioned this one particular instance of a young man who tried to use that route to get out of the service and it did.

Fred: He had signed up for a long time. In other words, I was in the Reserves he was in the regular. He decided he didn't like it so he wanted to get the hell out.

Mark: But I am wondering if morale in the post-war Navy was sort of affected by sitting around doing nothing. The war is over; there is no purpose in me being in the service no more. If that perhaps exasperated these mental illnesses or I suppose the instances of venereal diseases too?

Fred: Most of the people that I dealt with in the psychiatric wards had been in the battlefield, had been through some pretty tough periods and were validly mentally ill. But there were a couple that used the system as a way to get out. And there were some others that I would question how mentally ill they were. They did not have the sophisticated drugs then that they have now. And ah it ah, you talk about people wanting to get out; I wanted to get out. I didn't, I was having a good time but ah, I didn't like it. I didn't like the military particularly. I wanted to go to school. My goal was to go to college. I didn't want to miss too much and I was certainly hoping that I wouldn't miss this next semester, the fall semester, which I didn't, and so I only really missed one full year of school. In other words I got out-- I left the high school just a couple weeks before the end of high school and I got into college just a little after it started so I really only missed one year of school. I got much more out of the service than the service got out of me. I had the GI Bill and I used it and it was a fantastic program.

Mark: Well, let's go with that than because I think you're about to get out of the service.

Fred: I wanted to get out and I tried to get out. I tried to get the, and-- Ah, when I say I was in Panama I didn't do that much. I worked in several different areas. They would assign me to this and they would assign me

to that. And ah um, I never really had a chance to make a lot of use of the medical experience they gave me in San Diego.

Mark: So, you got discharged from the service, free and clear discharge?

Fred: No actually, that was my goal. This is interesting. I swore that I was going to get out and be absolutely done with the service and never again get in. But they had all of us at the reservist had to attend this lecture and they must have had some smooth talkers at the lecture because they talked me into signing up into the reserves for a couple of years. Part of the incentive was they would jack my grade up so instead of graduating, instead of leaving the service as a Hospital Corpsman 1 or something, I would leave as a Pharmacist 3. Secondly there was some kind of a bonus. Thirdly if you were in the reserves you weren't going to be called back into the war. It started going again ah until other people were called back. So the long and short is I did; I did sign in the reserves for a couple of years. I forget if it was two or four years but I can tell you that um, Korea came along and I was in the reserves and I was beginning to sweat. And ah, one thing that kept me out of Korea, I guess, I was in professional school. I was in law school at the time. I had a friend that signed into the reserves and ended up in the Korean War. Ah and that scared me to the point to where when my four year enlistment was up or whenever the point was I got the heck out and I never signed anything again. But I was talked into signing into the reserves and they did a good job of talking me into it.

Mark: And so that commitment involved what? Just like--

Fred: It didn't involve--

Mark: Did that involve a weekend a year?

Fred: It didn't involve anything. That is what was so great about it. They kick up your grade, they give you some kind of a bonus, they guarantee that if something happens you would be one of the last called, and I didn't have to go to any, I didn't do anything. I went to school. And I don't remember going to any kind of a training camp or anything else. There were several kinds of Reserves at that time; there was the Active Reserve and the Inactive Reserve and I was on the Inactive Reserve. But a friend of mine did get called up in Korea and it scared the living daylights out of me, so.

Mark: Um so, you got out of the service. You went to Carlton College?

Fred: For two years from there I went to ah, the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. Again I just like to travel and so I wanted to get as far

away from Wisconsin and still be in the United States. They had a good law school in Oregon at the time. Wayne Morris a family friend who was the head of it at one time. He became a United States Senator. I knew him. And ah so, I went out there.

Mark: So these are two very different schools. I have interviewed scores of ah UW graduates and so I have heard the stories of how the campus had transformed as a result of the veterans. As a small college like Carlton about how much of the student body were veterans?

Fred: Most of the men. In Carlton College it was a small college of under 2000. And ah, they um liked to keep the ratio of men and women somewhat similar. They didn't have attorneys and sororities there but they did have a social program. So they kept a few more men than women I guess. Almost all of us who entered that class of '46 I believe it would be were veterans. And a few that weren't veterans, ah, were different than those that were. I mean those of us that were veterans, we, ah, I wanted to get off campus. I didn't like the dorms right away. So I made, I-- My second year of Carlton I rented a home with some other people. I just didn't like the campus life, the regimentation.

Mark: Was it too much like the military do you think or just your own personality?

Fred: Well it is just my own personality. I just don't like to be told when to get up and when to go to bed type of thing. And I had that kind of personality and that is particularly why I didn't like the military. I am not a military person. I don't have that kind of personality.

Mark: Umm, so most of the men on campus were veterans?

Fred: Yes.

Mark: Umm, were there any sort of veteran's services available on campus? For example, how did you use the Vets Bill? You mentioned that you did use the GI Bill?

Fred: Absolutely, I used it to the hilt. In fact some people over used it. Ah, the GI Bill was a great thing. You know there are always people ready to do a scam. And we had people—I was not part of it—but we had people that would sign up for the most expensive courses. In other words, they would have really expensive books. Because the GI Bill would give them books they would sign up, then they would drop out of the course and sell the books to make money. And there was a way, there is always someone who is ready to work a scam. I can remember people that would sign up for very expensive lab work and somehow

they would drop out and be able to cash in on it. The GI Bill sent you a check regularly and ah um, I am not sure how they computed it but it was something that some people would actually make some money off of, profit a little bit off of it.

Mark: That is interesting.

Fred: Well, you can understand it if you had to buy hundreds of dollars of books and then you dropped the course and the books had already been paid for by the GI Bill. They dropped the course and turn around and sell the books to someone for half the price or something. The person who gets them for half the price makes a deal out of it and you pocket the difference when it didn't cost you anything in the first place. There were people that did that. Um, also there were other services that ah, I had a very good friend who had lost a leg in the war. And of course the military provided him with an artificial leg but everyone who lost a limb got a car. So, I remember befriending this one fellow in part because he was one of the few people with a car. Carlton College did not allow cars on the campus because it was a small town. Generally people that could afford to go to college, this was a private college, and so they had a policy against cars. And so the exception was that the few people that had military complications, if you lost a limb, you got a free car out of the deal. Another thing--

Mark: Was this state or federal program?

Fred: That was a federal program. Another thing they did was you had free dental care. And ah I had all of my teeth taken care of when I was in the service because I figured I would get it all done right. What happened was some young intern did it. When I got out and in the private life I had to have them all done over again.

Mark: Double fun!

Fred: [tape not working properly there is a jump in the story here.] Academically levels are entirely different in Carlton. I was a B student, and in Morgan without doing anything I was a straight A student. I found Morgan, ah and this was before I got into Law school, but I found I didn't have to work as hard and I found the first time the grades came back I had straight As. This was sort of surprising and I decided I would try something. I signed up for overlapping courses, two courses at the same time. They overlapped one or two days to see if I could get an A in both of them. The professor caught me on it so he gave me a B on one course because I done all right on the tests and all but he thought I was trying to ah-- They were political science courses and that was my field. But I found the University of Morgan quite easy the first

year. And another reason I went there is I was able to get into law school after three years instead of four years. So I picked up the year I lost when I was in the service and so after if I would have stayed in most places they want a four-year undergraduate program before you got into law school. Morgan I could get my fourth year credits as an undergrad the first year as a professional in law school. So I-- Moving along as a young person to pick up the year I lost in the service.

Mark: You went to law school in Morgan too?

Fred: Yes.

Mark: Did the GI Bill cover your graduate education as well do you recall?

Fred: Um, GI Bill had a limit to it and I--

Mark: I forget what it is?

Fred: And I have a sneaking suspicion that did not cover all my law school, but I am not sure. But I will tell you one thing it covered. I remember that one summer I had a little time on my hands and, ah, GI Bill covered flying lessons and I learned how to fly. Because there was a provision in the GI Bill that you could take training, and I was sort of foot loose and fancy free so I took flying lessons on the GI Bill. And ah, some people, other people took other things but ah, I ah, I did learn how to fly. And I didn't follow through on it, it was too expensive but I got some help on that as I remember. The GI Bill covered what I did at Carlton and covered at least the first couple years at the University of Morgan. I just don't remember, my dad was able to help me somewhat and I did some work too. But it was a great program and they say that there were a lot of people who would not have gone to college if it had not been for that.

Mark: Now in your case you probably would have?

Fred: I would have gone anyway, I would have and my folks would have helped me and I was college bound. But they didn't have to help as much because of the GI Bill.

Mark: Yeah now, there were other aspects of the GI Bill actually, the home loans and that sort of thing. I don't want to pry too much but I am curious to know if you used any sort of home loan or anything like that later on in life as related to your military experience?

Fred: No. I have the only benefits other than the fact I used their life insurance program and that is not GI. But when I got in the service my

dad said, be sure to get that \$10,000 dollar life insurance policy which I did. And when I turned 65 I cashed it in. I converted to 65 pay and I cashed it in and it was a great program, my-gosh it was some of the cheapest insurance I ever had. \$10,000 dollars and I paid a couple hundred dollars a year for it or something. And when I cashed it in when I turned 65. That was the only other military benefit that I can remember. I bought property but I never used the GI Bill or never used the military. There are several reasons some of the loan programs relate to income levels. And I guess I was a dependent for my father when I was in college because I was not married and I think he helped me some. And after I got married I was already practicing law and just never used any of the GI benefits.

Mark: Um, I just got one last area that I want to cover. I don't think it applies to you too much and that involves veterans' organizations and that sort of thing. As you mentioned before the tape went on you had explored that why don't you just tell me your--

Fred: Well, quite frankly I am not much for ah, pounding my chest and claiming that I am a great veteran because I never really saw active action. I mean, the Panama Canal and a couple of hospitals. I never really got out into the field. But I did go into politics shortly after I got into practicing law and I did join one organization, the VFW. And the reason I joined the VFW is because, um, at that time in fact I joined before I got into politics. It was one veterans' organization that I joined because it seemed to me the most I won't say exotic, but the VFW meant that you had been overseas. And so I got credit for being overseas and in Panama and some of the people I know and it seemed like some of the other veterans organizations really were um, sotto veterans' organizations. A person had been overseas maybe they were a real veteran even though I don't know how much a real veteran I was in that. So I did join the VFW and I went to one of their first meetings and people there were saluting and having a hi-ho time and quite frankly that sort of turned me off. I didn't like the organization doing that kind of activity and saluting people and addressing people by their titles in the military since. So, while I still retain the VFW membership I sometimes go down there. It is not from the standpoint of doing any of their activities. I buy the raffle tickets once in awhile. And I help fund raisers down there and as I say I maintain my membership but I am not what you would call an active member. I am not interested in going to meetings. I had to go to enough of them in my political career to just salute people and to call those people by their title. I don't have a lot of war stories to tell anyway so ah I um, had thought about going to join some other veterans organizations. There are some veterans organizations that are more pacifistic or internationalist than this sort of

a traditional or conventional. I had looked into those but I just had not done it.

Mark: That is pretty much my line of questioning. Is there anything you would like to add?

Fred: Other than in retrospect, ah, the experience that I had in the service was really quite wonderful. I got more out of the service than they got out of me. I only spent less than two years in the service and had at least four years of my education taken care of so monetarily I came out better. I retained good health, got a chance to travel and ah meet some interesting people. I was fortunate; a lot of people weren't so, ah, I am one of those fortunate veterans. And quite honestly I don't really think that just because a person is-- I look at it this way: A person who has given up a good share of his life or has been wounded. And my view is this: Our country owes a veteran who was wounded in service or gave four or five years of his life or her life, we owe them an awful lot. But to a veteran like myself who has been totally educated as you might say as a result of it who probably got as I say more out of it than. I don't think that the government owes me anything. I don't think that I am entitled to free burial; I can pay for my own burial. I am not looking forward to going into any veterans' home and I don't want to go to the veterans' hospitals. I am able to take care of myself and I am fortunate I am in good health and I am not destitute financially and I don't think that I should necessarily get any special benefits. I think that those people who lost their opportunity to get a job, job benefits and I was going to school anyway, I didn't lose any of that. Ah, my experience to me was a plus. I don't feel that I am owed anything by the government. They have given me more than I have given them in this aspect.

Mark: Well, thanks for coming in.

Fred: Is that the kind of interview you want?

Mark: That was very, very interesting.

**[End of Interview]**