

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
William "Bo" Ryan
Military Police Officer, U.S. Army
2007

OH
1107

OH
1107

Ryan, William “Bo”, (1947-). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 41 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 41 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract

William “Bo” Ryan, a Chester, Pennsylvania native, describes his stateside experience as a military police officer in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Born in 1947, Ryan relates growing up always knowing the possibility of military service as his father received a Bronze Star in World War II veteran and his uncle was an Army Ranger in the Korean War. Ryan details how prevalent the Cold War was; relating a story of a neighbor who built a fallout shelter. After graduating high school in 1965, Ryan describes attending Wilkes University. While there he strived for good grades in order to avoid being drafted out of college and because he would be the first in his family to obtain a four year degree. Upon graduation in 1969, Ryan describes obtaining a high-paying job with ARCO only to be drafted several weeks later. Ryan recounts that he took his draft in stride; trying to make the best of the situation. Ryan explains completing basic training at Fort Bragg (North Carolina) where he achieved the highest PT test scores and becoming a platoon guide. Ryan describes several ways to evade military service; such as eating peanut butter to affect blood pressure. He also mentions playing basketball at night with special operative members after most in his platoon had gone to sleep. After completing basic training, Ryan was assigned to the military police at Fort Gordon (Georgia) where he attended Advanced Individual Training and won a pistol as the top graduate of his class. Ryan tells that he was assigned to work with prisoners as a correctional specialist to provide counseling and perform guard duties. He tells of transporting some “bad characters” to prison at Fort Leavenworth (Kansas) via commercial airline. Ryan describes Army prisoners; saying some had done tours in Vietnam, but that most went AWOL or deserted before they went over. He claims the biggest reason for desertion was their perception that their wife or girlfriend was cheating on them. He speaks to the time as “trying to be a kinder, gentler Army;” in that somebody who went AWOL or deserted a little bit could still serve and receive an honorable discharge if they completed their assigned duty while in prison. Ryan addresses going to town to take care of the drunks who were “over served.” He speaks of being on alert on “the day the eagle dropped”(payday) and several encounters he had with the neck of a broken beer bottle. After completing his service duties, Ryan speaks of his decision not to return to ARCO, but to go back to school for coaching and teaching. Ryan then tells of using government funding to go back to school and also his use of the GI Loan to purchase a home in Madison, Wisconsin. Ryan describes his experience in the military as positive, as well as feeling that it was his responsibility as an American citizen.

Biographical Sketch

William “Bo” Ryan is the current head coach of the top-ranked University of Wisconsin – Madison Men’s Basketball Team. As head coach he has lead his team to two Big Ten Tournament Championships, three Big Ten Regular Season Championships. He was also the recipient of the Big 10 Coach of the Year award for two consecutive years, the Clair Bee Coach of the Year Award in 2007, and the Jim Phelan National Coach of the Year for the 2007 – 2008 season. He is the author of three books on coaching basketball, and he and his wife, Kelly, are the parents of five children.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2007

Transcribed by Cheryl Hoover, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2008.

Transcript edited by Brooke E. Perry Hoesli, WVM staff, 2008.

Interview Transcript

Jim: September 14, 2007. My name is Jim Kurtz, and I'm interviewing Bo Ryan in his office at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wisconsin. Bo, when and where were you born?

Ryan: I was born in 1947, December 20th, in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Jim: Okay. And where did you grow up?

Ryan: In Chester, a town at that time of about sixty thousand.

Jim: And what part of Pennsylvania is it in?

Ryan: Just outside of south Philadelphia.

Jim: Okay. And when you were growing up there, were World War II veterans and Korean War veterans conspicuous in your community?

Ryan: Pretty much so. My — kind of like a brother to me, was an uncle who lived with us when he wasn't in the service. He was in the Rangers in Korea, and then after he finished his tour of duty in the Rangers during the Korean War he then joined the Air Force. He became — never really figured out what he did in the Air Force, but they came back and interviewed all his elementary teachers. He had top security clearance. Very good with technical things. He made his own TVs; he was pretty sharp. And so that was my — he was actually like my roommate in the house when he would come home. My dad was in World War II in the Navy, has a Bronze Star, was hit by kamikazes and thrown into the ocean and survived on a life raft for 15 days. And I was about 12 when I realized that other people helped in the war. I thought he was the only one.

Jim: (Laughing) So did he talk — did your uncle and your dad talk much about their military experience?

Ryan: My uncle didn't. My dad would talk about — never about the kamikaze planes, never about seeing people die, never — you know, when I read *Flags of Our Fathers* I understand that Bradley never talked about Iwo Jima. Did you read the book?

Jim: Yes.

Ryan: So my dad would talk about what the islands were like, but he never talked about death or gory details, so to speak. But he would talk about the experience about being in the South Pacific, what it was like being

disciplined by being in the Navy, what he learned.

Jim: Was the Cold War evident in your life?

Ryan: Oh, sure, because there was a neighbor who did a bomb shelter. And we didn't laugh at him, we just said, What are you doing that for? Well, the Russians were going to bomb us. We were going to be the only ones surviving. So, yeah, the Cold War was very evident. As a matter of fact, my high school and college coach was delayed by one year coaching in my high school because he went over to Berlin.

Jim: That's the Berlin crisis.

Ryan: (Inaudible)

Jim: When Kennedy gave his inaugural speech, that "Ask not what you can do for your country but what you can do for your country (sic)," did that make any impression on you?

Ryan: Yeah. I thought it was words, and it was said by a person who I really didn't know. You don't get as much information as you do now; there's not a 24-hour news station. What I saw of Kennedy, he seemed like a decent guy. So when he made the statement, it's kind of pretty much the way I was raised. I ended up becoming president of my class and had to give a speech. I didn't use that quote, but I basically said, you know, I'm here to help serve you at the school. Don't worry so much about what the school can do for you but how can you make the school better, but I didn't give it that way. So, to me, it just made sense, a believer being somebody who's saying how can you help. And like being a captain of the basketball, football, baseball team, I just don't (inaudible). It ain't the coach (inaudible) if you strike out. Let's not blame the coach. Let's see what we can do to get better to be a better team. So that's how I was raised. So Kennedy's speech to me was typical conversation.

Jim: It fit into with your context of your life.

Ryan: Absolutely.

Jim: When you were growing up, did you have an expectation that you may have to go into the military?

Ryan: Sure. It seemed like that was always a possibility, because as you're going through high school and then into college, the draft is on in '65, and that's when I graduated from high school.

Jim: Okay. So you graduated from high school in '65 in Chester, right?

Ryan: Chester.

Jim: So did you go on to college then?

Ryan: Yes.

Jim: Where did you go?

Ryan: Wilkes University.

Jim: Whereabouts is that?

Ryan: Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Jim: Okay.

Ryan: Coal mining region.

Jim: And did they have ROTC there?

Ryan: They did not have it on our campus.

Jim: Okay.

Ryan: And if they did, it was — no one I knew was in ROTC.

Jim: Okay.

Ryan: I don't think we had because it was a private — small, private college.

Jim: Okay.

Ryan: But there was an armory there. There was — because I played ball in it. The Wilkes-Barre Bears semipro team played out of there and I practiced a bit with them. But I don't think we had — no. We didn't have any.

Jim: Was there much discussion about the war when you were in college?

Ryan: Sure. That was '65 to '69. Spoke about it all the time, Vietnam. It was — we had protesters on campus. We had confrontations.

Jim: What was your feeling towards the protesters?

- Ryan: Well, I've always been a believer that everybody has their opinion, and as long as they weren't — as long as people making the statements aren't interfering with other people's rights, you know, I think that's what our ancestors fought for. Agree to disagree. But, you know, I was so busy with sports and school activities. It would be discussed in classes, but as far as taking my energies and going out one way or the other, that wasn't even something that people that I kind of hung around with would do. I mean, we'd talk about it, and, of course, you know, the big thing during that year was make sure you get good enough grades so you don't —
- Jim: To stay in school.
- Ryan: So you don't get drafted. I mean, come on. You'd be lying if you didn't say it, because you wanted to get a college degree. Because I was the first Ryan to go to college. And I thought if I let my parents and relatives down, then, you know. It wasn't so much I got grades to stay out of the draft. I got grades because I wanted to get a degree, because I was kind of like the one that had the chance.
- Jim: Got you. I assume, then, if you went in in '65, you graduated in '69; is that accurate?
- Ryan: Yes, I did.
- Jim: Were you drafted, or what happened?
- Ryan: 1969 I graduated and was offered a job that summer, for which I kind of knew I was getting, at ARCO (inaudible). I was an economics and marketing major. So I had a really good job. And then I was on the job two weeks, maybe three weeks, got my draft notice and —
- Jim: What was your reaction when you got drafted?
- Ryan: Must be my turn. It's okay, you know. See, here's what I did. If I'm drafted, then make the most of the experience. Do the best you can, because other people before you have done it, have gone through the experience, and you contribute. Team player.
- Jim: I assume, given your family background, that that's the way your parents felt about it too; is that accurate?
- Ryan: Oh, yeah. That's the thing to do. So I just made the best of it.
- Jim: Where did you go to basic training?

- Ryan: Fort Bragg.
- Jim: And is there anything that stands out about your basic training experience?
- Ryan: I got the highest scores in the PT test. Just made sure that there was something to compete in, you know, the rifle, the expert marksmanship thing, whatever it was. Being a competitive guy, I just wanted to be the best. I was a platoon guide. That's one of the stories that I'll tell you off the record —
- Jim: Okay. We'll turn the tape off.
- Ryan: — how I got to be the platoon guide. Dwayne Clemens (phonetic) just loves this story.
- Jim: I'll turn the tape off.
You got drafted and you got to be platoon guide, and then what was this group of people that you were, like, with (inaudible)?
- Ryan: Well, let's go back to when I got drafted, because one thing I didn't go over with you. Okay, then we had to go in for the physical. I have never in my life seen so many people try to get out of the Army in different ways. Guys were talking about eating a ton of peanut butter. And I'm like, What would you do that for? Well, because it does something to your blood pressure. I don't know. Guys who were injured, who injured themselves. And they said it to us. They didn't say it to the doctors that were there. There were all types of excuses and notes that people had. You know, I wasn't going to do any of that because that's not the way I was raised. So take the physical. Plus they actually were a little nervous because my sitting pulse was in the 40s. And what they finally realized is if you're an athlete, if you've done a lot of running and you're in good shape, okay, so your sitting pulse is very low. So, anyhow, we go in and we take the train ride, and that's when we got off and got on the bus. Now, here's something else that I did. I kept a pair of basketball Chuck Taylor shoes, a T-shirt, a jock, a pair of shorts, and a pair of socks in a cellophane bag that I hid underneath the barracks in Fort Bragg.
- Jim: Why did you do that?
- Ryan: Because we would come back and finish our training. I would go underneath the barracks, pull this bag out, go down to the gym, and play an hour or two of basketball. That's how much energy I had. I was a — I was kind of a "go, go, go" guy. So I would go down, and I ended up playing with some guys I knew in college. It was kind of like the place to meet. And, meanwhile, all my bunkmates, they're all sleeping. And I would go down there with the special services guys, and one of them was a former

high school player. So, anyhow, I would do that in basic training. Still do the runs and do all the other stuff. But what happened was we ended up having a couple stragglers, and you're expected to get the stragglers through. So I would carry their backpack, their steel pot, things that would keep a guy on a five-mile march or whatever it was from completing it. I guess one of the reasons was my bunkmate was another Ryan from Ohio, terribly overweight. He struggled, so I helped him. It just seemed like the thing you're supposed to do. So, anyhow, by being platoon guide and making sure that everybody completed everything. And, you know, what was really neat was we had all these contests, and they compared scores and took PT tests and everything else. Our platoon won.

Jim: Was your platoon pretty diverse, or were they all college graduates?

Ryan: No. We had some college grads, some college people who flunked out, college people who just quit at that age. And we had a lot of 18-year-olds that were just really — a lot of them would drop out of high school. There were some who were told the Army or jail and they chose the Army because that's the kind of diversity you had at that time. So we had some hardheads in our group, not just that were high school dropouts or college dropouts or anything else. We just had some guys who kind of looked at it like, Why me? Why did I have to get drafted? And I kept trying to tell the guys, Wait a minute. We're here. Why not make the best of it? So shine your shoes a little better, get your display — what do you call it?

Jim: Foot locker.

Ryan: Foot locker. Get your foot locker up to snuff, because the nice part about being in Augusta and in Fort Bragg and then later in AIT was in AIT (inaudible) your foot locker you'd get three days from (inaudible) from Augusta to Atlanta. In Fort Bragg, at least it got you some time off, as long as everybody had their foot lockers, their shoes polished, their boots shined.

Jim: Did they try to persuade you to go to OCS?

Ryan: Oh, they brought me into a room, and, basically, it wasn't exactly fair, the way they did it. They would say, You're a college grad. These are your test scores. This is what you need. I said, Well, that's fine, but what does it mean? Well, obviously, if we're going to put the time and effort and resources into training you as an officer, we're going to need more time. And I said, You know what? I'm going to do my two years. Thanks, but no thanks. And the gentleman wasn't very happy. I don't know whether he was trained to be that way or he was just feeling I was missing the boat by not being an officer. I don't know which. I didn't try to read too much into it at the time, but I do remember they were trying to be overly persuasive to

get me to be an officer.

Jim: I had exactly the same experience. As a lawyer, first lieutenant, they wanted me to go in JAG, and they wanted eight years. And I told them I was obligated for my two years and I was very happy to do the two years wherever they wanted.

Ryan: I didn't try to start an argument or anything. I just said, I'm going to do my two years and give you the best I have.

Jim: Was there any pressure to become an NCO? They were doing "Shake and Bake NCOs" then.

Ryan: I became one.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Ryan: I was — within a very short period of time I became an E5. And, I'll tell you; that's coming up.

Jim: Okay. Is there anything more in basic training that we haven't covered?

Ryan: No. But I can remember we — running that mile in the — we had to do it under six, and I got under five. I mean, it was boots and it was — the goal was to get under five.

Jim: As competitive as you say you are, which I believe, was there any thought of going to jump school or special forces?

Ryan: Did Dwayne tell you that?

Jim: No.

Ryan: Well, we were right there at Bragg, and I seen the guys practicing on that —

Jim: — tower?

Ryan: — the tower thing. I'm like — so I checked it out. You know what they said? We're not going to train you on this unless you give us another two years. It was the same thing as OCS. Absolutely. About four of us. We go — we went to the commanding officer and then we go, Hey, we see these guys doing that thing and that looks kind of exciting and we'd seen guys jump out of planes. Of course, at Fort Bragg you've got the 101st there.

Jim: 82nd.

Ryan: 82nd. So, okay, boys. He goes, Okay, boys. You've got two more years and we'll train you. We'll give you all the jumps you want.

Jim: (Laughing)

Ryan: Okay. Thanks, but no thanks. All right. So, anyhow, did I think about that? Yes, we did.

Jim: Okay.

Ryan: And then, no.

Jim: AIT.

Ryan: So here is — Dwayne loved this story too.

Jim: Okay. Leave the machine on (laughing)?

Ryan: This one's okay. So we're standing in formation; you know how they do it. They'll say, Okay, now, for the following assignments, then they give the MOS, you know, tell you where you're going. And a lot of these guys (inaudible). And I'm thinking they'll probably send me infantry. Why would they say — just because I was a college grad I wasn't expecting anything. So they go, all right, the following, and they read off, like, four names, 95 Charlie, Fort Gordon, Georgia. Okay. The guy behind me goes, Hey, Bo, my brother was in 95 Charlie. He's a cook. I've never cooked anything in my life. Cans of soup maybe, a grilled cheese. I'm like, Wait a minute. Cooks are up at two in the morning. They're — or three, whatever it is. And I'm like why would they take two years of a person who — I thought I could give them — not that being a cook isn't anything, but it just wasn't me. So then finally — so I'm thinking this whole time while they're reading off the rest of the MOSs that I'm going to be a cook. So finally we get to our group, and now we're going to get on the buses to where we're going. It turns out, okay, military police so —

Jim: That's great.

Ryan: — assigned to 140 or go to AIT, which is at Fort Gordon. But very few guys get to stay and be assigned to Fort Gordon. Well, here's what happened. I ended up again being the top graduate; won the pistol. I never fired a gun, a weapon, anything, before I got in the Army. Never. And the guy says, Well, that's why we can train you, because you don't have any bad habits.

Jim: That's right.

Ryan: And you've got eye-hand coordination. So, okay. So I do the pistol thing, got the plaque thing, which is kind of neat. Guys rib me about it nowadays. This commanding officer, I get to drive — if you're the top graduate in AIT in military police school, you get to drive the commander around for a day of the base. So I'm driving him around and we're talking and they end up starting — I don't know if you remember this — a correctional specialist school to work with prisoners. Do you remember when they started that in the '60s, late '60s?

Jim: No.

Ryan: Well, he says — you know, he ends up assigning me. I get assigned to go to this school, and it's working with prisoners and now to, you know, get them to — not just doing what they're supposed to do when they're in prison but to try to, you know, encourage them to get back to active duty. A lot of them were deserters or AWOLs in the stockade. So it ends up after AIT I get assigned to the 140 as kind of a correctional specialist, guard commander, part counselor. It was working with prisoners and being in charge of the guard assignments. And that's what I ended up doing.

Jim: Where did the other MPs get assigned to?

Ryan: Some to 'Nam, some to other — well, all the MPs came to Gordon (inaudible), so they went everywhere. There was only a few of us that ended up staying right at —

Jim: They were saying to me that it would be fair to say you sold yourself to the commander when you told him he could use you.

Ryan: You know, we hit it off. And it's kind of like, Well, what do you think of this town, or, What do you think of it down here? And I said, I like it. But here's what happened. I was playing some more basketball when I was in AIT. And I get assigned there, and this guy who was running in the special services was like, You're our point guard (inaudible). He says, I'm going to get you TDY. You're going to play ball for us. You're going to travel with us. Because they made me an E5 for this school and — what did you call it? An Acting Jack was the term.

Jim: Shake and Bake.

Ryan: Shake and Bake, yeah. It was Acting Jack first, but then because there was some contention about being an E5 but not getting the quarters pay and the clothing and all that, finally then they made me an E5. So then I moved off

base; got a place in town.

Jim: Did you end up playing basketball down there?

Ryan: Here's what happened. So they tried to get me TDY. The commander said no. He wouldn't let me do it. The only TDY I did was I took some prisoners to Fort Leavenworth that had a year or more sentence. Anybody who was sentenced to a year or more and they needed to be transported, I got to take 'em. There was some bad characters. So I got a chance to make a few of those trips.

Jim: How did you take them there?

Ryan: By plane. I had a .45 on me. Gave the .45 to the pilot, and flew commercial.

Jim: Were these guys cuffed?

Ryan: They were cuffed but, you know, in the plane we took the cuffs off and then put the cuffs on again when it landed.

Jim: What was the reaction of the people on the plane, or didn't they realize what was going on?

Ryan: You know what? People didn't say — I tried to be — I never tried to make it look like — I had a little talk with the guys that I took out and basically told them, you know, the reason I've got you is because, you know, something like, I'm the guy who could nail you, you know.

Jim: So you can be pretty persuasive.

Ryan: You know, I kind of said, But you know what? I don't want to have to do that. Just do yourself a favor. Let's just get there. Let's take care of business and everything will be fine. It was just — I didn't do it by intimidating. I just said, Look. I'm not that big a guy. This one guy I took was pretty big, but they sent me for a reason. Of course, I told that guy I'm a little crazy.

Jim: (Laughing)

Ryan: Said I'm a little crazy and I'm the best shot.

Jim: That's all very persuasive. What were your other duties as an MP down in Fort Gordon?

Ryan: We would do like — we would check the towers, have our guys, you know, the guys that — the specialist 4th class, the private, the people who were assigned to us. You know how you get assigned to stockade duty. Sometimes you're on leave — you're on — in between stations or, what was it, in between — and, okay, go and serve guard duty for a hundred days, for 120 days, whatever. So we had to get all these guys to understand what their duties were, how to treat the prisoners, what they can and can't do. And, you know, again, trying to be a kinder, gentler Army, in that just because somebody went AWOL or somebody deserted a little bit along the way, they still got duty they can do. They can end up with an honorable discharge if they do this, this, and this. So that was part of what we were doing when we would get the guards — because it constantly changed who you were getting in. And we would talk to the doctors about medication. They got a lot of lithium and a lot of Valium. I know that there was a lot of that prescribed.

Jim: Sure.

Ryan: To a lot of the — and they were the maximum security and the minimum.

Jim: Were many of these prisoners Vietnam veterans?

Ryan: They had been over there. Some of them had done tours. But most of them it was before they went over, okay? Went home. And do you know how many guys told me that the reason they went AWOL was somebody was fooling around with their wives or their girlfriends? And you know what? Every guy thought that that was a legitimate reason to go AWOL.

Jim: (Inaudible)

Ryan: I mean, yeah. And it was, Sarge, Sarge, come on. You'd do the same, wouldn't you, somebody was doing that, you know? Okay, well, here's the thing. If you don't finish this, it's going to be on your record for the rest of your life. It could keep you from getting a job; it could keep you from getting benefits.

Jim: Sure. Was there much discussion about the Vietnam War in the time you were down in Fort Gordon?

Ryan: Oh, sure. Talked about it all the time. Obviously, you're around the news, you're around — you know, it would — people obviously were like, Why are we doing this? What's going on? It was confusing, yet, the thing is, you're committed to that time. You do it. If I'd been over there, I would have been more knowledgeable. But the fact that I was never sent there, I never felt like it was something in my life that where there was a void. (Inaudible) Obviously, I lost high school and college classmates,

teammates to the war. Guys that I knew — got to know while I was in the Army went over. And we would — there was some letter writing going on. I got letters back that said, Sorry, but Private Such and Such was killed in action.

Jim: I've got to turn the tape over.
The Vietnam War, did you ever have duty where you had to go into town to take care of the drunks?

Ryan: Okay, here we go. The day we always hated, every military policeman hated the day the eagle — you remember the expression, but I don't want to use that — the day the eagle dropped, which is pay day, and we were always on alert. And, yes, probably in the 15 months I was in Augusta, twice we had to go down — well, I had to go because, well, being assigned to the stockade, we would just — we were not backups, so to speak, but we were on alert in case they needed (inaudible). So, yeah, there were a couple times.

Jim: Anything outstanding, or just like Saturday night drunks anywhere?

Ryan: You know, if I said that I was around rowdy people when they had been drinking, people would say, Well, his last name's Ryan so he's probably used to it, so I'm not going to go there. I don't want to stereotype. But have I been around people who have been overserved? Yes. And there's ways to cool the atmosphere. There are ways to get things done, not just by swinging a stick. So I think in the couple times that I went down I'd like to be able to say I prevented things from escalating when the guys I went in with and said, Okay, you know, divide and conquer. If you see who the combatants are, if you see if there are certain ways you can divide the people up and get them out. Disarm somebody if they're using some kind of weapon, which is what they trained us to do in military police school. So, yeah, there was. But I never had a gun pointed at me or anything like that. But some bottles, some broken — the guys would — you know, when you're confronted with a guy with a beer neck, the neck of the beer bottle with the glass sticking out, now, that's scary.

Jim: Yeah. It gets your attention.

Ryan: It does. And, fortunately, most of the time those people don't have the coordination you do because of the condition that they're in. So, yeah, I had to get involved in a couple of those. Not because I was a guy looking to.

Jim: Were you treated differently because you were a college graduate, do you believe, in any way?

- Ryan: You know what? I seriously doubt that I was because of one thing: everything that — there wasn't one guy that was going to outwork me. There wasn't one guy that was gonna — just don't take shortcuts. If you're going to (inaudible) the people — you know, the college guys that were kind of picked on by the noncollege guys were the lazy college guys, the guys who were always trying to take shortcuts, guys that always thought they were smarter than everybody else, guys that thought, you know, they didn't have to do what everybody else had to do. Those are the only guys that I was in the Army with that ever got ridiculed and a hard time. But, you know, if you just do your job, pull your weight, all those expressions that are used a lot of times in athletics, that's what I mean. I had an advantage; I had the background. Not just my parents, but also athletic training where teamwork was extremely important.
- Jim: How would you assess how your military experience affected your life afterwards?
- Ryan: Probably sharpened my leadership skills, which I was fortunate enough to — I don't know how you get to be a captain. I don't know how you get to be president of your class. I never asked. It's obviously the way you're brought up, how you feel about being involved with things, not taking a back seat. So the Army just solidified — it reinforced everything else. So then when I got out I was supposed to — I had my job back with ARCO. I turned that down, and Nixon gave an early out. So I went back to school to become a coach and a teacher because I missed athletics. I'd been away from it for a couple of years because I wasn't allowed to play on that team, the base team. And I decided to coach and teach.
- Jim: Do you think that the desire to coach and teach was in part the experience you had with this correctional program you were teaching?
- Ryan: Not just correctional but also the younger guys that you're in the Army and you can see that they need some guidance. Being a teacher and coach, you can do those types of things. I don't mind helping people. And, certainly didn't go into teaching because — the job I had with ARCO paid five times as much as when I started out in college coaching. I started in junior high school for four grand, and by that time, if I was still with ARCO, I'd be making twenty grand. So it definitely wasn't for the money. So when I got out I took student teaching and I took a lot of history classes. I'm a history buff. So I ended up getting my certification and I taught history.
- Jim: What's your area of history that you really like?
- Ryan: Well, it probably goes in streaks, really, you know, but mostly Civil War, pre-Civil War, post-Civil War. It isn't so much the battles that intrigue me. More so in World War II it was the battles, how different things were

changed as a result of this skirmish here. World War II, I thought that that was more interesting than, say, the Civil War, but government and leadership and why the States were divided, how it was handled afterwards, the good and bad. But, anyhow, but I also taught world cultures. I also — ancient history is something I read about a lot. So I ended up teaching world cultures, comparative political systems. I had the top students in the high school when I ended up coaching and teaching high school. But I got into it because partially military environment of being in a position to help other people and also seeing the importance of teamwork. So coaching obviously was important to me.

Jim: What year did you come to Wisconsin?

Ryan: '76.

Jim: '76. And the war was over at that point. Did you have any impression about the atmosphere in Madison about their attitude (inaudible)?

Ryan: '76 it was mostly — when I was recruiting there was some parents that asked and, you know, brief discussions. But by that time, '76/'77 season, not a lot. Just that Madison was known as a liberal campus.

Jim: When you were here on your first stint as an assistant coach, did you have any players who were in ROTC?

Ryan: No. But I had a player in high school who had joined the Navy and was supposed to go to meetings. And they came to a game and picked him up. Shore patrol came and took him off the court. Everybody was like, What the heck's going on? Because I guess at 18 you could do it. And he joined this naval — I don't know if it was RO — I don't know what it was called. It was called something. And his nickname became "Smooth Sailing." We called him Smooth Sailing.

Jim: (Laughing.) Neat. Smooth Sailing.

Ryan: Curtis Canyon (phonetic). I'll never forget that. But when I was coaching, you're saying, did I have anybody that was —

Jim: Yeah.

Ryan: No.

Jim: And I assume that's the case now too; is that accurate?

Ryan: Yeah. No, I don't have —

- Jim: Does military ever come up in your recruiting?
- Ryan: Come up as far as?
- Jim: As far as, you know, that you've got some military.
- Ryan: Well, yeah, I do. I've got Trevon Hughes from St. John's Military Academy. Yeah. He went through the whole academy from 8th grade on.
- Jim: But, I mean, do parents ever ask about that or your background on this?
- Ryan: Yeah. Because a lot of the parents — not so much now. The parents are really younger than me. For a while there a lot of the parents were the same age, obviously.
- Jim: Has a way of happening, doesn't it.
- Ryan: Yeah. So — but some stories that have been run when you're in Wisconsin, nationally there are things mentioned about me being in the service. So there are people that would ask what did you do or where were you, where were you stationed? So it's come up. Simply because — well, different in Platteville. Platteville, nobody knows you. Madison, you know, the coverage we get now with the Internet and the whole thing, I mean, it's very hard for me to go somewhere and have somebody not know that you coach in Wisconsin.
- Jim: Right. Is there anything you'd like to say about your Platteville experience in light of what we've talked about?
- Ryan: No. I think, well, the Platteville experience, again, is an extension of me being able to assimilate into a community of something I'd never experienced before. What do I mean about that? It's a rural town in a rural area, and I went down there and —
- Jim: It's not exactly Philadelphia, is it?
- Ryan: No. So I've lived in different places, but I still think the athletic experience is the Army experience and all the leadership traits that you get a chance to develop during that time and your understanding the people and accepting differences and diverse backgrounds. If you look at my background with my high school team, basically I was the only white player on the team. I was in a school that was primarily — where the majority was black. I didn't know at the time that there was a difference. We just went to school together; we played together. We worked together. And then you know, the Army, that's obviously a very diverse group. And then in coaching, you have different players. So I just think I'm one of those lucky guys that's had

a chance to experience some things as a result of simply wanting to keep taking on challenges and not just going with the flow, you know. I just don't — I never see myself as somebody who's a follower that could just sit back. I don't know if it's just me. You don't seem like you're that type of guy. You're obviously doing something that's unique. So what is it in our personalities that calls us to do that?

Jim: I don't know.

Ryan: I don't know, either. But I've got to follow my vision, just like you're doing.

Jim: Well, we've talked about a lot of things. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to cover?

Ryan: No. I got my first house in Madison, Wisconsin only, only because of the GI loan. I didn't put a penny down. Bought a house for \$42,000 on the corner of Tokay and Segoe, that little yellow house that sits there.

Jim: I know where it is.

Ryan: It's still there. They put a little addition on it, though. Well, my wife and I looked at each other like we hadn't met, you know, at first. We've got to get a house, don't we? This is 1976. Well, what are we going to buy it with? I said, Well, I've got the GI loan. I mean, I can get that. So we did. (Inaudible) But that was — oh, and also — well, the other thing is, when Nixon gave those early outs, needless to say, I was getting money from the government to go back to school.

Jim: Sure.

Ryan: So I took advantage of what you put in you can also take out. So we took advantage — or I did, of getting that paid for.

Jim: Have you ever had any of your players ask you about going in the military or anything like that?

Ryan: Well, yeah. I think some guys, once they find out. It's not like you go out there and tell everybody. It's not like I'm in uniform, but I never felt — I never felt in '71 when I went back to Chester that in any way I was treated any differently because I had been in the service. Not in that area. I'm sure in some of your interviews you might be told some other things but — because, number one, I wasn't worried. It didn't matter, because I was going to do my thing anyhow. And with me it's always about what's going to happen next, not dwelling on anything in the past, other than to learn from it. And I just — I did my two years; felt it was part of my

responsibility of being an American citizen.

Jim: Well, I think that's a good point to stop on.