

Robert M. Cox Jr. '65
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[ALEXA P.]

SONNENFELD: Okay, so we can go ahead and start the interview. This is Alexa Sonnenfeld talking to Rob Cox. I'm at the Rauner [Special Collections] Library. The day is May 4th [2016], and Rob is joining us from California.

So, Rob, why don't we start at the beginning. Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and the family you grew up with?

COX: Sure. I grew up in a clothing retailer family, with several stores around the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area. I grew up in a small steel town outside of Pittsburgh. Went to public school, public high school, graduated, had to spend a year at Mercersburg Academy as a postgraduate to get into Dartmouth, to improve my SATs [Scholastic Assessment Test scores] and grades, I expect, a little bit, and then, you know, I got into Dartmouth Class of '65.

So my family. Interestingly enough, my mother went two years to college. My father went to Dartmouth and Tuck School of Business] and graduated '31 and '33, respectively—respectfully [sic]. And that's about it.

SONNENFELD: And—okay, let's—let's take that back a little bit. So did you have any siblings, growing up?

COX: Oh, yeah, I have a sister. She went to Colby Junior [College for Women], which is now Colby-Sawyer [College].

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: She's two years younger than I. And then she finished up at [University of] Wisconsin, and she—she lives in Pittsburgh.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: She is—

SONNENFELD: Tell me—tell me a little bit more about life growing up. What are—do you have any kind of earliest memories? What was elementary school like?

COX: I went through—I lived on a borough which was outside of a major city there, outside the steel town, and I went to different schools for first and second grade, and then third through fifth grade to another school, and then eventually we went into the city schools. I—my—I guess I had, you know, a wonderful childhood, a lot of country—out in the country a lot, playing outside a lot. Played a lot of sports early: Little League and then eventually football in high school.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. And how did you like school when you were younger? Were—was it something that held your interest? Were you more interested in sports? Just sort of walk me through some of your elementary school experiences.

COX: You know, I was—I was—I was a big kid, so I—I wasn't that fast, so I could only play, like, [unintelligible]. I played center and—center guard on defense. I played both ways in high school, on the football team. But I loved school.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I pretty much excelled, I would say. But it was natural. I wasn't aware of being—you know, excelling per se.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I—I—I—I really liked it. I got along with everybody, and I liked my teachers. They seemed to like me. I don't know. And—

SONNENFELD: Was it ever challenging? You said—you mentioned that you switched schools a few times, growing up. Was—did that every present a challenge, or was there any sort of transition when you switched to city schools?

COX: No, that was—my school district just had commissioned these different schools—you know, because I lived in sort of an area that was still developing, and it didn't have a school system, so they—they sent us as, you know, first through

twelfth grade to different schools, and eventually, you know, —actually first through nine, and then ten through twelve to the public high school in the city, itself, so—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: No, it was great. I liked—I liked the different schools. You got to meet different kids, you know, ride buses, and that was okay. I—

SONNENFELD: What was sort of the demographic makeup of the other—other kids you were attending school with?

COX: In—in my—the—the demographic was, I would say, very vanilla. It seemed vanilla—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —until I got to high school. And when I went to high school and I—and I played ball, I played ball with everybody—you know, every ethnicity. And we had all the religions were around me, growing up, actually.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So I had—I guess I had knowledge of everything and, you know, attended a few—I'm not Jewish, but I attended some bar mitzvahs and, you know, that kind of thing.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. And was growing up in sort of a multi-religious community—was that ever a point of tension, maybe not for you personally but for the community? Or did—did—did—

COX: No.

SONNENFELD: —people get along pretty well?

COX: No, it was wonderful because everybody recognized that people came from Europe and they worked hard and they worked in the mills, and, you know, people from all—all parts of Europe, mostly Europe.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

- COX: We weren't aware, as I grew up, of any Asian population. However, a lot of—which I don't consider—you know, Jews—Jewish was just a religion. Nobody was from Israel per se. But a lot of workers in the steel mills were from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany. We had Italian, that kind of thing.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. And you—can you tell me a little bit about what your dad did, growing up, and—and what your mom did? What—what was their presence in your life like?
- COX: When—when I was probably 13 years old, my father and my mother divorced. Or, no, they separated. They divorced later. So I—I had—you know, growing up, my—our families were pretty together until I was about 10 or 11 years old, and I guess my father was, you know, running around with his secretary, and—and that was something I wasn't aware of until I was 13. And then—and then I—I stayed in the same home that I grew up in with my mother, and my father moved out.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: So that was that.
- SONNENFELD: Did you continue to see your father after that or—
- COX: Yeah.
- SONNENFELD: No?
- COX: I—I tried—I—I saw him a lot, but only after about a year or two, after he left, because, you know, I was busy with school and I worked in the summers. I worked in a greenhouse nursery, a couple hundred acres in greenhouses, you know, painting buildings and working in the fields, driving tractors in the summertime. I started doing that when I was 10. Also I was a Boy Scout, and I traveled all over the United States and eventually to Europe with the Boy Scouts [of America] and to Canada, in the summers.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And I obtained not Eagle Scout, but I was a Life Scout. I was three merit badges shy of Eagle.

SONNENFELD: Sure. Let's—tell me a little bit more about your experience with the Boy Scouts. What—what was that like, growing up?

COX: That was—

SONNENFELD: And—and what were some of the activities that most captured your attention?

COX: Well, the great thing about the Boy Scouts was—and you don't have any idea—you know, because you—you go to, you know, Scout meetings once a month, and you get together and you do projects, and you help out the community and everything. And then, you know, you're working on your merit badges, and also in—in the summertime you arranged to go to a camp called Camp Aliquippa [now Roaring Run Resort] up in the mountains of Pennsylvania, which was a wonderful camp and camp experience, where you're—you know, you learn to swim and life save and survive in the wilderness and stuff like that.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And you learn—you learn to cook, you know, for yourself out in the wilderness and everything.

SONNENFELD: How about the friends you made through Boy Scouts? Were—were they some of your closest friends, or—or who did you find yourself spending most of your time with, growing up?

COX: The kid across the street, [Thomas] "Tom" Saxer, was my best friend, and Mike, down the street. The Mack family. The father [J. S. Mack] was president of the G.C. Murphy Company and Tom Saxer's father was president of J&L Steel [Jones and Laughlin Steel Company]. And those two—I hung around with them. They were my age. They were exactly my age. Did things with me, but they weren't in Boy Scouts with me.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

- COX: I—I chose Boy Scouts on my own.
- SONNENFELD: Did—did you attend school with the—those two boys that you mentioned?
- COX: Yeah.
- SONNENFELD: Yeah.
- COX: I went all the way through high school with them.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: Yeah. Well, actually, the one went to [The] Kiski [School], he went to prep school. Mike Mack went to prep school.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Let's talk a little bit more about high school. What—what was your favorite subject?
- COX: German.
- SONNENFELD: German. And—and what attracted you to *that*?
- COX: I don't know. I just—I was interested in the language because you learn about the people when you learn about the language, and I had a teacher in high school who was German,—
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: —from Germany, and fortunately it was just a public high school, and I—I just—I recall that, you know, pretty much. I took extra courses in high school so that I took typing. I was the only guy in the typing class, by the way. It was—they have—they offered typing and all these other things. I thought, *Well, I'm gonna have to type papers in college*, so I took a typing course.
- SONNENFELD: So—so you always knew that you wanted to go to college, then.
- COX: Yeah, I think from the time I was four or five, my father drilled Dartmouth into me.

- SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.
- COX: I mean, he talked about—
- SONNENFELD: So when it came—
- COX: Yeah.
- SONNENFELD: Yeah. What—what sorts of things would your dad say about Dartmouth?
- COX: Well, you know, he—you know, he always talked about what he did at Dartmouth and what a wonderful experience it was, and, you know, his—the fact that he went there—he went on to the Tuck School and talked about Harry [R.] Wellman [Class of 1907], who was a professor at Tuck at the time, and how they talked about what he should do in life, and it seemed like a good—you know, a good string to go. I always wanted to leave high school and go to prep school because I realized that my high school wasn't going to get me in. It wasn't probably the finest education. I wanted to go to Mercersburg Academy from the time I was a freshman in high school, but my mother wouldn't let me go.
- SONNENFELD: But you ended up taking some courses after high school, before you came to Dartmouth.
- COX: I—I took a postgraduate year at Mercersburg, and I did quite well,—
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm, mm-hm.
- COX: —just because I forced myself to. In fact, I couldn't play football there, and both the school and I were a little sorry about that. But I was in the All School Octet. [Chuckles.] I loved that.
- SONNENFELD: Okay.
- COX: I was in an a cappella octet group.
- SONNENFELD: Sure. Did—did you sing growing up, or did you just pick that up for your postgrad year?

- COX: No, I sang in—I sang in plays in high school.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: I took piano lessons for ten years, and, you know, we had a piano and organ in our house, and—you know.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: My father was a soloist, so—
- SONNENFELD: So when you were considering kind of your future, you—you had liked German in high school, and it sounded like you were pretty involved in—in a variety of activities. What were you thinking you—you might want to do when—and did you apply anywhere other than Dartmouth, or were you set on the one school?
- COX: No. I always—I read Ayn Rand's, *The Fountainhead*, and I was really close friends with some architects in my town and in Pittsburgh, and I always wanted to grow up and be an architect. I was—I was set on being an architect. And so I knew that Dartmouth offered art and pre-architecture, and then I'd have to go on to architecture school in any case because no school that I knew would put you through quicker, like a five-year program or a six-year program for the whole completion. So I applied to Penn [University of Pennsylvania], Cornell [University], Dartmouth and Penn State [Pennsylvania State University] as a—and Brown [University] as a backup and got into Brown and Dartmouth and certainly Penn State.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: But I just didn't wa- —I could have gone to Penn State out of high school. I just—I wanted to go to Dartmouth or, you know, maybe Brown.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. So talk me through kind of arriving at Dartmouth. Did you have any anxieties? What was it like transitioning from Pennsylvania to New Hampshire?
- COX: Well, the only—the only thing that I missed was, and I guess I was used to having a car, so I didn't have a car my

freshman year. I didn't really miss it that much because I spent a lot of time on campus. You know, I—I really—I thought a lot about George [A.] Plimpton. Do you know who that is?

SONNENFELD: Could you—could you refresh?

COX: Yeah. George Plimpton—I think he just passed. I'm not sure. But George was a—a journalist, a significant journalist in the—you know, just before me, and he tried and did everything. George wanted to play in the NFL [National Football League], so they let him be a quarterback for one game. He—he tried all sports, and I felt I—I could just try and do anything. Dartmouth just availed me of so many things. I was excited about that.

And so the first thing I did when I got there was I rowed. There was a freshman rowing team. And I was too small to play football. I tried out. They had me all ready to play football, but I was too small, so—eventually, I played rugby in my last two years.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And—but I loved the fact that Dartmouth let me try so many things. My two roommates were All American lacrosse and, you know, it was, I thought, quite a school.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. So what was your—what was your freshman year on campus like? You joined the crew team. How—how did that—how did you enjoy that experience?

COX: Well, crew was an early—I'm an early person, so you had to be down there quite early in the morning, so you're up at six, down there at seven. You're on the water 7:15, 7:30, and I loved it. And my first class I think was at nine or something like that. And so I—I liked that.

My freshman year was very hard academically for me. I had—our—our—my freshman teacher was Chauncey [C.] Loomis III [Jr.], was my freshman English teacher, and he helped me a lot. He suggested I get a tutor, so I got a tutor. I used to walk down to the river and go to this woman's

house, and she would tutor me in the evenings, in English and reading and some writing.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So I had a tough—tough time my freshman year. I was—

SONNENFELD: What was challenging about your freshman year?

COX: Well, when I got there, they explained something about our class, the Class of '65. There was some discussion, which I haven't heard too much, and I even asked some of my classmates at my 50th [reunion] when I was there last June, that they—they said that our class was—that they let some well-rounded people in there that weren't just—everybody wasn't just scholars making the numbers, that kind of a thing. Percentage wise, it was greater for the Class of '65 than other things, and so I thought, *Well, I must be one of those experimentals* because I think 50 percent of the incoming class were valedictorians, and I wasn't anywhere near that. And I don't know about the boards, how many had a pair of 800s, but I wasn't anywhere near that.

And—and a lot of them were from prep schools. They had gone—they had prepped a lot at Deerfield [Academy] and [Philips Academy] Andover and [Philips] Exeter [Academy], and I knew I was, you know, behind the eight ball a little bit academically. But—but there were some other kids who were just high school athletes and were there to do it all as best they could. They seemed to be as smart or smarter than me, so I realized that I—

The one—the two things that Dartmouth exclaimed was there's going to be competition in the classroom, and—let's see, competition in the classroom. There were two things, but—I'll remember the other one. But anyway, you know, so I realized [chuckles] that the competition in the classroom was there.

Oh, the other thing was intellectual curiosity. They—they really emphasized intellectual curiosity right away. They just talked about it just straight out, and I thought that that was—those were two things that Dartmouth prided itself on, and if

you'll know—and you might know that Dartmouth, you know, was all male, so—

SONNENFELD: Right.

COX: —that's all we had to do, was study, play ball or whatever.

SONNENFELD: And did you consider yourself intellectually curious, or—

COX: Yeah, I did.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I took—you know, you find yourself niching in intellectual curious. I was more interested in history and architecture and—and how the buildings were used by people and what they did in the 12th, 13th, 14th [centuries] and the Renaissance, things like that, so I would call it intellectual curiosity.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: But it didn't—it didn't bode that well for me with calculus. I wasn't so intellectually curious to—to excel in calculus. [Both chuckle.]

SONNENFELD: Sure.

COX: However.

SONNENFELD: How about—how about socially? How did you find freshman year socially, making friends and so forth?

COX: We had a great dorm. I was in South Mass[achusetts Hall], and South Mass—the dining hall at the time was Thayer [Hall, now Class of 1953 Commons]. I think it's still Thayer. I'm not sure. And I was right next to the dining hall, and—and because of sports and the guys across from me were athletes, but the guy next to me was a star running back on the football team, and he was a junior. I think he was two years older, or maybe he was a sophomore. And—and it was great because, you know, we hung out together a lot and did things sort of as a dorm. And, you know, I didn't compete—we didn't compete intramurally or anything like

that I can recall; I just remember rowing as far as a sport in my freshman year.

SONNENFELD: And what—what did you tend to do with your down time, then, other than—can you—can you give us a few more specifics of how you spent your time, who you were socializing with? How about big weekends, things like that?

COX: Well, we—we weren't aware of—I wasn't aware of the weekend being preponderant— you know, that much different. We weren't going to go anywhere, couldn't go anywhere. There wasn't anywhere to go in your freshman year. That was my opinion, anyway. And I had—I had to study a lot. I really had to study a lot. In fact, my roommate said—said, "Rob, you know were unbelievably neat and tidy," and, you know how [chuckles]—he said, "You know, you had stuff shipped in for our—our room, and it was so great." [Chuckles.] I said, "No. No, no, no, we bought that stuff in Woodstock [New York] on the way and just brought it in," so—

SONNENFELD: [Chuckles.]

And—so I was just thinking about a follow-up question to that. How—how about the events going on in the world? Was that something you were aware of, or was campus talking about?

COX: That's a really good question. I realized—it just—it shocked me personally, as I did everybody, of course, when [President John F.] Kennedy was killed in '63?

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: In 1963, and when I realized that—we—we were isolated, somewhat isolated. I didn't watch television a lot or anything like that or, you know, I probably read a newspaper maybe. I—I enjoyed, you know, finding out about things on campus, and that was always posted on bulletin boards and—you know, communication then—we didn't have cell phones, and if I wanted to communicate with home or anything like that, it was with a wall phone with coins in the—downstairs or something.

- SONNENFELD: So it was world events or national events—were they something that were really discussed on campus, or—or not so much?
- COX: No, not so much, no.
- SONNENFELD: No. Mm-hm.
- COX: No.
- SONNENFELD: Sure.
- COX: And that was *my* opinion, by the way. I could have been—and maybe perchance, you know, I was different from other kids. Maybe their parents sent them information and—and—and communicated and stuff, but I didn't—I didn't—you know, my parents were separated, not even divorced by then, and I—I don't think I particularly communicated very much with—with my family. I did more so when my sister came—when she came—she's two years younger than me, so when she came to Colby Junior, that was—that was sort of fun. I, you know, talked to her and everything.
- SONNENFELD: Let's—let's go ahead and move—move from your freshman year to your sophomore year. You switched sports. Were there any other transitions as you kind of started to move through your Dartmouth career?
- COX: Well, as far as—once my freshman year—I always was focused on architecture and art, and there was a course—I don't know if it's still offered, History of Art and Architecture, and I took that, moved up into my sophomore year and then pledged SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon] and moved into the house. I lived in SAE for my last couple of years.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: So—and I was really close to Baker Library [Fisher Ames Baker Memorial Library, now Berry-Baker Library]. I was always over there studying somewhere in the stacks. I—I loved studying in the stacks because it was cold and it kept me awake. So.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Still is. Still's chilly in the stacks.

COX: Yeah.

SONNENFELD: And so you maintained the interest in—in architecture kind of throughout?

COX: Oh, jeez, intensely. You know, it was—my whole focus was architecture. I was always drawing and sketching and—and doing things, you know, as—I can draw anything any time. I had a natural sense of perspective. You know, I was always, you know, figuring things out spatially, and—and so, you know, I—I was definitely on track. There was an architect who taught two—in our junior and senior years, taught pre-architecture there. I forget his name. Really nice guy, an architect not from Hanover [New Hampshire] but somewhere near by, Lebanon [New Hampshire] perchance. And he taught these courses, and I took sculpture and, you know, a lot of different things.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I worked with iron and wood and stuff like that.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Any—any other sort of major incidents or—or events at your Dartmouth time that—that really stuck out?

COX: No. I—I played—we—you know, intramu- —because—I think because we were isolated and we didn't go places too much until I drove, and then I went over to girls' schools, I really felt like we had, you know, the intra-fraternity—and maybe the dorms were—like, if we'd have swim meets against other fraternities.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And SAE did pretty well. I was a good swimmer, so I swam anchor on a—you know, four guys.

SONNENFELD: What was your stroke?

COX: Freestyle. I could slam-dance a race, and we came in second in all the fraternities all the time. Psi U[psi] always beat us. [Both chuckle.] So we thought—we thought they

were the Yalies. We weren't sure that—if they were in the right school.

SONNENFELD: [Chuckles.] So a—

COX: We had a lot of football players in my house.

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: The star running back. The quarterback was actually in Beta [Theta Pi, now Beta Alpha Omega], but we had—[William H.] “Bill” King [Jr., Class of 1963] I think was a Beta. And then we had, oh, tackles, running backs—mostly tackles and running backs. And, oh, and ends. Good wide receivers that actually played for Dartmouth. Football was really an incredible sport there. I mean, it still is. You know, I really—I—I not only supported it, but because I played it, I understood it and everything.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And then I thought rugby was great because all the guys that could no longer handle [Robert L.] “Bob” Blackman, who was a really hard-driving coach, and we won the Ivy League when I was there a couple of times, so we played rugby. [Chuckles.]

SONNENFELD: Yeah, sure.

COX: And it was great. Quite a rugby—

SONNENFELD: Tell—tell me a little bit more about your experience at the rugby team. What was your position?

COX: [Chuckles.] I was a prop. It's called second row. I was—I was big at the time. I weighed about 230, 5'-11"—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

COX: —you know, in very, very big—good shape. My—my best friend at Dartmouth, well, one of two of my best friends—he was in Deke [Delta Kappa Epsilon], and he was on the York Barbell team from York, Pennsylvania, so he worked out a lot, and he was really, you know, a strong guy, and so I

would—I worked out anyway because of sports. But—but I lifted with him and—you know, that made me—that made me perfect for second row. I could hold up anybody and push a scrum.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. And did—did you form—you—you were obviously affiliated, you were in SAE, but where did you find your closest friendships developing on campus: in your fraternity, on the rugby team, elsewhere?

COX: No, the rugby team actually had Paul [C.] Pringle [Class of 1965], who was in my fraternity, and Paul was my best friend, and—and [Edward A.] “Ed” Taber [III, Class of 1965] was the other guy, and he was in Deke.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So, those were my two best friends, and we—I was assistant—assistant social chairman behind [Alexander F.] “Sandy” Ritter [Class of 1965] at SAE, so, you know, we had—we got pretty good groups on weekends—you know, good [unintelligible] group.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And I hate—if you see SAE today, I hate to tell you that it was never like that when I was there.

SONNENFELD: Oh, yeah? Well, it’s been derecognized. That was a big thing this past term or this past—yeah, past term, right?

COX: I know. I’ll tell you, when I was there—and—and—and not to sound as though I would do anything for anybody or that I could, but I did—so, like, if we needed carpets or we needed to have things cleaned and we didn’t have the money, I just had somebody come in and just do it, because the place was always in great shape. The furniture was in great shape. We had nice—finished wood floors. You know, we set up a nice bar. If anybody got rough at one of our parties, we made sure that they were real quiet and went out the backdoor.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So we—we weren't—we [chuckles] weren't an *Animal House* at all,—

SONNENFELD: [Chuckles.]

COX: —and—even though—I mean, we never had a tendency to be that way. We were more—it was all fun, and people loved to come there because we had Taj Mahal and the Elektras. Did you ever hear of them?

SONNENFELD: I have not. Was that a campus band?

COX: Yeah. No, not—not a campus band. Taj Mahal and the Elektras were real famous in the New England area probably until about 20 years ago, and so, you know, we would have them come up and, you know, we paid for them for entertainment for our fraternity.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Nice.

COX: About once a month.

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: Yeah, it was great.

SONNENFELD: So as you were kind of approaching the end of your time at Dartmouth, again, what direction were you thinking of going, and—and what were kind of your—your next steps when--when graduation approached?

COX: Well, I was going to apply to Cornell. I wanted to Cornell, to architecture school, and as we realized that the Vietnam War was rolling up and was going to be tough, we were trying to figure out ways to stay away from the military or out of the military, frankly. As a—I thought as a college graduate that I wanted to see if I could finish graduate school or—or do something like that. I didn't—you know, there were ways to stay out of the war, and that was to have a family and be the sole, you know, economic driver for your family, or you could go to Canada and run from the military, or you could 4-F [Selective Service System classification for not acceptable for military service]. And unfortunately, I was a physical—you know, sort of a beast, so, you know, I could—you know, they

wouldn't—they wouldn't—when they said 50, I could do 50 pushups, you know. It wasn't—so that wasn't a problem, unfortunately, for me.

And so I—I just—I resigned myself to, you know, this wasn't going to be good, and my father and I talked about it at length, and I told him that I wanted to go into the [U.S.] Air Force and be a fighter pilot, and he said, "No, I don't think that's a good idea." He said, "How about if I get you in the Navy? How about the [U.S.] Navy Reserve? I think there's an opening here in—in your hometown."

So I went in the Navy Reserve to try to stave off the military. You still had to go two years active at one point, but I would have been an enlisted man, but I still wanted to be a fighter pilot. I—you know, I—the one thing there—a guy named [Kenneth H.] "Ken" Jukes [Class of 1965] taught me how to fly at Dartmouth. We flew a—a float plane on the—in the aero club, and we flew off the lakes around New Hampshire and Vermont. And—

SONNENFELD: Was that a particularly common thing, or just through your buddy?

COX: Was it a what?

SONNENFELD: Was that a particularly common activity, or just you had a friend with an interest and—and he took you along?

COX: Well, I didn't realize there was an aero club, and Ken Jukes said, "Rob, yeah. I mean, you want to go flying?" And I said, "Ah, I don't know. Yeah, I'd love to." You know, I'd been in airplanes a lot, but I hadn't flown particularly. And he said, "Let's go," and, you know, it was twin—dual-control Piper with a high wing, with pontoons on, so we went down and untied it and took off, and he taught me how to fly on and off lakes, and then he also taught me how to land on land, so—and then—

SONNENFELD: Okay, sure.

COX: So when I got into the Air Force, I was already—I already could fly, so—

SONNENFELD: So did that automatically qualify you to be sort of a fighter plane guy, or did you have to go through any further training for that, or how'd you get the position?

COX: Well, as—as—as it was, you know, the draft—the full-on draft was announced in March of 1965, and we graduated two months later. And—and so I got a draft notice from Pittsburgh and said, you know, “You’re on the top of the list here. Come on down for your physical.” And I said, “Well, okay,” and then I got into the Navy Reserve, and that—that staves them off for a while.

And then once—as a college graduate, you can go in from any enlisted to any—you can go into any—if you qualify, you can go into any officer program, officer training program. So I took all the tests for the [U.S.] Navy, the Air Force and the [U.S.] Army and—as a—as a flyer, and they said, “Well, you know, you’re aerobic, and you can—you can be in any one you want,” and I said, “Well, I’m not”—I picked the Air Force.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I figured they had the arsenal, and they had the planes that I wanted to fly. And so I—I went from the Navy—I went—by the way, I went to graduate school in architecture at Kent State [University] for a year.

SONNENFELD: Oh.

COX: I didn’t just languish.

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: I was trying like hell to see if this Navy thing could somehow work, would I like it, could I stay in architecture school and then go on active duty and come back and have—I didn’t care if the military paid for my education particularly, although that would be all right. But I—but I really wanted to go to architecture school, and I wanted to be serious about it, and I couldn’t because I was so conflicted with this military thing.

SONNENFELD: Mmm.

COX: And so I just decided, *There's no way I'm gonna waste my life, you know, swabbing decks or cooking in a—I don't know, I was a corpsman. I was trained as a Navy corpsman—you know, like—you know, like, what a corpsman is. Like, help out doctors and stuff.*

So I liked that. I liked learning something different, but I still didn't—and I knew First Aid and everything from the Boy Scouts, so I—I just—I always wanted to be a fighter pilot—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —once I realized I had to go in the military. I mean, if I—if I chose someday to have an airplane and fly it myself, that would be one thing. I don't know about a fighter. And so I—I—I got in. I passed the test, and they gave me my call date, and I went to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and in 10 weeks I was a lieutenant.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. So before—before we get into that, just to revisit your time at Kent State, was it only a one-year program or did you cut things short to—to pursue your military duty?

COX: Yeah, I had to cut it kind of short.

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: They were very nice to us there. We were—my—through a family friend who's an architect in Pittsburgh, the head of the school, you know, put me in the graduate program and understood about the military. You know, there were—I wasn't the only person with this military quandary sitting over their head or trying to work it out in those days. I mean, if you were a red-blooded, you know, stand-up—in those—in those days it was males—men, you—you were going in the military somehow, or you had to figure out what to do—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —for you—for your service requirement. And so it was actually a three-year program, and I completed one year and just—I couldn't—I couldn't stay away anymore. The military—the Air Force said, “Look, you know, you're—you're gonna go from the Navy to us, and that's that.” And I wanted

to get moving. I just wanted to get it done, in a way. I didn't know anything about it. If you think you don't know about things and you go to a prep school or you go to a college and you interview and you look around and you walk around campus—

You can't walk around an Air Force base and try to figure out what it's going to be like. You know, life—that life every day is what is next. That's—that's just an experience that you're going to learn about tomorrow, tomorrow, but they don't tell you anything about it. And, you know, whether you're proficient in this, proficient in that or you can do this or do that, you—they—you push yourself, and they push you as hard as they can to see what you're going to do as your job in the military, so—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

When you left Kent State, did you have plans to return to architecture school when you were done with your service, or—

COX: Yeah. In my mind—

SONNENFELD: —what were you thinking?

COX: In my mind, I somehow wanted to maintain—somehow be involved with architecture. I just didn't know what to do about that, because I was running out of I guess age and—and experience. And when you think about the fact that I went to a postgraduate year, which extended me in high school one more year, then I go to Dartmouth for four years, complete that, and then, you know, for me to come back out of the military after four more years, at 30 years of age, and go to graduate school in architecture—I wanted to make money.

I really—I was paid \$12,000 a year as an Air Force captain, with combat and, you know, hazardous duty pay, and that—that—that—that's all I made, was \$12,000 a year. However, I lived in Japan the whole time, so—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Okay. So—

COX: —you know, my money—the money went pretty far.

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

Let's—let's go back to training camp at Lackland, Texas, you said, correct?

COX: Yeah, yeah, in August.

SONNENFELD: Can you tell me a little bit about that experience?

COX: Yeah. I'll tell you what that was. So you get there. You drive there. You park your car. You don't see it again for 10 weeks if you're going to make it through the 10-week training. And everybody there is intent. If you're there for officers' training, you're not—nobody is a shirker, and everybody is trying to excel and be a lieutenant. And, you know, it was—it was 100 degrees during the night and 104 degrees during the day. No air conditioner in the barracks. And we had to run every morning and run in the afternoon. Sometimes the red flags would be up that, you know, you shouldn't be out doing this, so you'd take the backpack off and you'd just run without it.

SONNENFELD: Mmm.

COX: It was quite an experience. I—I—I liked it. I was—you know, I was made an OT captain, which is like the head of my group in officer training camp, an OT captain. And—anyway—so—and then at the end of it, you're a lieutenant. They pin on the bars, and—and I got my assignment, so—

SONNENFELD: And you mentioned your—your dad didn't want you going into the Air Force. What were your parents' thoughts through- —throughout all of this?

COX: My parents were so concerned about the Vietnam War because there were so many casualties. I think by the time, you know, the newsreels and stuff—even though I was isolated in New Hampshire, it was pretty obvious that we were losing a lot of people and with everybody going—but it was mostly the Army, by the way, so the statistics didn't cover the Air Force particularly or the Navy particularly. My father felt that I'd be safe on a boat. He just wanted me to be on a boat, and he didn't want me to be a—well, I couldn't be

a Navy flyer either unless I was an officer, and I didn't want to be a Navy officer; I wanted to be an Air Force officer.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So they—they didn't want me to go into the military at all. In fact, they—they couldn't—they said, "Well, how do you—how can—how can we do this?" And that's when my father, you know, pushed and helped me get into the Navy Reserve, and that's—I don't know if you know, but that's where you go two years and six years to meetings.

SONNENFELD: Mmm.

COX: You go two years active duty. I didn't care for that.

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: I didn't want to do that.

SONNENFELD: So once you—once you graduated, so to speak, from Lackland, what was the next step? Where was your first assignment, and did you have any idea what you *would* be doing?

COX: Yeah. What—what happened was because I wasn't a fighter pilot, they—they—they—they tell you that you can do certain things. The quota on fighter pilots was met, and they said that "you're gonna be—you're gonna fly transports." And I said, "I don't wanna fly transports." And they said, "Well, you're gonna be a lieutenant in the Air Force. You're"—and, by the way, when you're a flying officer, it's five years of duty. So they said, "Well, what do you want to do?" And they said, "Will you give us a couple of days? Because, you know, we have an idea."

So at the end of a couple of days, they came back to me. This is while I was still becoming a lieutenant. This was five weeks into officers' training, or six weeks in. And they said, "What do you think of aircraft maintenance officer?" And I said, "I don't—I don't know." He said, "Well, you'd be around all the aircraft all the time, and we can't tell you that you'd fly or anything like that because obviously you'd be an aircraft maintenance officer. You'd have the aircraft and the crews

and all that stuff.” And I said, “Good. I’ll take it.” So at seven weeks in officers’ training in Lackland—Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, I became—that—that was my direction, was as an aircraft maintenance officer.

And the first thing I had to do was go to power plant school at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. And we all end up there. We’re all lieutenants from all over the place. And so I was there for about six weeks, and I flew in the aero club there. I flew Cessnas and, you know, I got checked out and soloed and everything, just in the aero club and, you know, bided my time at the University of Illinois.

We lived in an apartment complex. There were six of us in a four-bedroom place. We had a—you know, I had a good time there, but from there you get your orders, so while you’re there in—in power plant school, they—they—they decide that you’re either going to go to Vietnam or you’re going to go here or there, and they ask you where you want to go, and, of course, I wanted to go to either Germany or San Francisco.

And so they said, “Well, you’re an aircraft maintenance officer. We have”—this was—this was probably the most interesting thing that—that they did with me. They said, “Well, we can’t tell you much about your squadron or what you’re gonna do, but we would like for you to—we’re gonna give you this information, and we want you to go to the officers’ club at—at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois”—where I was—“and ask any flying officer captain or above about Yokota Air Base in Japan.” And so I asked two guys, and they said, “Oh, my God, secret, luxury tour.” So I said, “Okay, I’ll go there.”

And—and that pretty much—I—I went back up to the guy and took a case of Scotch for him, and I said, “Thank you for my orders,” and I got my orders and took off from McClellan Air Force Base in California and up to Japan.

SONNENFELD: All right. So—so now you’re in Japan. What was that transition like? Did you know what to expect on that assignment? You had been told it was kind of a luxury assignment. What—what did the other officers mean by that?

COX: Well, what they meant of it was that, first of all, it's in Japan so it's out of the war zone. And you don't know anything, though, until you get to Japan and you understand what you're going to. However, I was told a little bit more because I joined a—it was a fighter base with F-4s [McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom IIs]. F-4s were the—the unbelievably powerful fighter jet platform that really—if anything, if we ever won that war—we didn't win it, but it would be the F-4s that did it.

So the base was an F-4 base, but I was on the other side of the base, the other side of the runway, in a squadron called 56th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. And we had nothing to do with the weather. And I realized when I got there that we were—you know, that we were clandestine and we did unusual missions. You know, you learn right away. And, of course, I'm a lieutenant, so you—you know, you move right in, and you get briefed by the lieutenant colonel that I reported to, and, you know, you—you take over the job on the flight line, and, you know, meet the guys that are fixing the planes, and—and you're the lieutenant. [Chuckles.]

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So—And I—I got along really well with all the pilots. It was a smaller squadron. We had flag Boeing 707s, which—I don't know if you know a 707. Do you know what I mean?

SONNENFELD: I don't. Do you want to give me a quick description?

COX: The original Boeing four-engine jet transport.

SONNENFELD: Okay.

COX: Huge. You know, big, like the [Boeing] 747. The 707 and the 747, so it's the little one. They're still flown today by the military, ours and others, but not commercially. There aren't 707s in the United States anywhere. There are, around the world. Some 707s are still—Boeing doesn't make them anymore.

And we had particularly high-performance ones. And we had five of those and five high-altitude reconnaissance spy

planes. So that's what was my squadron. That's what we did. And so—and I got along real well with the pilots because I was a flyer, and they like a maintenance guy because, you know, I keep the planes fixed.

SONNENFELD: Did you ever get to fly, or you were kept grounded the whole time?

COX: No. In the Air Force, if you're—if you're not a pilot, you technically aren't flying. But these pilots were really great with me. I could fly in the cockpit. There are two seats. The pilot's on the left, and the copilot's in the right, so on—on missions I could get in the right seat and just sit there. I could fly if I wanted. And I did. I couldn't take off or land. I didn't do that.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: But I did that. I was allowed to—I got checked out in a Martin-Baker [Aircraft Co., Ltd.] ejection seat so that I could fly in the back of our fighter reconnaissance, the high-altitude plane.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And so I went up and flew in that. I had controls, but I didn't fly it. So I was always in our planes, flying somewhere—you know, doing either a maintenance check or, you know, I'd go to Alaska on a mission or I'd go to Hawaii. I went two summers to Pago Pago [which he pronounces Pongo Pongo] in American Samoa for three—three weeks at a clip, and we—

SONNENFELD: And—and what would you do there?

COX: I was the aircraft maintenance officer. I was in charge. I took a bunch of guys, and one of our 707s, and [unintelligible].

SONNENFELD: What—what would be the nature of the—of the missions?

COX: They flew—we flew against nuclear weaponry of other countries, so when they had any test or any bomb went off, we'd fly through it, right though it.

SONNENFELD: Ewww! And what was the purpose of *that*?

COX: We—you have to find out what the particulate is, and our—we had scopes on the sides of our airplanes, and they scooped up the air, and it was analyzed by a special agency in the United States Air Force, and that was frankly sent to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] when we got back.

SONNENFELD: And were you ever concerned about how that might be affecting your health, flying—flying through the particulates, or—or not so much at the time?

COX: Okay. As it was, in—in our Boeing 707, if you can imagine a large transporter craft empty, completely empty except for some bunks and a couple seats, we had a couple of rows of seats or whatever, we'd fly—and the operators—they were called the operators, who—who would put the filter- — filtration screens out when we'd fly through this, and they'd sample the air. They wore special white suits, and they were completely sealed and sealed off from us. We didn't—we didn't interface with them. They had a double exit. And we had showers on the bird. And we—we wouldn't be exposed whatsoever. We—we didn't think so.

The aircraft would be hot. Sometimes we'd come back and we had to wait for the aircraft to be washed down before we could get off because it might be hot. You know, we were checked—

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: —when we came back.

SONNENFELD: And—and when you were—when you weren't on missions, what was life like on the base? Can—can you talk a little bit about that?

COX: [Chuckles.] Well, the secret---the secret luxury mission was— the tour was—for me, it was three years, and I became the maintenance—well, I took over maintenance pretty much—because of the war situation during the Vietnam War, we were losing people and people—there was a lot of attrition, and so I made captain in a year and a half.

And I took over the maintenance. I was the head of the maintenance squadron.

But I was also the social chairman for the squadron, so we had some pretty good parties on Friday afternoons.

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: And I ordered a lot of sushi, and—

SONNENFELD: [Chuckles.]

COX: —a lot of alcohol. And people liked to come to our parties, and people that weren't even in our squadron, so I had to always ask the squadron commander—you know, everybody had to check in with me. [Laughs.]

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: So that was fun.

SONNENFELD: Would there be women at these parties, or all-guy events?

COX: Well, at the time, I was married. That was my first wife. I was married, and she eventually joined me. For your first year—well, first six months, you're unaccompanied, and then my wife came over. And so she was there, and I bought a house just off—you know, just off the base.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: You know, just a little—we called them paddy houses, but they were nicer than that. And so I would say that the wives were there, but in the military, the military's in charge.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: It was—But everybody had a good time. Everybody was very friendly, you know. There was some promiscuity. I had nothing to do with that, though.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

- COX: And, you know, you just—you know, just some flying guys' wives messing around. I don't know what they were up to. But anyway.
- SONNENFELD: How about with your down—how about with your down time? What sorts of activities would you do to keep yourself busy?
- COX: Oh, I played a lot of tennis. As I remember, I played a lot of tennis, and I also had a couple of mountain motorcycles, so I would ride up in to the countryside. We were 40 miles—25 miles, 40 kilometers west of Tokyo, in the mountains, at the base of Mount Fuji. And the towns and everything around there were wonderful, and so I'd ride with a couple of guys.
- And—also, you know, we'd go into Tokyo. We had a Joint Forces officers' hotel right in Tokyo, opposite the Imperial Palace, called the Sanno [Hotel]. It was all Joint Forces and a lot of flag officers, which is generals and above. You know—bird colonels and above, flag, who would stay at the Sanno and come in because of—you know, the—there was a hot theater, the Vietnam—that whole part of the world was very hot.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.
- COX: And Japan was quiet. You know, there wasn't any war in Japan whatsoever, and we were the—as you might know, Japan today only has three percent of the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] for the military, and when I was there, they couldn't have any. They were very suppressed militarily. The only weapons—we were their—we were their military.
- SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Did you interact with the Japanese much or mostly tend to interact with—with Americans?
- COX: My friends—two of my friends seemed to have other activities. They—one of them booked rock 'n' roll acts and entertainment acts at the Sanno Hotel and different places in Japan because he could, I guess. He was a captain, same as me. And I—I just—I did a little bit of, I don't know, I guess you'd call it acting. I was a—I was the candid camera man for a year on billboards and stuff like that.

SONNENFELD: Mmm.

COX: Because I could.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Yeah.

COX: You know, so I'd say that's extracurricular, and that was tolerated, I guess. Nobody told me no.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: But—and I didn't—I didn't particularly make any money doing that, but I liked it. You know, it was fun.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: [Chuckles.] So—

SONNENFELD: So after your—when your service was—was winding down, what were you thinking? You were—you're starting to get a little bit older, but were you considering returning to architecture, or what did you want to do at that point?

COX: No. I tried to figure it out, and because I had to come back—I couldn't stay in Japan. I wanted to stay in Japan. I didn't want to come home.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: At the time, you had to muster out. I had—well not muster out, but anyway, you, you know, get out of the Air Force. So I had to come back to Texas, got out of the Air Force, and then, you know, you're civilian, and, you know, Air Force captain, retired—you know, not retired. Air Force captain, reser- —in the Reserves.

So I—I really wanted to make money and work, and my father's business was thriving to a point where there was space for me to join him in Pittsburgh, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, where I grew up. And so I bought a house in Pittsburgh and, you know, commuted to McKeesport and worked for him for six years and then—and did a lot of stuff for him.

SONNENFELD: And—and how did you like that work, or were you—

COX: I enjoyed it because—

SONNENFELD: —just knew it would be sort of a short term?

COX: I don't—I don't know, because I wasn't going to do—I got to design different departments in the stores. I got to design—one new store I designed completely myself.

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: And then I, you know, hired the contractors and do all that work, just because I could and did.

And the other thing that I thought was—is that we would, you know, expand and do more stores, but I had a different system that I wanted to follow. I wanted to follow [Leslie H.] “Les” Wexner of The Limited [Inc., now L Brands Inc.], whom I had met at a wedding. And I knew him enough to talk to Les Wexner. Do you know who I mean?

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: He owns The Limited—you know, he founded it and he owns it. So I wanted to do smaller-footprint, you know, higher-end women's and men's stores side by side fashion. These were fashion stores.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: The chain grew from five to eight while I was there, five stores to eight stores, from 1970 to '76. And so my father didn't want to do it the way I wanted to do it, and we agreed to disagree, and I drove to California.

SONNENFELD: Why'd you want to go west?

COX: When I was traveling with him because of different buying opportunities for apparel, you would go to the—New York City to the—to see manufacturers and, you know, pick merchandise—your buyers would pick merchandise, and you'd distribute it to the different stores. We'd also do that in California, and we also did that in Europe a couple of times.

But California to me seemed very bright and light and refreshing, and I didn't know that much about it. All I knew was where I'd been in San Francisco on my way to Japan. And so I just decided that—I thought the opportunities would be in California. So I came out here without anything.

SONNENFELD: And—Yeah. What'd you find when you—when you got to California?

COX: Well, I stopped in Aspen [Colorado] for a month, and—with some friends there, and—in the summertime and then came here and pretty much got right into retail again after about three months. I called the woman who owned a group of stores called Judy's, and very, very at the time prominent, fast junior fashion chain, a lot like what today you'd think of as—let's see, probably Scoop [New York City]. Do you know Scoop?

SONNENFELD: [No response.]

COX: You know H&M [Hennes & Mauritz AB]?

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh.

COX: Okay. But smaller. You know, smaller stores. Not H&M because that's all vertical. But—but it was a multi-brander, and she had a lot of stores. She had 45 stores when I joined her. I interviewed with her, and I told her that we were in the same buying office in New York City when I was with my father's company. She said she didn't remember me, but she wanted me to come out to her offices here in Van Nuys [a neighborhood in Los Angeles] at 11 o'clock that night. So I showed up, and a day and a half later, they told me they decided on me, and that was that. So I worked for her for a while. So [unintelligible].

SONNENFELD: And did you like what you were doing with her? Was it similar to what you had been doing for your dad's company, or—

COX: Yeah. Oh, no question, yeah. I was a merchandise manager. It was fabulous. Yeah, it was great. I did that for one other company, and then Sportmart stores—it ran an ad in *The Wall Street Journal*, and they wanted to expand out of Niles,

Illinois, which is Chicago, and Sportmart was the—was birthed by one of the founders of Toys “R” Us [Inc.]. And so I answered the ad. I went back to Niles, Illinois, and I joined Sportmart, and I built six stores out here. They’re about 40,000 square feet each. And—I mean, I didn’t build them; we replaced them and, you know, retrofitted the buildings and all that stuff.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And I ran all that, and I, you know, hired the managers and—so these stores were up and running, six of those for six years. And then I got into the shopping center business, which is the love of my life, and that’s what I do now. That’s what I’ve been doing since 1985.

SONNENFELD: So did you—you were living in Chicago? And then did you move back to California, or—

COX: Well, Chicago was just for training.

SONNENFELD: Okay.

COX: I was back there training with Sportmart. I trained for three or four months with them, and I then I came to California and I ran the office out here—I ran the business out here. We opened—I opened six Sportmarts here, and eventually the company—that company was sold, but I had nothing to do with that, so—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. So tell me a little bit, then, about—about the—the business you went into. What did you find interesting or do find interesting about that sector?

COX: You know, this is where life comes together for you, and I realized that intellectually I responded, without realizing, maybe, but then I thought about it, that it put together what I thought was my qualities and things that I wanted to do in life, and merchandising—when you get to merchandise a mall and I get to pick every store that goes into one of the greatest malls in the United States, whether it’s great at the time or I—or I’d build it and make it great, that’s wonderful, and it’s fabulous. And, you know, you get to work with the architects of all these different companies, like Gucci and

Bottega Veneta and Louis Vuitton [Malletier] at the very top, and, you know, H&M and all these other companies, Forever 21.

And what I realized was, is that it—it had that—my merchandising and my architecture, because the buildings were fabulous, and the common areas, and I got to—I got to contribute, in the common areas—the companies I worked for pretty much put me in charge of the whole area. And I was in leasing primarily, and—but I drove what was going on and increased the sales per square foot and the revenue, and I worked really well with the managers of the centers, and—

I worked first for May Centers [Inc.], which is part of May Department Stores [Company] at the time, which became Macy's. And—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —they were out of St. Louis [Missouri]. I did that for 10 years and then four—four years I was hired in after that—I was hired by the Trisacon [spelling uncertain] Company out of San Diego for four years. And they were fizzling, and Simon [Property Group, Inc.], out of Indianapolis [Indiana], kept this one guy that I worked for when I was at May Centers. [James A.] “Jim” Napoli kept calling me and saying, “Rob, c'mon, c'mon, come work for us at Simon, come work for us at Simon. You can do what you want. You can stay in the West. You can run the West. We'll”—you know, whatever. So I finally went with Simon, and I did that for 10 years until five years ago, so—then 10 and a half years.

That was—that was the love of my life.

SONNENFELD: Was there anything—yeah. Was there anything about your time in Vietnam that you think kind of equipped you for that profession, or just divergent interests?

COX: You know, this—well it was Japan, by the way. I wasn't in Nam, itself.

SONNENFELD: Sure.

COX: I was just in Japan,—

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: —but during the Vietnam era.

SONNENFELD: In service, I should say.

COX: I would say that I learned—you don't think about it, but my managerial skills—I had 175 guys that worked for me in these kind of aircraft, and I interfaced with, you know, the squadron ops and commander. And, you know, we had a serious mission every day. These planes were taking off and landing all the time, and the fighters were across the base. I think the excitement—I really—I would have missed that excitement if I hadn't stayed active and been able to travel and do things in merchandising.

And so I would think that—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —the one thing that—that the military—just because my military was Air Force and it involved the aircraft and the fact that I could be around them and fly little stuff while I was there and not—couldn't fly the Air Force planes. But it was so exciting. And—I mean, I—I had friends come visit me over there, friends that I grew up with. A guy called and said, "Rob, you know, it's Murray Lindberg [spelling uncertain]. I'm with the New Jersey Guard, and I'm coming in with four F-106s [Convair F-106 Delta Darts] in the Yokota Air Base. Can we get together?" And I said, "We can not only get together, but you can park them over here in my squadron." And he said, "Oh, great." [Chuckles.] So he's on his way to Vietnam with these F-106s, and he stayed for four days. I mean, that's like, "You gotta be kidding me." Where else is that going to happen?

SONNENFELD: [Chuckles.] Yeah.

COX: And—and I think, too, that—I think—you know, my wife—well, my wife today, but—says, you know, "Who are your friends?" And I said, "You know, guys really don't have a lot of acquaintances. They have acquaintances and friends. But

really close friends, guys have fewer than the perception of you and what you think.” But from high school, I still have one really close friend. From college, I still have two. And from the Air Force, I have three.

And you only take away so much when you’re pulled—I never, after Dartmouth—I never came back to the United States for five years, for four and a half years. I never—I never had anything to do with the United States, nor could I. And so—

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: —you know, you really become immersed, and I just realized how immersed you become and how much you love what you do because you just want to take advantage of where you are all the time and what you can learn and expand.

Meanwhile, you know, you’re suffering because you realize that you—you can’t pursue architecture. That military commitment took architecture out of my picture. And to this day, I think I miss the hell out of that. But I—I make up for it with this shopping center business, I got to tell you. And I own real estate and houses.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I fix them up and build them, and so—you know.

SONNENFELD: How about flying? Do you ever fly anymore, or—

COX: [Laughs.]

SONNENFELD: No. No more.

COX: No, my wife won’t—won’t fly with me. She said, “No, that’s it.” And no motorcycles or no airplane. [Laughs.]

SONNENFELD: So did you do either when you got back from Japan, or you put down the keys, so to speak?

COX: Well, when I first came to California—let’s see, when I first came to California, I flew a little bit with a friend of mine who was here. He had a couple of Aerostars, and he was an Air

Force fighter pilot. And that was it. That was the end of it. Oh, and I also flew—we flew a tail dragger, a Cessna 182 [Skylane] down to Mexico a couple of times, landed on the beaches, had a couple of drinks and some nice meals and took off and flew to another beach.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And went down to Cabo San Lucas [Mexico]. That's the last flying that—in a small craft—that I personally did, but I did fly. I did all that, so—

SONNENFELD: Sure.

COX: That's okay. Yeah. You know.

SONNENFELD: Rob, do you—do you have any—any kind of final thoughts or any other memories you'd like to share?

COX: No. You know, it's interesting that—you know, I know, because I didn't serve in the Army or, you know, the Navy or any kind of combat, that my experience was just that it was a military experience that drew me away from my academic endeavor. However, in life you realize you can't do anything about it. That was the only time in my life I couldn't do anything about it. The only time. All the rest—and every time in my life, I've made the decision for everything I've done. And—and—and I've been excited, even though, you know, it's intrepid sometimes. I mean, that's—that's—that's my only—

SONNENFELD: Did not—yeah.

COX: I always—

SONNENFELD: Did having that sense of agency—was it something you thought about a lot, or—or more in retrospect, or—

COX: No. I always thought about it that I was always on a path of what I thought was excellence so that I could be—you know, I didn't pursue glory, but I pursued excellence. And, you know, I didn't think as a fighter pilot that it wasn't going to be glory. Whatever I did, it was—it was just going to be exciting, very, very exciting.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: And, you know, fortunately or not, you know, you are what you are, and the fact that I was an Air Force officer—I have to tell you that there's a lot to be said for the—you know, the accomplishments of the military. Of course, I was around them a lot.

And, by the way, I interfaced with the wounded warriors who came out of Vietnam. They were in a unit—they were brought to a unit next to us in Japan, where they decided where they were going to go, if they were going to make it. So special doctors and nurses and—

SONNENFELD: Was that—was that tough to watch, or—

COX: Yeah, very.

SONNENFELD: —did it ever make you question what was going on in Vietnam, or what—what were your thoughts coming face to face with sort of the effects of the war?

COX: I had an insane and intense hate for [President] Lyndon [B.] Johnson for calling the draft. He personally had to make the decision to call the full-on draft in March of '65. I personally hated him. I thought he was an ignorant Texan. And to this day, I'm not sure what I think about him.

And I was very mad—I hated Jane Fonda for all the G.I. Jane crap that she pulled while we were over there. And, you know, to this day, I don't think I care about—I see Jane here, but I don't—I don't say anything to her.

And, you know, I just don't—I'm just proud of what I got to do. I always felt, you know, that maybe at Dartmouth was the only time where I was challenged to the point of I might not make it, in my freshman year. But the rest of the time in my life, I've—I've never been over-challenged. You know, I've always tried to meet the challenge.

That's in retrospect. I just—I'm just glad that this shopping center business was able to put in life all of what I thought were my qualities to—to work,—

SONNENFELD: Sure.

COX: —to be in concert. I think it's important to live to work instead of working to live, so—

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: I definitely live to work, so—and I—and I love it.

SONNENFELD: That's great. So just—lucky, lucky that you found that. But just to revisit, you—you—you didn't—you didn't like Lyndon B. Johnson for calling the draft. What—what were your thoughts of—of [President Richard M.] Nixon and—and other political leaders while you were in Japan? What was your relationship like with the decisions being called at that time?

COX: Do you know? It's interesting. Once you're in—and because I knew I wasn't in combat—and we only knew that it was either escalating or—or—or it was flat or whatever was going on in Vietnam, which was to the south of us all the time right there in Japan, I didn't particularly think about it, and I just waited for my time to be up.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I didn't—I wasn't marking time, by the way. I wasn't, like, looking the calendar and crossing off the days.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I—I loved what I did, and it was exciting. And I loved the Japanese people. They're the most—I traveled the world pretty substantially, and they're my favorite, so far [chuckles], people.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: I'm not sure how I feel about the Africans. I was there two years ago, so I like them too. But anyway—well, it's interesting when you get—

SONNENFELD: Great.

COX: —when you—have you traveled?

SONNENFELD: Yeah, I've been fortunate enough to travel quite a bit, yeah.

COX: So what is your position?

SONNENFELD: I was actually in Africa last year.

COX: Where?

SONNENFELD: I'm an undergraduate student at Dartmouth. Where was I in Africa? I was in Ghana.

COX: Oh, okay.

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: So I was in Kenya and Tanzania, so I know Ghana. I know where that is. What were you doing?

SONNENFELD: I was actually interning for an adventure travel company.

COX: [Laughs.] That's great! What's their name?

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: What's their name?

SONNENFELD: BraveHearts Expeditions, BraveHearts Expeditions.

COX: What a cool name.

SONNENFELD: It's a Ghanaian company, actually.

COX: That's my favorite movie, *Braveheart*. [Both chuckle.]

SONNENFELD: Great. Well, all right, Rob, I don't—I don't want to—us to get too derailed, but unless you have any last thoughts, I want to thank you for your time and for—for—for volunteering to—to—to do this interview at the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. We really appreciate it.

COX: Well, I hope it's ingredient [sic], and, you know, I don't know what the outcome is, but it was interesting when I was there.

Do you know that at my 50th—were you around for that?
What year are you?

SONNENFELD: I'm a '17, so I'm a junior.

COX: Okay. So last year—

SONNENFELD: Uh-huh. Undergrad.

COX: Last June, June 15th, was my 50th.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm.

COX: Were you around?

SONNENFELD: Yeah, I would have been around.

COX: Okay, for graduation.

SONNENFELD: Mm-hm. Yeah.

COX: So one of the sessions—you know, of the 680 or 700 of us that went to Dartmouth in 1961, you know, 600-and-some, 800, 680 of us graduated. But—so about 220 of us showed up for our 50th reunion, and they had breakout sessions. Did you hear about that?

SONNENFELD: [No audible response.]

COX: I guess this is driven from [unintelligible].

SONNENFELD: Yeah. Mm-hm.

COX: That was amazing. It was standing room only.

SONNENFELD: Yeah.

COX: It was very emotional.

SONNENFELD: Wow.

COX: I thought that was so wonderful for Dartmouth to do that. And I guess this is a, yeah, part of that. Yeah.

SONNENFELD: Yeah. Well, thank you again so much, Mr. Cox. I'm going to—to stop the recording now.

COX: Okay.

[End of interview.]