

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WERNER RYSER
U.S. Army, Korean War
2000

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Ryser, Werner., (b.1932). Oral History Interview, 1998.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.); 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Werner Ryser, a Blanchardsville, Wis. native, discusses his Korean War service as a medical corpsman with the 160th Medical Company, attached to the 40th Infantry Division. Drafted at age nineteen, he characterizes his introduction into the military at Fort Sheridan (Illinois) as a “rude awakening.” Ryser feels he may have been chosen to be a medic because he was working with cultures and bacteria in a cheese factory prior to being drafted. He touches upon his medical training at Camp Pickett (Virginia), Fort Sam Houston (Texas), and Camp Polk (Louisiana). He states there were wounded Korean War veterans at Camp Polk hospital that also had a big psychiatric unit with quite a few Korean War veterans who “just couldn’t take it.” After receiving training about frostbite and war wounds, Ryser shipped out in September 1952 from Camp Stoneman (California) onboard the USS General W. F. Hase. He says that his first impressions of Korea was that it was a “very, very poor country” and that one of his first orders was not to eat anything grown in Korea because it was fertilized with human waste. He speaks about American replacement troops and working with Republic of Korea troops. Ryser comments on his actions as a medic, field treatment, and common medical problems among the troops. He mentions that the cold conditions in Korea made frostbite a real problem. Later, he was transferred to guard a prisoner of war camp in Koje and he comments on the differences between Korean and Chinese prisoners. Ryser mentions a USO show with Debbie Reynolds and Walter Pidgeon, his unit’s combat during the battle of Heartbreak Ridge and Old Baldy, and the reality of actual conditions compared to the television show, *MASH*, and his return to the States after the Armistice was signed. Ryser speaks about his nightmares and how they have lessened over the years, although the frostbite on his ears still troubles him. He also mentions his involvement with the Blanchardville American Legion and how there are more projects and more money today than when he first became involved.

Biographical Sketch:

Ryser was born in a cheese factory in Blanchardville and grew up on a farm. He was a two-year draftee who take some agricultural assistance courses through the GI Bill upon his return home. He and his wife farm in the Blanchardville area.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997

Transcribed by Liliana Gundy, 2010

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Abstract written by Danielle Spalenka, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Van Ells: Today's date is October the 30th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Werner Ryser of Blanchardville, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning, and thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Ryser: Thank you.

Van Ells: Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military?

Ryser: Well, I was born in a cheese factory here in rural Blanchardville in 1932.

Van Ells: You were born in the cheese factory?

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: That sounds like an interesting story.

Ryser: At home, you know, of course in them days there wasn't much money around and nobody had money for hospitals, and Doc Steussy here in Blanchardville delivered me, and that's where I was born.

Van Ells: And you grew up on a farm I take it?

Ryser: Yes, in 1936 we moved onto a farm, and I lived there until 1950 when I went to work in the cheese factory, and I worked there until I was drafted.

Van Ells: During World War II you were a, geez, you were a young boy, I guess.

Ryser: Yes, I was, well, when World War II started in '39 I guess I would have been seven years old.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: But I do remember Pearl Harbor very, very well. I mean, when the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor. It was on a Sunday, that I know.

Van Ells: What was your reaction, do you recall?

Ryser: Well, it was very shocking I thought, and, you know, I thought, "Will it ever end?" I mean, it looked really bad in the beginning for the United States, but--

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: Once it started to turn it drug on and drug on for a long, long, long haul.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm. As a young boy did you follow World War II very closely? And did you think that someday that you might end up in that war?

Ryser: Well, I didn't think myself I would, but, oh yes, my parents listened to the news, you know, morning, noon and night, you know. But I had an older brother that he was five years older than I was, and of course he was born in '27, and he was getting of just about that age, you know, to be drafted when the war ended.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: So, uh, we were watching it very close, and of course we were glad when it was over with as everybody else was.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, World War II sort of turned around the American economy. It sort of brought America out of the Depression and into a more prosperous period, and you sort of mentioned before that your farm was a little hard pressed economically. I'm wondering if World War II helped the economic situation at all.

Ryser: Yes, it did. Everything was, I mean, there was the prices started to pick up, but of course there were ceiling prices on everything.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: I mean the OPA [Office of Price Administration] outfit had ceiling prices, what you bought and what you sold, everything had a ceiling price, but there was like for farming when you milked you got a subsidy, you know, over the ceiling price for producing a little extra, you know, because they needed all they could get.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: And the same way with hogs, meat market, there was a ceiling price on the meat and things like that, but if you produced a little extra you got a little bonus, you know?

Van Ells: Yeah. So in 1950 when the war in Korea broke out you were about 18.

Ryser: Right.

Van Ells: So now you're of military service age and so perhaps you paid more attention to Korea?

Ryser: Yes, ah—

Van Ells: Did you think you might end up in this one?

Ryser: I really expected that I would because I had to register for the draft, and I hadn't registered. I was supposed to register when I was 18 years old, but I had never really thought about it until when the war broke out in June. Then they really, you know, said about everybody better get registered or, you know, penalties and this and that.

Van Ells: Yeah, and so you did—

Ryser: Oh, I went right down to--I was working in Green County at the time so I went down in Green County and registered.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: But being I was 18, they said there was no danger of me getting drafted yet.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: But, uh, the following year then, in '51, I was working in the cheese factory, and my time was up I guess at the end of December. So I had taken my physical in, I think it was in July '51, and I expected to get drafted, but I was still only 19, and they said no 19 year olds were getting drafted, but I did get my Uncle Sam notice in December of '51 to report January 7, 1952. To Milwaukee.

Van Ells: Yeah, so when you got the greeting from Selective Service you weren't terribly surprised.

Ryser: No, not really. I expected maybe it would have been a little later because I was still 19 years old, but, uh, it really doesn't surprise me, and, uh, I guess I was probably ready to go. I could have volunteered, you know, joined the Air Force or something and gotten out of it.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: But that wasn't really, if everybody done that, that wouldn't be good either, so I thought I'd go ahead and take it and take my lumps.

Van Ells: So why don't you just walk me through your induction process. You had to go train somewhere and learn how to salute and all that sort of thing--

Ryser: Oh!

Van Ells: So take me through your introduction to the military.

Ryser: It was a rude awakening; really not so much for me, uh, I was used to getting up in the morning. We went, oh I can tell you, from here we went to Milwaukee, and there we had another physical. And, uh, sworn in at Milwaukee, and stayed overnight at Milwaukee, and the next morning we got on the train down to Fort Sheridan. And I guess while there they gave you the Army haircut and issue clothes, and I think I was there five days. And, uh, it was kind of a rude awakening in the mornings. I mean, at 4:30 a guy comes through with a whistle, and he'd walk down the barracks and back up, and if you weren't out he'd tip the bunk over, you know? So you had to get up. Really, it didn't bother me that much, but it did bother a lot of people that were, well, not used to getting up in the morning.

Van Ells: I suppose on the farm you got up pretty early.

Ryser: Yes, yes. So, it really didn't bother me that much, but there was a lot of grumbling and it was quite a change for, for everybody. There's no doubt about it.

Van Ells: Any other sort of, ah, adjustments you had to make? For example, one thing that some guys mention is language. They had never heard language--

Ryser: Well [laughs]--

Van Ells: Quite as harsh as they did in the military, and this sort of upset some people. Anything else that you can think of?

Ryser: No, I think maybe, yeah, the language, it was really bad. I mean, they really broke you in. I mean, we weren't used to being sworn at, swore at, you know, and things like that. And, ah, you got it right off the bat, you know. I mean, it was, it was quite an adjustment.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: But, ah, it's one that you grew accustomed to within, you know--I did anyway. It didn't take me that long, probably, I was used to taking orders anyway, you know, and it really didn't bother me that much, but like I said before, it was very hard for some people that weren't used to taking orders.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: Very, very hard!

Van Ells: Yeah. And so you ended up as a medic. When was this decision made?

Ryser: Well, that was made at Fort Sheridan, I guess. We wrote these aptitude tests and things like that, and I don't know how I got in the medics. The only reason I can think of is, uh, being a cheesemaker I was used to working with culture and bacteria and things like that, you know. And that's the only reason I could think of that I got put in to the medics.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: Which I didn't really care for but it was better than the infantry, I guess, maybe, but not very much [Van Ells laughs]. Not very much.

Van Ells: Why is that?

Ryser: Well, in combat you're no better off than an infantryman, really. You wear that white cross, you know, cross on your arm, and you're a pretty good target. In fact, in Korea we even took them off because--so we didn't stand out.

Van Ells: Yeah. Where did you train for, um, becoming a medic?

Ryser: Well, I went to Camp Pickett, Virginia from Fort Sheridan, I think I probably left there about the 13th of January, something like that, 14th, I just don't, I'm not sure on the date, but Camp Pickett, Virginia, which is very close to Blackstone, south of, probably south of Lynchburg about 60 miles. I think it's probably closed now. I'm pretty sure it is, but, ah, I went there for basic training and I had eight weeks of infantry first, infantry training, and then eight weeks of medical, and so I had a sixteen week basic training.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: Which took me into May of '52; probably--I think I got a leave on about the 12th of May.

Van Ells: And how long was it before you ended up in Korea?

Ryser: Well, that was in May, and then from there I went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for advanced medical training which got into the medical part much deeper, you know, than the basic training.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: And then I was there six, no, eight weeks at Fort Sam Houston, and then from there I went to Camp Polk, Louisiana for six weeks of working in a hospital, and that covered quite a few aspects of the medical part. We'd work maybe in the hospital, the outpatient clinic for two weeks, and then I think maybe a week or two right on the main hospital floor and then a week in the psych section and things like that, you know? They keep rotating you around, and I was, ah, finished there then—

Van Ells: If I could interrupt for a sec, while you at this hospital I would imagine there would have had to have been some casualties coming back from Korea by this time?

Ryser: Yes, there was, yes.

Van Ells: Did you handle them at all?

Ryser: Oh, yes. Yes, we worked with all of them, the wounded, and, uh, some were really bad, and some not so bad, but, no, there was Korean veterans coming in there, for sure. And they had a big psychiatric unit there, very big, and there's quite a few from Korea, Korean veterans in there because, uh, some just couldn't take it.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: And I was there then until, I think about the 8th of September, 7th of September, something like that, and got my orders then for Korea. And I got a leave, and I came home, was home then until the 19th of September, and I left for overseas.

Van Ells: Why don't you describe your voyage over? It's a very long one I take it.

Ryser: Yes, uh, went from here to Camp Stoneman. I flew from Madison to Chicago to Oakland [California] and went to Camp Stoneman in California which was a processing center for going overseas. And I think I was there about a week, a lot of briefing and medical checkups, you know, shots. We had to get a bunch of shots, and a lot of films on the diseases in Korea, and then they started showing us battle films, like wounded and what to expect, and the wounds, and what most of the wounds were and

frostbite, and things like that. A lot of frostbite in Korea, toes, trench foot, uh, things like that. And that's basically what went on at Camp Stoneman. And then they took, like, our dress uniforms; we didn't take them with us overseas, just fatigues and things like that.

Van Ells: Did you go by boat or a plane?

Ryser: Yes, I went by boat, on the General W. Hase, I think was the name of the boat on the way over. And, uh, it took, just about fourteen, I think it was thirteen days to--we landed in Yokohama, Japan.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: And, uh, from there they took us by bus to Camp Drake, which is not very far from Yokohama, 20 minutes, half hour, something like that, and a little more processing, not very long. I think we were there two days, and then we got on a LST [Landing Ship, Tank], took us to, no, no, this was a small, small troop carrier boat, I think, took us up by Chunchon is where-- it didn't land in Chunchon, though, but they took us by LST then off of the boat up on the beach, and we landed on the, in Korea, which was quite a ways north, we weren't far from the 38th Parallel.

Van Ells: Yeah. What were your first impressions of Korea? If you go there today South Korea, anyway, is a modern industrial nation, but it wasn't that at the time from what I gather.

Ryser: No, at that time it was a very, very poor country, mostly all peasants, you know. They lived in these little straw huts, you know, most of the people. The only buildings, really good buildings, you'd see you had to get into like Chunchon or Seoul or someplace like that, you know, a big city. Out in the rural area they all lived in these grass huts, practically. There was no wood buildings or anything like that, no housing, you know.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: And no, they had no plumbing of any kind. They were very poor people. All they had was a little hut and maybe a little rice paddy, and that was what they lived off of.

Van Ells: Very different than the kind of farm you grew up on I take it?

Ryser: Very much so, very much so.

Van Ells: Now, one of the things vets always tell me about is their method of fertilizing their fields.

Ryser: Yeah? [laughs] Every--

Van Ells: This make an impression upon you, too?

Ryser: Well, it sure did, and I mean, it was one of the first orders we had was not to eat anything grown in Korea because everything was fertilized with human fertilizer, you know.

Van Ells: Mm-hm.

Ryser: They saved, that's what they done, they saved all that, and that all went out on their gardens and rice paddies. I don't know if they do that yet today, I have no idea, but I'm sure they do in some areas yet, probably. But, ah, it was common at that time. Everyone, everyone over there done it.

Van Ells: Yeah. Did you have an opportunity to have much, um, contact with Koreans?

Ryser: Oh, yes. Not, not probably so much at first, but, ah, they had the ROK detachments, Republic of Korean soldiers, you know, and they'd sprinkle a few of them in with the American troops, and, uh, so we had a little experience there, but, ah, the civilians, yes, we had contact with them. You had to, you had to watch them because they'd steal everything from you, you know. Anything, anything that wasn't fastened down they'd take it. It was bad that way, but I guess at that time everyone got kind of angry, but I suppose now when you look back they didn't have anything, and they had a chance to get something, and they'd take it. It didn't matter what it was, anything.

Van Ells: Yeah. So you landed, and how long was it until you got up to the line?

Ryser: Well, it wasn't very long. I went to, after we landed in Inchon, that's what I was trying to think of, that's where we landed on the LST, and went right then to 40th Division Headquarters by truck. And this was, I think, probably about, let's see, I left the 19th, two weeks, it was in October, probably the middle of October at that time, '52. And I think the 26th of October, I was up on line. The 40th Division was a California National Guard Division, and at this time they were replacing it. All replacements were Regular Army because National Guard had quite a struggle over there. They weren't really ready for it, or I don't know what, and the Chinese and Koreans knew when there was a National Guard Division south of them, and they'd really, really hit them hard. So, the 40th had just moved on line, I guess, up on line, I think the first part, about the 1st of October, and they were losing quite a few men, and so that's--I wasn't there at the headquarters, I wasn't there more than about two days and,

three days, I guess, and I was up on line. More briefings and issued weapons and things like that. First aid kit and away you go.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm. If you would, why don't you just describe your first combat action.

Ryser: Well, I was scared, there's no doubt about it, and you know, like at division headquarters you'd see these guys, soldiers coming from the front line, and everyone had a bigger war story than the one before, you know, and it was very scary for, you know, a greenhorn, what you would say. And I was scared. There's no doubt about it, and I would say once you get up there about as far as you can go, you know, that's, ah, that's it, you know, you're there. And I guess the first mortar barrage was probably the most scariest. You know, you can hear a mortar coming in, and it really gets--you wonder where the next one's going to land. And of course veterans, veterans would tell you, "As long as you can hear them you're okay." And I found that out to be very true. The ones you don't hear are the ones that really hit close. And I don't know if you ever really get over being scared, but, ah, I think after probably a month or so you kind of, I don't say you get used to it, but you aren't as scared as you were at first.

Van Ells: In your job as a medic, I want you to describe it to me. In a combat situation what are you supposed to be doing?

Ryser: Well, if there was any wounded, I mean, they'd call for a medic. Some, there wouldn't be wounded every day, there'd always be lulls, you know, but I mean if there was anybody that called for a medic you had to go, you know, and patch them up the best you could, and then we'd get them on a litter, and then we'd get them back to battalion headquarters is what we would do, carry them back, and there they'd have like litter jeeps, and then they'd take them back to company headquarters, medical company headquarters, and there they had surgeons and doctors, and if they were wounded bad then they would fly them out of there with a helicopter to like a field hospital.

Van Ells: Right.

Ryser: But usually you had like a day on the, a day on the front line, and the morning would probably start out, would be to, it would be something like holding sick call. I mean, somebody would have, oh, pains or something or, you know, we'd carry like ACP which was a form of aspirin and things like that and lin [Approx. 4 sec. pause in recording] In case of badly wounded, you know, we'd issue a, we'd inject a tube of morphine.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: Which you'd have to have something because, you know, some have very bad injuries, an arm off or something, and give them a shot of morphine and they'd be on "Cloud 9" in no time.

Van Ells: Yeah. So you, basically you followed patrols around and that sort of thing?

Ryser: Yes, yes. We'd see that everybody had dry socks especially in the winter time. That was one of the things they really stressed is, "Keep your feet dry," you know, because as soon as your feet get sweat and get wet and then they get cold, frostbite had set in.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: That's very bad.

Van Ells: Yeah. You spent the winter there?

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: So that was a problem, frostbite?

Ryser: Oh, yes.

Van Ells: You saw it a lot?

Ryser: Yes, it was. In fact I even froze my ears. But really, that's probably the worst that I got. Oh, I did get a little cut with a little shrapnel, but I didn't even turn it in because I was a medic, and I doctored it up myself, and so that's the way it went.

Van Ells: So you were in combat about how many days a week?

Ryser: Well, I was up there 26th of October and then we pulled off a line, I think it was right around the 1st of April. So we pulled back. We had, you know, spent the winter there, and I guess they decided that that was probably enough for us for awhile.

Van Ells: Uh-huh.

Ryser: We pulled back in to reserve, and then we went from there down to, ah, Koje Island. We guarded prisoners for--I guess we were down there a couple of months. And then 45th Division was getting hit pretty hard so we were backing them up, oh, between Heartbreak Ridge and Old Baldy. They called it the Mung Dung Ni Valley, which was a great big open valley, and the 45th was getting hit pretty hard so we were backing them

up, and when the truce finally, cease-fire, finally did come in July and everybody was very, very happy after that, that had come.

Van Ells: Yeah. Um, I want to talk about the prisoners for a minute. I'm just interested in your impressions of these prisoners, were they North Koreans, or were they Chinese, or were they sort of a mix?

Ryser: Both, both. Yes, we had North Koreans and Chinese both down there. The North Koreans, they were more humble. I mean you could tell them what to do, and they'd go ahead and do it, but the Chinese were more, oh I don't know, independent, or I don't know what you'd call them. They were more; they'd give you a lot more trouble than the North Korean prisoners did. They could manufacture, you know, tools and weapons out of almost anything, the Chinese. They were very, very sharp. It was the same way up on line. We could tell when we were against a North Korean division or if the Chinese were on opposite of us because we used to say the North Koreans couldn't hit a bull in the hind end with a, you know, with anything, but the Chinese if you stood around in the open they'd dump a mortar right in your pocket, and they could do it, too. They were very good.

Van Ells: They were a better fighting force?

Ryser: Absolutely. Much better.

Van Ells: Yeah. So in the times you weren't actually engaged in combat, I'm interested in what sort of activities you and the other troops were doing in terms writing letters or whatever the case may be. When you weren't in combat, what did you do to occupy your time? Because you're sort of in a remote area there. It's hard to go to town or something like that.

Ryser: Oh, yeah, there was no town, and we weren't allowed, we weren't allowed to leave line. We were—well, usually there'd be a lull, you know, and always a lull there, and we could write letters, and as far as cleaning up, you couldn't do much of that. We were allowed once a week to go to, oh, Division Reserve, I guess they called it, and then back there we could get a shower and a clean uniform.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: And clean clothes, you know? So, that was kind of the highlight of every week is when your turn was to go, you know? And, uh, it felt pretty good to get a—probably it wasn't much of a warm shower, more of a cold shower, but at least you got cleaned up, you know? And, uh, but really during the days, they were kind of boring, you know. A lot of times the days were very boring up there because there was nothing going on, and

which was all right, too. In fact, we soon found out when it got really quiet then you could expect something that night, and that's the way it usually worked. If they throw a few mortars in all day long, or artillery, then we'd figure we're okay for that night. But if during that day it was really quiet then you could really expect a probe that night.

Van Ells: I'm curious to know if you got a USO show or anything like that.

Ryser: Only one. Yes, ah—

Van Ells: Bob Hope by chance?

Ryser: No, it was Debbie Reynolds and Walter Pidgeon.

Van Ells: Oh, I've actually heard of them.

Ryser: Yeah? Yeah, Debbie Reynolds is still around; in fact I think she's right around my age, pretty sure she is.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: And that's the only one I got to see.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: It was very good.

Van Ells: Really, why not?

Ryser: What's that?

Van Ells: Why not? Why wasn't it very good?

Ryser: Oh, I said it was very good.

Van Ells: Oh, it was very good.

Ryser: Yes, yes, it was very good.

Van Ells: When I talk to Korean War vets I can't help but ask them their impressions of the television show M.A.S.H. I presume you've seen it.

Ryser: Oh, yes.

Van Ells: Especially working in the medics.

Ryser: It kind of, you know, hit home with me, but it didn't really, it didn't transpire really the way it comes over on M.A.S.H., no.

Van Ells: How's that?

Ryser: Oh, it was, [laughs], it wasn't quite that way, but some of it maybe vaguely was but very vague, but, ah, no, it was just a little bit different. Not, I mean, here they all had clean clothes and clean looking and things like that but over there, you know, it's a little, it's a little different.

Van Ells: Everyone's a little grimmer I take it.

Ryser: Yes, yes. In fact when you get shaved once you think you're really doing good, you know? Sometimes you'd have to go three, four or five days without even getting to shave, you know.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, you left in April of '53, and the armistice, as you mentioned, was that summer. Did you have a specific amount of time you were supposed to be in Korea? Like in Vietnam it was a one year tour of duty, for example. Was there some set time you were supposed to be there or--

Ryser: They had a point system.

Van Ells: Uh-huh.

Ryser: The way it worked, I think if I remember right, you needed 40 points to rotate, and that means you would be done, go home. I think it was 40, and for every month you had on line you got, like up on line, you got four points, and if you were in division reserve, which is right in back of the front line and like artillery, things like that, you'd get three points and if you were in the rear echelon you'd get two points per month.

Van Ells: Mm-hmm.

Ryser: But my time was running out, see? I was a two year draftee, and on November 13th then of '53 I had come up on points, and my time was running out so I had to go home one way or another. So, November 13th of '53 I got my notice then to leave.

Van Ells: To leave Korea or the military?

Ryser: Leave Korea.

Van Ells: Oh.

Ryser: So, ah—

Van Ells: So you were over there when the armistice was signed.

Ryser: Yes, yes. We were in reserve, right in back of the 45th Division, and after the armistice was signed then it was fairly easy going over there, very easy going compared to what it was before.

Van Ells: Yeah. So in November of '53 then, you came home?

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: By ship again?

Ryser: Yes, come home on the Marine Phoenix. I had a chance, at that time they were flying some home, guaranteeing them to be home by Christmas. But it wasn't more than a couple of weeks before that that a plane had went down out there by California or Washington, I don't know which it was, with a load of troops on and none survived. So I just thought, "I'll take my chance on the ship. If I get home for Christmas, okay; if I don't, I won't." So I took the boat.

Van Ells: And you got back and you got your free and clear discharge from the military?

Ryser: I didn't get my discharge. I got my separation in December of '53, December 19th, I think I got my separation, and then I didn't get my discharge until, oh, '60 something, in the '60s.

Van Ells: Oh, I see why was that?

Ryser: Because I was in the Reserves for six more years, see?

Van Ells: Now, was that a voluntary decision or—

Ryser: No.

Van Ells: Or was that part of your—

Ryser: That was automatic, you were in the Reserves.

Van Ells: Any thought of re-enlisting?

Ryser: Not then. But, you know, later on, probably five years later, I kind of think maybe I should have stayed in because--and it's the same I guess with most veterans. Once you get out you remember, all you remember is the good parts, you don't remember the bad stuff, you know. No, at that time I

had no thought of re-enlisting. I'd about had it, you know, with the, with the, Korea anyway.

Van Ells: So, I've just got a couple of questions about your postwar years. When you got discharged and you're out of the active duty service anyway, what were your priorities, and what did you want to do, get a job and this sort of thing, and how did you go about pursuing those goals?

Ryser: Well, I wanted to--I didn't want, we didn't want to live in the city or anything. So, and being we, my wife and I, both grew up on farms, we decided to start farming, and that's what we did. In 1954 we started farming, and didn't have much money either or anything at that time, but, uh, I went to, under the GI Bill, I went to veterans school, which was like an agricultural, oh, to help you, you know? I'd get, oh, I think I got \$250 a month to start with like a three year deal, and the last--of course, as the three years went on every six months you'd get less, you know, because you were supposed to know more and make, be able to make more money and the last six months I probably didn't get more than \$40 a month or something like that. But it helped because there wasn't much money around at that time either. So that's the route we went, and we farmed all our lives, and we're—I've still got a farm, and I still do a little part-time farming.

Van Ells: Is it the same farm you that you got after Korea?

Ryser: No, no. We bought this farm in 1959. And we've had it ever since.

Van Ells: After the war did you have any sort of medical or emotional readjustments to make? For example, you mentioned your ears were frostbitten.

Ryser: They still bother, I mean, I have to watch it in cold weather because they get cold so fast, you know. Otherwise, nothing serious, uh, I guess I was lucky. I didn't come home with any Korean disease of any kind, you know. Malaria was very prominent over there, but I guess I was lucky. Of course we had pills to take every week, quinine pills, and if you took them I think you were all right, but some wouldn't take them, and some ended up with malaria. Hepatitis was very common, different diseases.

Van Ells: Yeah, but you managed to avoid those I take it?

Ryser: Yes, I did. I think maybe being a medic did help a little bit that way because I realized what taking them pills would do, you know? And like someone that was in the infantry, some were hard to tell them to take them if they didn't want to take them.

Van Ells: Uh-huh. In terms of psychological readjustments, as you mentioned you were in a mental ward for awhile, not in it, but I mean you worked in one.

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: And so you sort of saw what combat can do to some people's minds. I'm just interested, you weren't shooting, but you were in combat situations, and I'm just sort of wondering if that had any effect on you at all. Like some vets report nightmares after the war for awhile—

Ryser: Yes, you have them, you know. In fact, I still have them once in awhile but not very often anymore, but it's very common at first, you know. You relive it in your dreams, you know, quite a few times, and there's some of them sights you never forget, you know.

Van Ells: Nothing debilitating, though, in your case.

Ryser: No, no.

Van Ells: Nothing that stopped you from making a living or anything like that?

Ryser: No, no, no. I don't say that my mind was stronger than anybody else, but it's just that, uh, some people it really did get down. I mean, some we had to just ship out, send to the rear because they couldn't take it.

Van Ells: You could see that in the combat situation?

Ryser: In combat, yeah. Combat, it's just a whole new ballgame. You can explain it, talk to anybody, but you just can't explain it until you're there. It's just different.

Van Ells: Mm-hm. I've just got one last area that I want to cover, and that involves veterans organizations.

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: On the form I had you fill out you mentioned that you joined the Legion.

Ryser: Yes.

Van Ells: I was interested in why you joined the Legion and why you joined it when you did and what you got out of it and still get out of it.

Ryser: I think it's a good organization. They do a lot for the community. I know us here in Blanchardville, there's different projects for the village and schools that we donate money to, and we're always donating money. In

fact, we've got a dam here in Blanchardville that needs repair, and we've donated five hundred dollars to help repair that, and I think it's a good organization. I've been in it since 19, I think, 58. I think I've made it 39 years I've been in, I believe.

Van Ells: Now were there many Korean War vets in when you first joined?

Ryser: No, not very many at that time. There are a few now. In fact, a lot of our WWII vets, of course they're all getting in their seventies now, you know, so there's getting less and less of them all the time.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: So there's got to be another, got to pass the torch, as they say, to the next generation I guess, but we have quite a few Korean vets and quite a few Vietnam veterans right now.

Van Ells: As you mentioned, you were in for thirty years. I'm wondering if, in your observation the Legion and your post in particular has changed in character. You mentioned the Vietnam vets come in. I don't know if you are getting the younger Gulf War vets now or not.

Ryser: I think it has changed some. I think, uh, when I first joined, at that time they didn't have much money either, the Legion, you know. It seems like now you have a little more money on hand and more, more things to get involved in and more projects to get involved in.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: That's one way, and we have activities to raise money. In fact, this Saturday night we have our annual "Feather Party" they call it, a bingo party. And so if you aren't doing anything come on, if you like to play bingo, come on down.

Van Ells: I am doing something, but thanks for the offer [both laugh]. Well, those are pretty much all of the questions that I have. That's my standard line of questions; is there anything that you'd like to add or anything?

Ryser: I think we pretty well covered almost all of it that I know of.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Ryser: From start to finish, I think, I haven't left out much of anything. I'm sure I've left maybe something out, but I wouldn't know what. I can't think of it right now, you know?

Van Ells: Yeah, well, if you think of it let me know.

Ryser: Okay.

Van Ells: Well, I want to thank you for taking some time out of your day.

Ryser: Well, thank you for calling.

[End of Interview]