

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RUBEN BAUMANN
Transportation Company Clerk, Army, Korean War
2003

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Baumann, Ruben (1929-2013). Oral History Interview, 2003.

Approximate length: 34 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Ruben Baumann, a native of Port Washington, Wisconsin, discusses his Army service as a company clerk with the 117th Transportation Company stationed at Fort Eustis in Virginia from 1951 to 1953. During the Korean War “T-port” moved more than three million soldiers and seven million tons of supplies. Baumann had earlier enlisted in the Navy Reserve, while a junior in high school, with a history of military service in the family. Graduated from high school in 1948, and married in 1950, he was drafted in 1951. The newly wed Baumann opted for the Army because the enlistment period would be shorter. He describes his basic training done at Fort Eustis as being “very easy,” ascribing this to the initiation of Fort Eustis for this purpose. Schooled in cargo trucking, he yet volunteered to become clerk typist. His wife pregnant, he accepted an offer to be the company clerk. Baumann states that in this role he helped choose the men who would be sent to Korea, as well as help those who needed hardship discharges. He talks about the make-up of occupation troops returning from Japan, who constituted a “hold-back company” of which he also was a member. Living with his wife off-post, in Newport News, Virginia, made military “almost like civilian life.” Baumann credits his army experience with giving him a greater patriotism. He is active in Saukville, Wisconsin’s American Legion Post 470.

Biographical Sketch:

Baumann (1929-2013) served in the US Army’s 117th Transportation Company at Fort Eustis, Virginia, from 1951 to 1953 during the Korean War. Schooled in cargo trucking, he yet volunteered to become clerk typist. Military service completed, he worked as a machinist at Mercury Marine and as foreman for Schwengel Manufacturing in Grafton, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Vicki Schanen, 2003.

Transcribed by Colin Robinson, 2013.

Abstract by Jeff Javid, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

Schanen: And you're allowed to swear.

Baumann: No, no I won't do that.

Schanen: Ok. I am here on March 8—

Baumann: Ninth. Seventh.

Schanen: March 7, 2003, and this is an interview with Ruben Baumann who served with the—what was your branch of service?

Baumann: The Army.

Schanen: Army.

Baumann: Yup.

Schanen: What unit?

Baumann: I was in the 117th T-port Company.

Mrs. B: Transportation Company.

Baumann: Transportation.

Schanen: Ok.

Baumann: In Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Schanen: Ok. And what years did you serve?

Baumann: 1951 to 1953.

Schanen: And did you stay in the States?

Baumann: That was my only—[laughs] camp.

Schanen: Ok, good, that's good.

Baumann: The only camp.

Schanen: This is conducted at Mr. and Mrs. Baumann's home at the following address—what's your address?

Baumann: [REDACTED]

Schanen: And Mrs. Baumann is with the interview too, so what is your first name?

Mrs. B: Doris.

Schanen: Doris Baumann.

Schanen: Ok. So, just briefly, and I'm asking you this for the tape, when these go to the museum, a hundred years down the road, somebody can either come in and say "Do you have anything on Ruben Baumann?" or they can say "Do you have anything on veterans from such and such town?" so we need a little background. So, what is your hometown?

Baumann: Now, or—?

Schanen: No, where were you born?

Baumann: I was born in Port Washington.

Schanen: Oh, so you're local then?

Baumann: Yes.

Schanen: Ok, good.

Baumann: I went to school in Port Washington [Wisconsin], all my life.

Schanen: Alright.

Baumann: I graduated in 1948, and was married in 1950.

Schanen: Alright. Now, was there a history of military service in your family or were you the first one?

Baumann: No, my father was drafted in the First World War; I had one brother in the Second World War, and two brothers in the Korean War.

Schanen: Wow. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Baumann: I had five brothers and two sisters. Four brothers and two sisters. I'm the fifth son.

Schanen: Ok, good. So were you drafted? Did you enlist?

Baumann: No, I was drafted.

Schanen: Now, you were drafted in 1951? Or 1950?

Baumann: 1951.

Schanen: Ok. So, was this a surprise to you?

Baumann: Yes. [Both laugh]

Mrs. B: Not really, we knew it was going to happen eventually.

Baumann: No, I didn't. I enlisted in the Navy Reserve as a junior in high school, inactive Navy.

Schanen: Ok. And why did you do that?

Baumann: Sort of, if I had to go in, I had to go in the Navy.

Schanen: Ok.

Baumann: That's why we got married when we did, in November '51.

Mrs. B: '50.

Baumann: Oh, '50. We got married in November '50.

Schanen: We've been married eleven years and my husband was talking to someone at a wedding reception and he got the year wrong. And I just let him keep talking and then when the person went on, I said "Well, that's good, because we've been married eleven, not ten." Ok, so when you enlisted in the Navy Reserves, was that for a period of time? Because you ended up in the Army. How did that work out?

Baumann: That I don't remember. I think I enlisted for so many years but I never had to go for drills or anything.

Schanen: Oh, wow. Was that common? Did your other classmates do that or were you the--?

Baumann: There were quite a few in the class that did this, and then when I got my draft notice, I checked with the draft board and they weren't aware of this so they checked it out and they says "Well, in that case, you may join any branch you like."

Schanen: Oh, really?

Baumann: But you have to stay in the prescribed length of time. And the Army was only two years, I'd just been married and that sounded the best of the deal.
[Both laugh]

Schanen: Ok. So you had no interest in the Navy anymore or was it just--?

Baumann: Not at that point anymore. [Both laugh]

Schanen: Well, that's funny.

Baumann: Yeah.

Schanen: Your story reminds me a lot of Steve Shock in that book. He's in the middle of it.

Baumann: Yeah I think so, I remember that.

Schanen: Like a month after he got married he got his draft notice and his wife sat in on the interview and it was really funny. [Both laugh] You know, he had just bought his GTO [Pontiac automobile] or something, he listed off all these things—

Baumann: And he just bought a home, too, didn't he?

Schanen: A home. Bought everything, then he got his draft notice. Oh, go ahead.

Baumann: I was inducted in March 1951, Holy Week.

Schanen: Really?

Baumann: Yup.

Schanen: So you're coming up on your anniversary here. 52?

Baumann: 53.

Mrs. B: 53.

Schanen: Wow.

Baumann: No, 52, because I was in the service.

Mrs. B: Oh, anniversary of the service. Ok.

Schanen: Yeah.

Baumann: Of course, I was inducted in Fort Sheridan [Illinois].

Schanen: Before we get to that part, how was that for you two? Did you cope ok?

Mrs. B: Well, yeah, I was living with my parents at the time so it wasn't at though I was all by myself.

Schanen: Ok. And were you from here?

Mrs. B: Yes, I was born at Port Washington and we went to school together.

Schanen: Sounds like us.

Baumann: From first grade on. Same school, except for four grades, or two grades.

Schanen: Ok, good.

Baumann: We got down to Fort Eustis [Newport News, Virginia] on Holy Saturday.

Schanen: Did you go to Mass?

Baumann: The next day? [Mrs. Baumann laughs] I don't remember.

Schanen: [Laughs] Ok.

Baumann: Of course I took my basic training at Fort Eustis, six weeks.

Schanen: Did you have any expectations of basic training? Was it harder, easier, were you indifferent?

Baumann: It was very easy down there. We used carbine rifles because M-1s weren't available to us at the time. And this was something new for this camp to have basic training, and in our last two weeks of basic training, we finally got M-1s, that were, I think they were the first ones used in World War II, so worn out. [Both laugh]

Schanen: Ok. Now you said you had a choice of what branch you wanted to serve in, did you have a choice of your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty]? Or did you take some sort of test?

Baumann: We just took tests. And well, Fort Eustis was transportation, so you were either a truck driver, a cargo truck driver, or a stevedore. And, ah, I ended up to be, to go to school for steve—for cargo trucking, and when I finished

schooling, sitting in the barracks—a sergeant from personnel came by and asked if anybody knew how to type, and knowing that you should never volunteer, I volunteered, and I ended up in personnel as a clerk typist.

Schanen: And could you type?

Baumann: Yes. [Both laugh]

Schanen: Yes.

Baumann: I had two years in Catholic school.

Schanen: Ok. Did you read Paul Tootis's [?] in there? [Schanen laughs]

Baumann: No. And I stayed in the personnel office for one year, and in the meantime, in October of '51, Doris came down to live with me.

Schanen: Ok. Did you live on-post, off-post?

Baumann: No, we lived off-post. We lived in Newport News, Virginia.

Schanen: Nice area, indifferent?

Baumann: It was a military area—

Mrs. B: A lot of ship building.

Baumann: Yeah, we lived off, about three blocks from the big shipyard; they were laying the keel for the *United States* luxury liner. Then our company got notice, or the whole battalion did, that we were going to go on maneuvers up to Iceland. And, ah—

Mrs B: Was it Iceland or Greenland?

Baumann: Iceland. Greenland is icy. Iceland is green.

Schanen: Green, yeah.

Baumann: They took me out of Personnel because they had enough personnel people and put me in Heavy Equipment.

Schanen: That's a switch.

Baumann: And I learned how to run bulldozers and cranes and, just before I was to ship out, they called me out at ranks, which scared the bejesus out of me, because my wife was pregnant, what was it, about six months? Something

like that. We had our apartment all sub-leased and they called me into the old man, which is the company commander, and he asked me if I would like to stay behind and become company clerk. And I thought for about ten seconds. I said “Yes.” [Laughs]

Schanen: You didn’t want to go to Iceland?

Baumann: Not with my wife expecting.

Schanen: If she wasn’t expecting, would you have wanted to?

Baumann: I think maybe it wouldn’t have been bad to go.

Schanen: Ok. So, when you were personnel clerk the first time, what types of things would you do [inaudible]?

Baumann: We took care of personnel records, took care of anybody that needed hardship discharges or help about their records and all that. There I found out while I was there that being in the Navy Reserve, I could get longevity, all I needed was a discharge, which I got from the 5th Naval District and I ended up with four years longevity, more than I had.

Schanen: But you didn’t do anything.

Baumann: No, I know. I still was in there. I got a pay increase.

Schanen: Ok. Well that worked. Once I sold an idea to a magazine, I didn’t have to do anything and I made 200 dollars. Same basic thing.

Baumann: Yeah, I got a pay increase, I got back pay, plus every month I got a pay increase.

Schanen: Ok, good. So, as company clerk—

Baumann: I took care of morning reports, all the reports going to battalion, letters, and for a short period, I was acting first sergeant but I was a corporal. We lost our first sergeant.

Schanen: Did he die, or did he go somewhere else?

Baumann: No, he was transferred.

Schanen: Ok.

Mrs. B: Just like “Radar” [a character in the *M*A*S*H* movie and television situation comedy], he had Radar’s job.

Schanen: Oh, ok.

Mrs. B: I dressed like “Radar” once for a costume party, in high school. [Mrs. Baumann laughs] Because I had the glasses, and I borrowed some of my dad’s fatigues which were way too big for me anyway, but I won. [Mrs. Baumann laughs]

Schanen: Ok, good. Now, as company clerk, did you work like a 9 to 5 job or were you on call, or how did that work?

Baumann: I worked—

Schanen: A regular shift?

Baumann: A regular shift, and in the evening I went home, and I got all off-post rations and everything.

Schanen: Ok, and did you stay Company Clerk for the rest of your—?

Baumann: For the rest of my career.

Schanen: And your child was born?

Baumann: Our child was born in August of ’52.

Schanen: Go ahead.

Baumann: Oh, I don’t know.

Schanen: Did you stay in Virginia the whole time?

Baumann: I stayed in Virginia, same camp, same—

Schanen: You were fortunate.

Baumann: Same camp, same company. The reason they kept me back as company clerk was called a hold-back company, so anybody that came off of emergency leave or anything from Iceland, they would come back into the company in the States instead of going back out there.

Schanen: Did you unit stay in Iceland the whole time?

Baumann: As far as I know.

Schanen: Really?

Baumann: Yup. I didn't know of anybody that came back from that. But then, what we were getting to make up this hold-back company, they had soldiers coming back from Japan that were the first occupation of Japan, and they ended up to be the cavalry [?] of the unit. Ninety percent of these men had Japanese wives.

Schanen: Oh, really?

Baumann: Yeah.

Schanen: Ok. Now, I have a question about that. Did they stay married?

Baumann: As long as I was with them.

Schanen: Ok, because I remember my husband was in Korea for a year, and his MP company came back and they were stationed in Louisiana and they had warned the company before they went over there that there are a lot of entrepreneurial Korean women who wanted to get back to America and they had a few of those Korean women [?] but they ditched them after awhile.

Baumann: I presume a few of these guys, their wives left them, because we had a supply sergeant, he was very mean and one night he went home and he lived about 30 miles from camp and he saw some chickens and he stopped in and bought two live chickens and got home and told his wife "I want those for supper."

Schanen: Oh, ick.

Baumann: I don't think she stayed with him too long. We were friends of another man, he was a sergeant and he married a girl by the name of Minneko.

Schanen: How do you spell that?

Baumann: How do you spell that? [Laughs]

Schanen: M-I-N-N-E-K-O. Yeah, that'll work.

Mrs. B: Your guess is as good as ours.

Baumann: We found out later on when they got out that they had twin boys.

Schanen: Oh, ok.

Baumann: I have a picture of them, too.

Schanen: Oh, cool. Ok, now in terms of off-time, what did you two, what did you do in your free time?

Mrs. B: Not very much. [Laughs]

Baumann: No, once the baby came. We had friends from the area coming up from North Carolina, and they came up for weekends.

Mrs. B: You mean servicemen.

Baumann: Servicemen.

Mrs. B: Your brother, and, ah, Roger.

Baumann: Roger Baumann.

Schanen: And your brother? Was he stationed down there?

Baumann: He was stationed in North Carolina with the Navy. He went in the Navy.

Schanen: Ok, if your brother went in the Navy, what about your other brother?

Baumann: My oldest brother, he was in the Army Air Corps in World War II.

Schanen: Did he come home?

Baumann: Yes.

Schanen: Ok.

Baumann: He's still living.

Schanen: And what's his name?

Baumann: Bill. And my brother John, he spent a year over in Korea.

Schanen: Army?

Baumann: Army. Well, of course he's gone now. And my brother Tony, younger brother, he was in the Navy at a blimp station.

Schanen: Really?

Baumann: Down in North Carolina.

Mrs. B: That was Norfolk, wasn't it?

Baumann: No, he had to come through Norfolk to come up by us. Norfolk is right on the border.

Mrs. B: You remember all that stuff so good. [Laughs]

Schanen: You know, I think we have somebody that was involved with the blimps in the second book. That kind of rings a bell. Ok, so your brother Tony was in the Navy, now Roger was in the Navy too?

Baumann: Roger was a—He's a cousin.

Mrs. B: That's a cousin.

Schanen: Oh, cousin.

Baumann: He was in the Marine Corps.

Schanen: Ok, so he's in the Marine Corps but he's attached to the Navy?

Baumann: No, he was just in the Marine Corps down at Camp Lejeune.

Schanen: Oh, ok, ok.

Baumann: And he just came up because he had the car and he brought up a couple other classmates of mine.

Schanen: So, with all of you in different services, was there any ribbing that went on between you at all?

Baumann: No, no.

Schanen: No? Ok.

Mrs. B: They were just glad to see each other and to get together in a strange place.

Schanen: Really? Ok.

Baumann: I don't know if I should bring this up--

Schanen: Oh, go ahead! Go ahead.

Mrs. B: No. [Inaudible] ice cream?

Baumann: No, I ain't going to go that far. [Laughs] I had a neighbor, my mother told his mother that I was down in Newport News, and Norfolk is right across the James River from Newport News, and of course he come up to visit us. We were very glad to see him, but he ended up coming up every weekend.

Schanen: Oh, no.

Baumann: He almost came up like clockwork.

Schanen: It sounds like some of my in-laws.

Mrs. B: And we have a limited budget and he came to eat every weekend.

Schanen: Yeah, that sounds like some of my brother-in-laws.

Baumann: [Laughing] He wouldn't bring a thing.

Schanen: We don't have to mention his name.

Baumann: I won't. He's dead now, though. But anyhow, one time I thought "I'm going to try to fool him." I got some ice cream, and we were close to a drug store, and maybe he'll volunteer to buy that. He bought a bag of potato chips and he never offered me one. He said he was saving his money because he was going up to Boston, and he wanted to see all the Boston baseball games. So, eventually we happened to be gone one Saturday, on purpose, and he never came back. One time, with all these other people coming up, he was there, too. And they stayed the whole weekend, and I think it was my cousin and he says "I think we oughta replenish their food" so they went down to the—it happened to be a kosher market—and they bought a bunch of food, and this guy, it almost killed him, but they made him chip in.

Schanen: Yeah, I have a brother-in-law like that.

Baumann: And he was that way all his life.

Schanen: Ok, good. It sounds like you had a pretty uneventful, comfortable experience in the military. Why didn't you stay in?

Baumann: I liked home. The thing I hated most was—because I was in personnel and then Company Operations and that—and I saw these guys get orders, next week they have to be across the country, and I hate moving. I thought "This kind of life I don't want to put on my wife" and my company commander offered me another stripe if I would reenlist, and I told him "Not for the bars on that shoulder." [Laughter] And we had a saying when we first came in, when we were down at Fort Sheridan again, our sergeant

down there said there's one saying that goes: How do you get out of this chicken-shit outfit? [Laughter]

Schanen: I like that. Now, when you were in Virginia, you were there when the Korean conflict started, the Korean War. Were you concerned that you might be shipped over there?

Baumann: Oh, yes.

Schanen: Was that a constant concern?

Baumann: Yeah, it was. What really helped me was I was in personnel and I was the one that helped pick the men that went over. Not that it was a job I enjoyed, but they wanted certain MOSs and you had to take care of this. And they just never ran across my MOS.

Schanen: Kinda nicely buried. [Laughs]

Mrs. B: Our first born was the only one that was born in Virginia, then we had eight more born after that.

Schanen: You had eight, nine children?

Mrs. B: Uh-huh.

Schanen: Oh, wow!

Mrs. B: Otherwise they were all born in Port Washington.

Schanen: Wow!

Baumann: What did Dennis cost?

Mrs. B: Oh, about sixteen dollars hospital fee.

Schanen: That was the one that was born there, Dennis?

Baumann: We had to pay for the food. They wouldn't let us—they could stay in the hospital for nothing, but they had to pay for the food.

Mrs. B: But then I had to wrap bandages while I was in the hospital. [Laughter]

Schanen: They put you to work?

Mrs. B: [Laughing] Yeah. Well, we stayed for five days, so it was a little vacation.

Baumann: There was no—I couldn't get off of duty either. They called me when the baby was born, I could go up and see the wife and the baby, and you can go back to your company now. That was it.

Schanen: Did you find that the military—I'm watching my tape because for some reason my recorder won't shut off, it just stops—did you find that the military was, I'm trying to think of the word, conducive to family life? I mean, were they supportive, were they—I mean, it's a tight budget when you're a family in the military, but were there other services available?

Mrs. B: No, I don't think so. It's just that, like for Thanksgiving, we were invited to—

Baumann: We could go into camp. It would be the first Thanksgiving that we were down there, we went to the 1/16th Port Company to eat, they had a better cook. [Laughter] The cook we had at 1/17th was nicknamed "Gutslinger."

Schanen: What was it?

Baumann: Gutslinger. His name was Gutsinger but we just helped it along a bit. [Laughter]

Schanen: So you came in in 1953—after getting out, did you have to stay in at Ready Reserve or anything like that?

Baumann: We had to stay in Inactive Reserves for, I think, it was seven to eight years.

Schanen: Did they ever call you or check up on you?

Baumann: No.

Schanen: No, ok.

Baumann: That was almost ten years before the Vietnam War came along.

Schanen: So, did you get credit for those seven to eight years of Inactive Reserve? Because that plus your Navy time puts you pretty close to--

Baumann: I wasn't getting any pension or anything.

Schanen: No paid pension, ok. All right. So, was the military experience, are you glad you did it?

Baumann: Oh, yeah.

Schanen: Was it worthwhile? Was it just something that you had to do?

Baumann: No, I think it made me patriotic, more patriotic than I would have been. With living off-post and all that, it was almost like civilian life. I didn't have to pull any guard duties or anything being a company clerk.

Schanen: You were very fortunate.

Baumann: I pulled guard once and I pulled KP once.

Schanen: Ok. And, were you just filling in or was there anybody else?

Baumann: No, I was on the roster, but my crew chief in personnel always got me off; they were doing something—

Schanen: Something important.

Baumann: Very important. [Both laugh]

Schanen: Ok. Good. Now, did any of your children go in the military?

Baumann: Two of them did. I had one son who went to the Air Force Academy; and he just retired.

Mrs. B: As a lieutenant colonel.

Baumann: With a Ph. Degree in Computer Engineering.

Schanen: Ok, and what's his name?

Baumann: James.

Schanen: And where does he—?

Baumann: He lives in Ohio yet. And, then, Jeff.

Mrs. B: He was in the service for ten years. Ten years

Baumann: Ten years, yeah.

Mrs. B: In the Air Force, too.

Schanen: Oh, the Air Force? They both went in the Air Force.

Baumann: Jeff went in because Jim went in the Air Force, [inaudible] was sort of an idol. He stayed in ten years, and then when they downsized the military,

then they released him. And they both, all three of us belong to a post in Saukville, 470.

Schanen: That's good. I always put that at the bottom if somebody tells me that. Ok.

[End of Side A]

Schanen: Ok, so anything else you care to add?

Baumann: Like what?

Schanen: Do you have any favorite stories that you like to tell? Other than that friend that visited every weekend and ate you out of house and home? [Laughter] Did you acquire anything? Sometimes guys brought home some strange stuff. Or did you meet anybody famous?

Baumann: Mm-mm I never went to those USO shows.

Schanen: Oh, wow. Ok.

Baumann: Because I was married, I went home, watched television. We did go visit Williamsburg, we were about thirty miles south of Williamsburg, we visited that once. Well, you never did.

Mrs. B: No.

Baumann: I did before you came down. We have gone down there since.

Schanen: Have you ever gone back to where you were? Have you ever driven through?

Mrs. B: Oh, yes.

Baumann: In the area we did, but we never went back to where we lived or to the camp.

Mrs. B: We drove through, past the sign of Fort Eustis but it just looked so strange and different because when we lived there—

Baumann: All country.

Mrs. B: Yeah, and now it's all built up.

Schanen: Have you kept in touch with anybody you served with?

Baumann: Well, just the people around here. I mean, I went in with people from Mequon, Thiensville, Cedarburg, Port Washington, Grafton, Belgium.

Schanen: Did they serve with you?

Baumann: Some of them stayed a whole year with me. Most of them either were transferred to a different post or went over to Korea. None of them were war casualties.

Schanen: Ok, good. I can turn [tape cuts out then audio returns]

Baumann: The only story I do have is while I was in personnel, we were looking on a case of a Hispanic soldier. He should've never been in the service to begin with, he was short and fat. He was the oldest son and his father was out of the family, I don't know if he passed away or what, but we tried to—for how long to get him a hardship discharge. We never could do it and they shipped him overseas and, later on I found out he was killed on the frontlines.

Schanen: So, as the oldest son, could you get—?

Baumann: We usually could get a hardship discharge but we just never could get that one through.

Schanen: Wow.

Baumann: And then we had another case where we had a shipment going overseas, and we had a lot of people from West Virginia in our company, and of course a lot of these were alcoholics. And this one guy by the names of Jones, we had six Jones in the Company, this guy was very pale, or what would you call him, light-skinned. Just before they were being shipped out, they went to Buckroe Beach [VA] and had a last fling down there, drinking and sunbathing, and he came back like a lobster. There was about four or five of us helped him on the truck because if he couldn't make the shipment, he would've been court-martialed.

Schanen: Oh, wow!

Mrs. B: He was so sunburned.

Baumann: He had ten days to be home, and recuperate.

Schanen: That had to be interesting. Okay, anything else? You'll probably think of something after I leave, which is what happens.

Baumann: Ever since you called me I've been thinking about it.

Schanen: Good, good. It was funny, I'm trying to get all the Saukville ones done right now and everybody has a funeral, Charlie Watkins went to Denver. Ok, I guess we'll postpone Saukville for a week.

Baumann: The funeral, we didn't have to go that today.

Schanen: Oh, you didn't?

Baumann: Just the color guard and the bugler.

Schanen: Oh.

Baumann: [Inaudible] the rifle company.

Schanen: Oh, no!

Baumann: Yeah. I could've went to a funeral this afternoon; a friend of mine was laid out I found out down in Milwaukee though.