

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an Interview with
Paul Van Ells
Rank Unknown, United States Marine Corps
December 7, 1994

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Van Ells, Paul A., (1926-). Oral History Interview, December 7, 1994.
User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca.90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips
Master Recording: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips.

Abstract

Van Ells, a native of Manitowoc, Wis., discusses his experience as a cook in the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific theater during World War II and his later experiences as a veteran back in the States. As a sophomore in high school, Van Ells dropped out to enlist in the Marines. He touches briefly upon many things he experienced as part of the 4th Marine Division, Company C., 4th Tank Battalion during his interview. Among these were his experiences in basic training at the Marine Corps Base in San Diego. He mentions infantry training at Camp Pendleton. He also speaks of his journey to Pearl Harbor aboard the U.S.S. Stewart. From Pearl Harbor he then traveled to Maui to be trained in the use of tanks. Van Ells was stationed at various places around the Pacific during his time in the military. While in Guam, he describes his recreational activities as well as his experience of having the Enola Gay loaded on the airstrip there. He recalls the capture of Japanese soldiers in Guam as well. After the Japanese surrender, he was sent to the Palau Islands, to the island of Peliliou where he spent the remainder of his active duty. He shares his impressions of combat Marines that he had contact with at that time. When he returned to the States, he tells of the process involved including a four-week stop at Treasure Island in San Francisco before finally ending his enlistment by being discharged from Great Lakes Training Station. After leaving the military, he discusses how he took advantage of Veteran's benefits such as his use of the GI Bill to finish high school and buy his first home in Hartford, Connecticut. He also mentions his brief membership in the VFW as well as his involvement in the American Legion organization, serving as Vice Commander.

Biographical Sketch

Van Ells, was born in Manitowoc, Wisconsin and volunteered for the U.S. Marine Corps. Upon being honorably discharged, August 5, 1946 in he lived in Manitowoc, Wisconsin before moving to Hartford, Connecticut.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.
Transcribed by Kristin Pachal, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Today's date is December the 7th, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veteran's Museum doing an oral history interview this evening with Mr. Paul Van Ells. And in case you are wondering, he is my uncle.

Mark: This is going to seem odd, asking you these questions in this neutral format, but we'll just have to do it. Tell me where you were born and a little bit about your upbringing.

Van Ells: Well, I was born in Kaukana, Wisconsin on August 19th, 1926 and I grew up mostly in Kaukana and then we moved to Mischicot and in Mischicot I left high school in my sophomore year to enlist in the Marine Corps.

Mark: What was your growing up like? It was the Depression for example, was your family hard hit by the Depression?

Van Ells: Not too bad. Actually they were in Kaukauna, when we lived in Kaukana, it was rough times. After we moved to Mischicot we were in a farming district and there was a lot of barter. You know what I mean by barter?

Mark: Yeah.

Van Ells: My dad did a lot of services for food. You know where a lot of people weren't getting food. So Dad being a dentist we survived very well.

Mark: Yeah that's all right. So 1942 you enlisted in the Marine Corps?

Van Ells: No, '43.

Mark: '43. Explain to me the reason why you decided to join the Marine Corps, and leave school to join the Marine Corps?

Van Ells: Well, because our country was attacked, I was patriotic I guess.

Mark: Do you recall when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Van Ells: Yes, I sat and listened to it on the radio.

Mark: So you must have been like a freshman or maybe even ninth grade or something.

Van Ells: Ninth grade I believe.

Mark: Do you remember what you were thinking? Do you remember your reaction to it?

- Van Ells: I just thought it was a shame someone would attack us and you know, first thing you do when you're patriotic you want to go ahead and enlist. You know, a lot of people did.
- Mark: So were you the only one that you knew of that actually left school to join the Marines?
- Van Ells: No, there was another person there too that did the same thing.
- Mark: I see. How did your parents react to this?
- Van Ells: They didn't like it too much to begin with but—
- Mark: How come?
- Van Ells: Well, they thought that I should finish school. So anyhow after a little persuasion they let me go.
- Mark: I see.
- Van Ells: They had to sign for me.
- Mark: Yeah. That's what I was wondering.
- Van Ells: Yeah, they signed for me.
- Mark: Okay. So I've interviewed a lot of Army guys before but I haven't interviewed too many Marines. Why don't you tell me a little bit about your induction process, where did you go to get your physical, and sign the papers and get the haircut? And where did you go for training?
- Van Ells: Okay. I signed up in Manitowoc, Wisconsin and I went to Milwaukee for my physical. And then after the physical I went home, I enlisted in September '43, and I didn't go until January. Oh, in '42 and then I went in '43.
- Mark: Why was that?
- Van Ells: They didn't call me 'til January 25th of '43. That's the way they operated. Then they sent me in a full steam engine out to San Diego, California where I went to boot camp for three months.
- Mark: I want to backtrack a little bit first. I just thought of a question I wanted to ask. That was, why the Marines? There were three services to choose from. I suppose if you count the Coast Guard that was another one. But the Marines has the reputation of being the toughest.

Van Ells: Well that's why I took it.

Mark: Is that why you took it?

Van Ells: Yup. I figured I'd get better training there.

Mark: Did you think perhaps that you'd be more likely to see combat there?

Van Ells: That's what I figured. Unfortunately it kept me away from it. I'm not complaining.

Mark: Unfortunately in a relative sense I guess.

Van Ells: Right

Mark: So tell me about your basic training. You had three weeks of training, was it in San Diego that—

Van Ells: No, three months of training.

Mark: Oh, three months of training. I'm sorry. Was it in San Diego that they gave you the haircut and that sort of thing?

Van Ells: Oh yes. Yup. They done all that. [laughs] I mean they gave you the shave, you know. It was interesting. It was hard. The training was very difficult.

Mark: What sorts of things did they have you do?

Van Ells: Well, they had self-defense, rifle, you know, marksmanship, physical fitness, they gave you plenty of that. Plenty of training with the rifle and Browning automatic rifles and things like that, hand grenades.

Mark: Was discipline tough?

Van Ells: It was rough. It was real rough.

Mark: In what sense, a lot of screaming and yelling, did they actually hit people or how—

Van Ells: Oh yes. When you don't do well they hit you over the head with that walking stick. [laughs]

Mark: I see.

- Van Ells: When you don't hit the bulls-eye, they stand there and crack you over the head 'til you got it. It was a little rough.
- Mark: Yeah, it sounds like it.
- Van Ells: It wasn't like home life, I'll tell you. [laughs]
- Mark: Were there very many people that didn't make it through the training? Were there a lot of washouts?
- Van Ells: There was a few washouts, not too many. There were a few.
- Mark: I'm interested if you could discuss some of the people that you trained with, now this is probably the first time that you had traveled around the country and that you met people from the East Coast, or the West Coast, or the South—
- Van Ells: Lots from the South. Yeah, a lot from the South.
- Mark: How did Northern guys like you get along with the guys from the South or didn't you? Was there tension? Did you joke around?
- Van Ells: No, I didn't have any problem with anyone. The only thing that amazed me when we got into boot camp were all these southerners came up and they all had these little 44's and knives and everything and they asked everyone to put out their weapons and these guys came out with weapons, I couldn't believe it [laughing]. Real antiques now. But other than that the people were easy to get along with, they worked together. You didn't have much choice. If you had any chip on your shoulder, the drill instructor took it away from you in a hurry.
- Mark: I suppose. Did you get off the base much? Or post— what do they call it in the Marines?
- Van Ells: None. Not for three months. Not for three months.
- Mark: So you had no shore leave or whatever they call it in San Diego?
- Van Ells: No.
- Mark: Until you were finished.
- Van Ells: Right.
- Mark: When did the military make the decision to make you a cook? When did they decide who was going to do what?

- Van Ells: I volunteered for that.
- Mark: Oh, you volunteered for that. Was it in basic training?
- Van Ells: No, after.
- Mark: Oh. So what happened then after your training? After you finished the training?
- Van Ells: I went to school right there in San Diego and from there I got transferred to— let's see, I'm trying to think it out, it was a replacement battalion for the 4th Marine Division. From San Diego they sent you to Camp Pendleton.
- Mark: That's also in California.
- Van Ells: Yes.
- Mark: What sort of school were you doing? Infantry school—
- Van Ells: It was strictly infantry. Combat.
- Mark: I see. And you were at Camp Pendleton how long?
- Van Ells: I think I was there for about six months.
- Mark: Really? I suppose there you must have gotten some time—
- Van Ells: More training. Right.
- Mark: Did you get time to get off the base?
- Van Ells: Yes, from there we got off the base all right. You know, we could get off the base and hitchhike to L.A. and go to the Hollywood Canteen and things like that you know.
- Mark: So when did you finally get overseas?
- Van Ells: I think—well let's see— I think about nine months after we boarded the U.S.S. General Stewart in Long Beach, California and headed for Hawaii. We hit a typhoon on the way. Believe me, I'm glad I never was a sailor. [laughs]
- Mark: But one of my standard questions is to ask about the accommodations.
- Van Ells: They were atrocious.

- Mark: Like how many guys in a bunk?
- Van Ells: Well, they had bunks 'bout four high down in the troop ship, down in the bottom. And everyone was seasick so you didn't— [laughs] I'm just saying pieces were going all over the place, it just washed around. I never went down there. I stayed up in the deck and ate. I found as long as I kept eating I wouldn't get sick. But it was quite a trip.
- Mark: Yeah, it sounds like it. It took you how long to get to Hawaii?
- Van Ells: I think about ten days. Cause they zigzagged around.
- Mark: What happened after that?
- Van Ells: After that, they took another boat and they sent us over to Maui. Where we hooked up with the 4th Marine Division. And then they assigned me to Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division. And I also went to tank school there.
- Mark: Oh, on Maui?
- Van Ells: Yeah, on Maui. Boy, that a beautiful place then.
- Mark: Was it?
- Van Ells: It was gorgeous.
- Mark: I suppose an exotic place for a kid from Manitowoc, huh?
- Van Ells: Yeah, when you're seventeen and you hit a place like that, it was fabulous. You know you go out in the woods and all it is white orchid growing all over and different colored orchids. You could pick 'em you know. You think back and in the States you had to pay twenty-five dollars apiece for 'em. It was a beautiful place.
- Mark: I see. I suppose if you had to train in tanks that was the place to do it.
- Van Ells: Yeah, it was.
- Mark: There was a training ground there or something?
- Van Ells: Oh yes, there was a big training ground there.
- Mark: It sounds kinda a shame to tear up this nice island and put tanks on it.

- Van Ells: Well, it wasn't that much. What did they is they teach you how to drive and steer and how to use the flame-thrower, load the 75-mm and you know, things like that in the tanks. So in other words, it was pretty good but the tanks weren't as good as they are today. Today they got air-conditioning and everything else in them. We didn't have that. We had blowers but it didn't take all the smoke out when you started shooting.
- Mark: I suppose not. So you were how long on Maui?
- Van Ells: I spent most of my time on Maui, and from there they sent me to Guam. I was on Guam about a year and then they sent me to the Palau Islands. Pelilou, the island of Pelilou.
- Mark: Which is just off the Philippines I think.
- Van Ells: Yes, it was.
- Mark: When you were in Guam, when you were in the Palau Islands, what were your duties? Maybe you could just describe a typical day for you in the South Pacific.
- Van Ells: Most of it was getting up early in the morning, we cooked, then we had training, then it was back in the bunks. That was pretty easy going. It was pretty easy going.
- Mark: I see. What does a Marine eat? I mean I'm sure as cook I'm sure you had a birds-eye view of the sort of thing—
- Van Ells: Oh, the food was excellent.
- Mark: Was it?
- Van Ells: It was excellent.
- Mark: You always hear them complain, maybe not Marines. Maybe it was the Army guys.
- Van Ells: We didn't have any complaints on food. We had plenty of eggs and what we called shit on a shingle, you know corned beef and cream sauce [laughs], no, we had excellent food.
- Mark: I see. You spent a whole year on Guam.
- Van Ells: Yes.
- Mark: What sort of recreational activities did you do to occupy yourself?

- Van Ells: Well, once in awhile we'd take a platoon and we go up and try to get some of the Japs out of the woods. Then watch movies, play basketball, baseball. It was pretty nice, went swimming up in Talofofu Bay. We had a few sunken Japanese ships there and we went skin diving and went into the ships and looked at them.
- Mark: Anyone left in them that you could tell?
- Van Ells: No, not that we could see.
- Mark: I'm interested in going into the woods to look for the Japanese. You were there obviously after the island had been liberated but there were still some stragglers left.
- Van Ells: Quite a few. Quite a few geishi [geisha] girls.
- Mark: Quite a few geisha girls?
- Van Ells: Yeah, well the Japanese had 'em up in the hills and then when they got pregnant and had to deliver they sent 'em down to us.
- Mark: Oh.
- Van Ells: It was quite fascinating I think. You found a lot of dead ones that had been killed and never been found, you know you came across them in the jungle.
- Mark: About how many Japanese do you think were left there?
- Van Ells: There was quite a few hundred. There were quite a few hundred.
- Mark: Other than these women, did you ever catch any?
- Van Ells: Oh yes, we caught 'em. We caught most of them right at the movie theater.
- Mark: [laughing] What were they doing at the movie theater?
- Van Ells: They'd come and sit in the back row. They'd sneak out of the jungle and come and sit in the back row and watch the movies.
- Mark: Do you think this was their way of trying to surrender?
- Van Ells: No, they didn't try to surrender. No way José. [laughter] They were die-hards.

- Mark: Yeah, that's what I thought. It seems pretty audacious though to go watch a movie.
- Van Ells: Yeah, well you could smell 'em. You could really smell 'em. You know, they didn't smell too sweet I'll tell you.
- Mark: No I suppose being out in a jungle.
- Van Ells: Yeah, after living out in the jungle and everything the way they did, no.
- Mark: A lot of people in the military remember that there was a lot of drinking going on. In a kind of rear area like yours, I would imagine you might have access to that sort of thing. Was there much use of alcohol and those sorts of things?
- Van Ells: No. Not that I was exposed to. Maybe the older people did, but not me. You know I had never gotten into drinking that much. When we were on Maui and if we had liberty we'd go down and have a rum and coke you know, something like that. Other than that, no. No intoxication. Not to my knowledge.
- Mark: Of course you were just a freckle-faced eighteen-year-old at the time. In a place like Guam, I would imagine there were also WACS and other sorts of American women there.
- Van Ells: Oh yes. We had the Navy Sea Bees there and that the Enola Gay took off from Guam.
- Mark: Say that again?
- Van Ells: That's where the Enola Gay took from.
- Mark: Oh, took off from Guam. Right.
- Van Ells: They took off from Guam to bomb Japan.
- Mark: You were in the Pelau Islands by then.
- Van Ells: Ahhh –Let me think for a second. No, I saw the Enola Gay. Right after they went and bombed there that's when they sent me to Pelilou.
- Mark: Okay. How was Pelilou different than Guam was?

Van Ells: Well, Guam got to be a pretty good-sized island. Pelilou, I think was about three miles long and about three-quarters of a mile wide. And they had Sea Bees there. And that's all and an airstrip.

Mark: It was just an airstrip then.

Van Ells: Yes.

Mark: That was the duty of that particular island then.

Van Ells: Yeah, then I was on Pelilou we were more or less supply depot for the Pacific area.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the combat Marines?

Van Ells: Quite a bit.

Mark: What were your impressions of them?

Van Ells: They were hard people.

Mark: Were they?

Van Ells: Yeah. A lot of them had it real rough. They had it real bad some of them. Some didn't. It didn't bother them too much. But some of them it bothered them quite a bit.

Mark: I see. You could see the look on their face or something?

Van Ells: Oh yes. They turned out to be pretty hard. Nothing too much bothered 'em. As far as respecting the officers and that, they lost a lot of respect after they were in combat. Depends upon the officers also, you know. They got hard. I met a lot of them on Guadalcanal and Karau and those places. Them guys really had it rough.

Mark: Being in a non-combat situation, did you feel any kind of resentment from them? Or did you get along with them?

Van Ells: No, I got along with them real well. No one ever thought anything of it. You just do as you are told. When you got an order you just did it. You didn't question 'em. Not in the Marine Corps you didn't question them.

Mark: [laughs] I see.

- Van Ells: Cause I know when I went in there and they gave me my serial number and they said you'll never forget this the rest of your life. You know, that's true. That's true, you don't forget it.
- Mark: Did you get much news from home?
- Van Ells: Oh yes, I got a lot of letters from home, from my mother and father you know.
- Mark: Back in the States there was rationing and those kinds of things. What's the Marine's view of the United States during the war? Did you look back the U.S. and think they're living on the consumer goods or—
- Van Ells: No, never thought about it.
- Mark: Never thought about it.
- Van Ells: Never thought about it. They kept you so busy you didn't have time to think about too much except what you were trained for, you know they keep you in shape and that. In fact, it never entered my mind. The only time I heard about rationing was if Mother mentioned in a letter or I met someone that said they couldn't get sugar or stuff like that you know. [unintelligible talk from the background] Margaret said she'll tell you about the rationing. [laughs] But for me it didn't bother at all.
- Mark: I see. Because I talked to some vets and they sometimes have this image of the home front as being filled with guys driving around in their cars and all that sort of thing, people living high off the hog and while they were out there.
- Van Ells: No, it never entered my mind.
- Mark: I see. Okay. Do you recall when the European War ended, when you heard the Nazis had surrendered?
- Van Ells: Yes, it was just before we bombed Japan.
- Mark: Did it have much effect on the Pacific where you were? Where you were still fighting?
- Van Ells: No, it didn't have much effect on us. Over in Germany that was mostly Army. Army and Navy over there. The Navy was pretty well split up but it was the Navy and the Army over there. The Army had a lot more men than the Marine Corps did I think.
- Mark: Yeah oh lots more.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Mark: So you recall then when the atomic bomb blew up over Hiroshima.

Van Ells: Yup, yup I sure do. I was on Guam when they did it cause I saw the planes getting ready and you couldn't get near the airport space. We used to go down and watch the Japanese two-man sub, we used to go through that, the one we had captured. And we used to go through that and look it over and we got down near that base and boy they just pushed everyone away. The B-29's were all loaded up, you know, getting ready.

Mark: I would assume you didn't know what they were going to do at the time.

Van Ells: No we didn't. No one knew.

Mark: When did you find out what had happened?

Van Ells: After it happened.

Mark: Like a day or two?

Van Ells: The next day. We knew it.

Mark: Was there much talk around the base there or anything?

Van Ells: Not too much. The only thing that came up is that the Japanese surrendered. Everyone was jovial about that part of it.

Mark: When did you finally get back to the U.S.?

Van Ells: Let's see, I got back to the States in June and I was in Treasure Island in San Francisco.

Mark: This was in June of 1946?

Van Ells: Yeah.

Mark: So you spent like a year in the Palau Islands then.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Mark: While there was no war going on?

Van Ells: Right. That was fascinating.

- Mark: Really? Why was that?
- Van Ells: Well the Japs were still dug in there and we go out in the woods and pick bananas and [unintelligible talking to Van Ells in background] no, no. She said “Didn’t you ever shoot any Japs?” and I said “no” [laughing] But, no we picked wild bananas and the Pelilou was the pearl bed of the Pacific and I didn’t find that out until I got back.
- Mark: Well that’s too bad huh? [laughing]
- Van Ells: Yes that was too bad.
- Mark: It sounds like good enough duty but was there any sort of longing to get home at this time? The war’s pretty much over and—
- Van Ells: Yeah. After that yes. After the war was over whoever wanted to re-enlist could. I didn’t. I wanted to get back and go to school.
- Mark: I see. So you went from the Palau Islands—
- Van Ells: Yes, they flew me to Pearl Harbor and I got on the U.S.S. Albacore, it was a Navy aircraft carrier, and they took all the people going back. You had to wait your turn you know. When your number came up then they sent you back as long as you weren’t re-enlisting.
- Mark: Yeah, I see, they rotated the point—
- Van Ells: Rotation-like.
- Mark: So when did you finally get back to Manitowoc? Pretty soon after you got to California?
- Van Ells: I was on Treasure Island, San Francisco about three or four weeks and then they sent me to Great Lakes Naval Training Station up there. Where I was discharged from.
- Mark: I see and how’d you get back?
- Van Ells: From there to home?
- Mark: Yeah.
- Van Ells: Hitchhiked.
- Mark: Hitchhiked?

- Van Ells: Yup. [laughs]
- Mark: How come you hitchhiked? Didn't they give you a bus ticket? I seem to remember getting a bus ticket when I got out of the service.
- Van Ells: Nope. Nope. They just gave me my walking papers and my money and well "good-bye." [laughs] And I hitchhiked to Manitowoc.
- Mark: So that must have taken you a couple of days to get back there.
- Van Ells: About two days I guess.
- Mark: And how did Grandma and Grandpa respond to the –
- Van Ells: They were happy to see me. I was happy to see them too. [laughs]
- Mark: You didn't think of calling them for a ride or anything?
- Van Ells: No. See, when they discharge you, they got thousands of guys there and they just take them as they come. They never knew what day you were going to get out, mustering out you know.
- Mark: So here you are. You're a discharged veteran now. What were your first priorities when you got out of the service? What were the things you wanted to do? You mentioned going to school for example.
- Van Ells: Well, I had to go back and finish high school. I did two years in one at Mischicot High School.
- Mark: Oh, is that right?
- Van Ells: Yeah.
- Mark: How long— it took you a year to finish the last two?
- Van Ells: Yup.
- Mark: Was there a special program or something? Or you just crack the books?
- Van Ells: Crack the books.
- Mark: I see, and then what did you do after that? Now this education, did you have to pay for this? I mean you're an adult student now.
- Van Ells: No, I didn't have to pay for it, the GI Bill did.

Mark: I see, okay. After you graduated then what—

Van Ells: Then I went to the University of Wisconsin at Manitowoc for two years.

Mark: What did you study?

Van Ells: Pre-law.

Mark: I see. Did you use GI Bill to do this?

Van Ells: Yes.

Mark: Now, when you applied to the GI Bill, how did you go about doing that?

Van Ells: I went to the VA (Veteran's Affairs) right there in Manitowoc.

Mark: In Manitowoc?

Van Ells: Yup.

Mark: The state office or county office or—

Van Ells: County office. Because I had to sign up again for selective service.

Mark: Oh I see. Yeah, you were only nineteen or something?

Van Ells: I was twenty-one when I got out.

Mark: Twenty-one. So the CVSO there helped you out.

Van Ells: Right. They took care of all the paperwork and that.

Mark: Now, were there a lot of vets there going to school with you at the same time?

Van Ells: No, there was only one in Mischicot. But when I was going to the college, University of Wisconsin, yes, there were a lot of vets in there.

Mark: There were other kinds of GI Bill-type benefits too. For example there was a housing loan. Did you use that at all?

Van Ells: I used that, yes, when I bought my first house.

Mark: Now that wasn't in Manitowoc was it?

Van Ells: No that was in East Hartford Connecticut that I used the GI Bill.

- Mark: That was how much later?
- Van Ells: Three years later.
- Mark: I see. Why don't you just explain to me how you got out to the East Coast? How did you leave Manitowoc and move on? After you finished your two years at Manitowoc.
- Van Ells: Okay. I knew a fella by the name of Alan Dahlrumples (??) from Manitowoc. We hitchhiked around the country, down South and that. And then, he got homesick and I took a job at West Palm Beach Hotel as a bar waiter. I tended bar there for one winter and then I went up to Connecticut to see some friends and while I was there I met my wife at Trinity College.
- Mark: That'll do it.
- Van Ells: That'll do it.
- Mark: That's what I did too.
- Van Ells: [laughs]
- Mark: Were these submarine corps friends by chance?
- Van Ells: No, he was a blind veteran from— his name Thomas Burns—he was from Manitowoc. He was real good friends of the family so I went out there to see him.
- Mark: What prompted you to go hitchhiking around the country?
- Van Ells: Well, I wanted to see the country.
- Mark: I suppose you hadn't seen enough going to California and back.
- Van Ells: No, well I saw that side but I didn't see down South. I had a friend, a Marine Corps buddy in Baton Rouge, Louisiana by the name of Clinton Gill. And we stopped there and we looked him up and we had to spend a few days there, then we went on from there.
- Mark: I've just got one last area that I cover and that involves Veteran's organizations and reunions. Did you ever join like the Legion or the VFW [Veteran's of Foreign Wars] or any group like that?

- Van Ells: When I got discharged I got a lifetime membership in the VFW in Manitowoc.
- Mark: Why did you decide to do that?
- Van Ells: Well I guess they signed up all veterans, the VFW did.
- Mark: Now there are membership dues you know.
- Van Ells: Yeah, but there weren't then.
- Mark: Oh is that right?
- Van Ells: But there is now. I don't belong to the VFW at this time.
- Mark: I see.
- Van Ells: But then while I was in Connecticut I was Vice-Commander of the American Legion there.
- Mark: Oh is that right? I was going to ask if you were active in these organizations. Obviously you were.
- Van Ells: Yeah. I was pretty active, yes.
- Mark: What made the groups attractive to you? I mean what made you want to get involved?
- Van Ells: The people. It was the people. You know you meet a lot of people and American Legion has always been a good organization.
- Mark: Socializing and that kind of thing?
- Van Ells: Yes, it was a real good social program and community work. I was a Justice of the Peace for eight years there, I was on the Conservation Commission. I was in charge of a lot of political activities.
- Mark: This was all in Hartford?
- Van Ells: This was all in Connecticut, yes.
- Mark: Did you ever go to any reunions or anything like that?
- Van Ells: No, I haven't. You mean Marine Corps reunions or anything? No.

Mark: Okay. On some informal basis have you been in contact with the people that you knew in the service?

Van Ells: No. Only that one time.

Mark: Well, you've exhausted my questions. We've gone through my standard questionnaire here. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Van Ells: No, I think that covered it pretty much Mark. Anything you think you overlooked?

Mark: Not that I can think of.