Arnold E. Resnicoff '68
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
February 10 and 12, 2016
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

BURACK: Hi. My name is Emily [H.] Burack. I am currently sitting in Rauner [Special Collections] Library in Hanover, New Hampshire. It is Wednesday, February 10th, 2016, at 10:04 in the morning. I am talking with Rabbi Resnicoff who is at—in Washington, D.C. Excuse me.

Good morning. How are you?

RESNICOFF: Good morning. Very good, and looking forward to the conversation.

BURACK: Good to hear. Let's start at the beginning, in the basics. Where were you born, and when?

RESNICOFF: I was born in Washington, D.C. in 1946. My father and mother got married right after World War II and moved to D.C. When I was two, they moved right over the D.C. line to a Maryland suburb, and that's where I grew up and lived until the end of high school.

BURACK: Okay. What did your parents do?

RESNICOFF: My father was a lawyer, but he didn't practice since I was alive. He actually quit his job as a lawyer the day after [the attack on] Pearl Harbor and went to volunteer to serve in the military for World War II. And they told him that he could come in as a lawyer, a JAG [Judge Advocate General], but it would take a number of months to get him the right military course, so he said, "You don't understand. I've already quit my job. Just put me as anything."

So they brought him in as an enlisted man and sent him with Seabees [U.S. Naval Construction Force] to the South Pacific, and there—you know, Seabees were the ones that built the runways while they were being bombed and did a lot of things. But in addition to all that regular construction work, since he was a college graduate and a lawyer, they

put him in charge of the post office, and he ended up, after getting out of World War II and moving to D.C., continuing as a civilian with the post office. And he continued with that till he passed away.

My mother didn't start working until a little later in life, when I—when my Bar Mitzvah was coming and we needed a little more money, so she started working in some local stores and ended up getting a job with the [U.S.] Department of Agriculture and ended up retiring from the Department of Agriculture.

BURACK: Okay.

Did you have any siblings?

RESNICOFF: Yeah. I was oldest of three boys. My middle brother was an artist. He passed away in '86. He was one of the very, very early casualties of the AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] epidemic.

My younger brother, young*est* brother ended up being—getting a law degree but also going on and becoming an Orthodox rabbi, and right now he's a law professor in Chicago at DePaul University Law Center [sic; DePaul University College of Law] and also the co-founder and co-director of DePaul Center for Jewish Law & Judaic Studies.

BURACK: Okay.

So what was it like growing up with two younger brothers?

RESNICOFF: We—we fought a lot. [Both chuckle.] You know, we were three boys, you know. But we were all very different, and, you know, we had a strong bond and the kind of thing that you don't—we might fight, but nobody else should attack an of us.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: We all come together, so—but we had, I would say, a pretty normal childhood, you know, in this little suburb of Washington, D.C. And it was a different world back then. You know, somehow a little more carefree, and I think—I

remember that if I didn't come home for dinner, my mother would, you know, reprimand me for not letting her know I wasn't coming,—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: —but she never worried that I had been kidnapped, you know, or anything. And I remember that my mother, as a very attractive young woman, would take the same shortcut through the woods to get to the closest stores that we would, and today I don't think anybody would do that. So we had a normal childhood, and I guess each one of us, the three siblings, took different paths, but each was successful in the path that he chose.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

Did you all attend normal school and Hebrew school or both or just one?

RESNICOFF: Yeah, we attended public school with, you know, Hebrew school two or three days a week. I forget what it was. Plus Sunday morning—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —after—the synagogue that we attended is now a Buddhist temple. You know,—

BURACK: Interesting.

RESNICOFF: —I sometimes drive by. I remember—yeah.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: But after they sold the synagogue to, you know, a Buddhist group and—they moved to another place—my father at one point was president of the synagogue, so we were all active in the synagogue.

My grandfather had come over from Russia when my father was three. My grandfather was a very Orthodox rabbi. His father was a very Orthodox rabbi, all in Russia. My father, after being in the war, was no longer very observant in terms

of, you know, Jewish rituals but always very involved and proud of being Jewish, and that's kind of how we were raised.

BURACK: You mentioned your grandfather was an Orthodox rabbi. So your family comes from a long line of rabbis?

RESNICOFF: Yes. On my father's side, a long line of rabbis. There's Wikipedia articles on my grandfather and great-grandfather, and I'm sure beyond that there were rabbis, too, but no one remembers.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: But my mother's side, more salt of the earth, hard living, hard fighting working men, and so it was two sides of my family that I used to think led me to be a rabbi in the military, because it was—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —not a typical rabbi's life. It also involved some fighting.

BURACK: The perfect combination.

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: So did you feel pressure growing up to be a rabbi, or did your dad talk about—

RESNICOFF: No, it was just the opp- —just the opposite. I never even dreamed I could be a rabbi, because when we would visit—every summer, we would visit New York, a little bit in Long Beach, Long Island with my mother's family and a little bit in Brooklyn with my father's family. His father, my grandfather, was still alive. They lived in the building in Brooklyn where one floor was the synagogue and the rest was their house.

And when we walked in, it was liking going back in time for me, you know, a century or so. And my grandfather never learned English. He had this long beard. And I grew up thinking to be a rabbi, you had to be born—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —with a long beard and—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —you know, just—I never even dreamed that I could be a rabbi. So it really wasn't until I ended up in Vietnam and got friendly with the Christian chaplain there, who started urging me to consider being a rabbi that I even dreamed that I could be.

BURACK: Yeah. Did your dad ever talk to you and your brothers about his experiences in the war, or was it something that wasn't really discussed?

RESNICOFF: Well, he didn't talk in details, but he didn't hide it. He wasn't—I know a lot of people, war veterans who absolutely didn't want to talk about it, just like Holocaust victims didn't talk about it, but my father wasn't like that. I think we just never asked very many questions.

On the other hand, when I'm with some of my older cousins who were alive during the time my father was in the war (and I wasn't born until after the war was over), they talked about the letters, you know, they would get from my father. It was filled with war stories that weren't really true, about how he was single-handedly—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —winning the war.

BURACK: [Laughs.] It was all him. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: That's right. So—so, you know, he had a good sense of humor, and other people in the family were constantly in touch with him, on my father's side. And my mother's side. Many of my uncles ended up wearing different uniforms, serving in the military on both sides, and a lot of my aunts were involved in the war effort—you know, taking jobs that were making things to help the soldiers.

BURACK: Gotcha.

So tell me a little about your life in, like, middle school, and did you play sports? Did you like going to Hebrew school? What was your—what was your life growing up like?

RESNICOFF: I really didn't like going to Hebrew school.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: You know, I—

BURACK: I don't think any 12-year-old does.

RESNICOFF: That's right. That's right.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: Other kids, you know, you could finish school and go out and play and do different things, and, you know, I had to do that. And it also kept me from getting involved in a lot of organized sports. And then when I got to middle school but, even more, high school, I had a lot of part-time jobs after school, or on weekends. And so I never—I actually, at one point, thought about going out for track in high school, and just the schedule just didn't work out, but I was always very fast in, like, running.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And I could do well in hurdles and things like that, but—so I didn't—I didn't really get involved in sports.

I was very involved—because of one high school drama teacher, I ended up being very involved in drama. We had a, I went to a big public high school,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —about 3,000 people. And because of this one drama teacher, drama at that high school was as big as football.

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: And everybody would look forward to the big plays that, you know, the school would put on. And actually, when I was in

the beginning of my senior year, in '63, I was in *The Diary of Anne Frank* [a play adaption of the book], which was our big senior—we always had a big senior play and a big senior musical. And one of the nights of the productions—we put it on November 21st, 22nd and 23rd, '63. On the 22nd, [President John F.] Kennedy was assassinated, and almost everything in Washington, D.C., closed except for our high school play. And our drama teacher—I don't think he would have said any show must go on, but he said, "This show must go on."

And I remember—you know, this was the first of the modern assassinations, and we were all reeling, and we didn't know if anyone would come, but a lot of people came. And when Anne Frank's words came from the stage, saying, "Despite it all, I still believe people are good," it was more electricity in that high school auditorium than in any theater than I've been to in my life since then. And that was the day I decided to major in drama at Dartmouth.

And I think half the people in the play, in one way or another, tried to get into theater. A couple were successful, but I think a lot—because of that power of that night, it changed the direction of a lot of our lives.

BURACK: Wow. So do you remember where you were when Kennedy was assassinated, or when you found out?

RESNICOFF: Yes. I—I got out early from school, an hour early in my senior year to go to a—to work. I worked after school. And I heard it on the radio, and I remember thinking—I saw people on the lawn, you know, at different houses as I was passing them, driving to work, you know, and I just—I realized that these people didn't know anything. I had a feeling of yelling out the window, "Go turn on your television," but I didn't; I just went to work. When I got to work, everybody was just sitting, listening to the radio, and eventually work was closed that day. But, yeah, so I was in the car right after school, and I heard it on the radio.

BURACK: Because you were in this show the night before and for the next two nights, did you think it was going to happen again? I mean, did you think the show was going to go on that night?

RESNICOFF: I—I did not think so, and, you know,—but—but I was impressed when the teacher said it would. We were all calling. We are all trying to figure things out.

BURACK: Did your family go to see the show?

RESNICOFF: I think my mother did but not my father. And, you know, it was interesting: Everybody was reacting in different ways, and it was just—but now that I think back on it, I think my mother might have seen it the night before, so that night, I don't think either one of my parents went.

BURACK: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

So tell me more about your high school years. Were you in drama productions every year? What was your favorite subject?

RESNICOFF: Well, I—I—you know, I really got involved in drama at high school. Hadn't done that before. I became very friendly with this high school teacher. Some of my—the people I'm still in touch with from high school were the ones that, you know, were in drama with me. I have one friend who is a drama teacher in New York now and has taught some very famous people. And every time I go to New York, I see him, and we reminisce about days there.

I was—I had a—a good—good time in high school. I didn't—until that night when I, you know, made my decision to go into drama, I really didn't know what I wanted to be. And I was very good at math, and so I kind of thought I'd end up being, you know, a math major, which is so hard for me to believe now because my life is so different than that.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: And—and I also grew up assuming that I would go to the University of Maryland, which was only about a mile and a half from where we lived, and it really was because of a College Night at high school that I changed my mind and thought about Dartmouth. It was—you know, there were many representatives of different colleges and universities giving a pitch about why we should consider, you know, their school.

And it struck me that the people from Dartmouth—the other people were explaining their school, and it was like the people from Dartmouth were sharing their love of the place. And some of the things they said—it got my attention. For instance, they said that it really was a college so that any student could take any course; any student could take any book out of the library, whereas, you know, at some of these places, you were at a college within a university, and you were restricted to courses. You couldn't - some of the books in the library were just for grad students.

And so that got me interested. But it was really the love of Dartmouth that caught me, and I ended up only applying to Dartmouth, and not even early acceptance, just I applied to Dartmouth, and I actually thought that if I didn't get in, maybe I would go in the [U.S.] Navy first and then go to college, because I still wasn't 100 percent sure, you know, about my future after—after college.

But I was lucky. I did get in, and I went to Dartmouth, but I—was—I was in a very unusual situation at Dartmouth. I was the first student—I think I can say that pretty confidently—who was both a drama major and in ROTC. I was in ROTC, the Navy ROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps].

BURACK: Quite the combination.

RESNICOFF: That's right, to—the other ROTC students thought I was too artsy-craftsy, I was a drama major; and the drama people thought I was a warmonger, I was in ROTC.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: It actually ended up being a good preparation for being a chaplain, even though I never dreamed I'd end up being a chaplain, because you have one foot, you know, in the military world but you're really—the other foot is really a little bit out of the military world, looking at bigger pictures.

BURACK: Just to back up a little, you mentioned that you only applied to Dartmouth and if you didn't get in, you would have joined the Navy, possibly. So already as a senior in high school, you were considering joining the military?

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: This was in 1964.

RESNICOFF: Not as—not as a career, but my father was very, very, very patriotic, and I told you he quit his job—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. but it was because his father, my grandfather—you know, when they made it to America—my father used to tell me that in every service that my grandfather held, he would not only say a prayer of thanks that they made it to America but also a prayer of thanks that America existed. And this was a place, you know, that would take people in and would give them at shot at freedoms that they couldn't dream of in the countries, you know, from which they were coming.

So I was the oldest of three boys, and my father just kind of drilled it into me that I—I owed it to the country. I should pay back. I should pay our dues, as he used to say, so that—you know, I wasn't thrilled with the idea of going in the military and, again, never dreamed in a million years it would end up being my career, but I always knew I would go in for one assignment. And, you know, after Dartmouth, after ROTC, that's what I thought I was doing, going in for one assignment as an officer. If I had gone in after high school, it would have been one assignment as an enlisted man.

BURACK: At this point—you graduated high school in 1964. Is that correct?

RESNICOFF: Correct.

BURACK: Had Vietnam really entered the national consciousness? Like, were you kind of aware of anything, knowing, had you volunteered to serve, that's maybe where you might have ended up?

RESNICOFF: Yes, but in '64—and a lot of people forget—a lot of people weren't alive back then—that was still the time when college students and the country in general was very pro-Vietnam,

pro in terms of our involvement. It wasn't until later that Vietnam started to divide our country. And, of course, Dartmouth ended up—even though we were in the location, kind of isolated and isolated otherwise, that a lot of the campus disruptions didn't reach us until later—you know, by the time I was at Dartmouth, we—we did have threats from groups like SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] that if we didn't get rid of ROTC, they would cause trouble on the campus. And eventually, you know, there was a referendum, and we decided to get rid of ROTC.

And, by the way, I take a lot of pride in Dartmouth. I was—I was always very proud, still am proud of Dartmouth. I always am ashamed of that one vote because I know a lot of people who didn't vote to get rid of ROTC because they were against it; they voted just to avoid the trouble. So I thought it was kind of a cowardly vote.

And my position, especially after having been in the military and—and seeing the situation—my position is that getting rid of ROTC from good colleges, liberal arts colleges, colleges like Dartmouth was the worst thing that we could do because if we wanted to keep the military ethical and character driven, that we wanted people who were not going in—we didn't want just people who were going in because they wanted to fight and they wanted to make the military career. We wanted people who were going in just for, you know, that one assignment, in a position of authority, like an officer after NROTC, who could really inject some ethical leadership. And I think we lost a lot of that when we lost graduates from schools like Dartmouth.

BURACK: So talk me—let's back up a little and talk me back through when you got to Dartmouth. What—was your impression that of what you had at that College Fair? Did you feel welcomed on campus? Kind of what was your freshman year like?

RESNICOFF: I remember my parents drove me up—they're from D.C., and the next time they would drive to Dartmouth was the day of my graduation, because they thought it was so far away.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: Of course, just to show you how things are relative, you know, right after Dartmouth I had my year in Vietnam, and after Vietnam I went to California for my next assignment, and my parents visited me a number of times in California and said, "It's so good to have you so close to home again."

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: Compared to Vietnam.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: But, yeah, I remember when they dropped me off, I actually remember feeling a little scared. You know, here—I loved the idea of going away to college, but it really was the first time that I would be away from home, and it did seem like a long distance. And at that point in my life, I don't think I had ever even been on an airplane. You know, during breaks in the summer I would, you know, end up taking the plane back home.

But I remember—and I remember, you know, meeting my roommate, and he was from New Hampshire, and we were very different but he was a very, very good guy, and so that made me feel better. And slowly but surely, as I got to—[coughs]—excuse me; I'm sorry—as I got to meet people, I felt very much at home.

And that was a very different Dartmouth back then. It was all male, although we had nine women, because the drama department—and at that point, it was really a drama kind of sub-department under the English department. I think now it's a completely separate department; I'm not sure. But because we needed women in plays, there was a one-year—there was a program where women from schools, other schools, from Smith [College] and from [Mount] Holyoke [College] and other schools around the area could be a transfer student for one year.

So I ended up being a drama major and being involved in the drama department. You know, at least I had some female friends.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: You know, one of the dangers I saw at Dartmouth was that the men didn't have female friends; they just had female dates and—which I thought sometimes, especially if a man came from an all-male preparatory school, scarred them for life. [Chuckles.] That was my opinion.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: Back then when I was at college, these people didn't know, you know, what a woman was in terms of a human being; they just knew in terms of the date. So I had a more normal—what I would say more normal relationship with many men, many women.

Then I ended up, you know, taking a year off between my sophomore and junior years and working on a kibbutz in Israel. With all the mystery, which has just been solved about which kibbutz [Democratic Vermont Senator and U.S. presidential candidate Bernard] "Bernie" Sanders was on—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: _I was hoping—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —that it was spent on my kibbutz.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: It wasn't. And then one of the—I was on a kibbutz with 18 people from different colleges around the country, a special work program, and one of the other people was a man from Tufts [University]. I got friendly with him, and he was actually from El Salvador, so I spent the next summer in El Salvador with him and his family. So I really—some of my experiences at Dartmouth but away from Dartmouth ended up, you know, being very important to me. I—

BURACK: Just—

RESNICOFF: Matter of fact, after being in Israel and being in El Salvador, the travel bug had bit me, and I really loved the idea of

traveling. So Dartmouth had a wonderful—I'm sure it still does—but a wonderful foreign language training program, where you could—if you've never taken a language before, you could take a double course one trimester, and then spend the next trimester in that country, the country where the language was spoken—you know, living with a family who didn't speak English.

So I very much wanted to do that, but the problem was you—you couldn't do it in your senior year. So I remember going to my drama advisor, and you had to pick a senior project, and so I said I wanted to direct *The Bald Soprano,* [Eugène] Ionesco's *La Cantatrice Chauve* in French. And he said, "That'll be great." But he didn't know I didn't speak French.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So then I went to the foreign language department, and I said, "Even though you're not supposed to do this in your senior year, my senior project"—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —"is to direct a play in French."

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: "And I don't speak French, so I think we—can you make an exception and let me do that?" So they did. So my senior year, I spent one of the trimesters in France. So I—I did everything by the rules, but I also tried to get an exception whenever I could to make, you know, the Dartmouth experience even better, so it ended up pretty good.

BURACK: Just to go back a little.

RESNICOFF: Okay.

BURACK: So after your sophomore year, you said you spent a year on this kibbutz in Israel.

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: What year? Was this 1968?

RESNICOFF: It was ’66, because I went—I started—

BURACK: Oh, ’66. Excuse me.

RESNICOFF: Dartmouth in ’64.

RESNICOFF: Yeah, started in ’64.

BURACK: Oh, sixty- —oh, you were—okay.

RESNICOFF: So ’66. It was a program called Sherut La’am, Service to the People and actually was nine months on a kibbutz and three months in—in an old—at that point, they had very poor development towns or immigrant villages where they would take many of the poor immigrants from around the world and put them in a place that they really wanted—where they were developing in a country—’66 was, you know, such a different Israel.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And I remember that periodically they’d get the different groups, under different kibbutzim together, the people in this program, and we’d have lectures. And one of the last lectures we got was, you know, from the Israeli experts, who said there would never be another war with the Arabs; there’d be economic pressure, but the Arabs knew they could never win a war with Israel again.

And then I came home, and—very quickly after I finished my year and came home, the war broke out, the ’67 war, so it shows experts, you know, have always been wrong [chuckles] about these predictions—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So it was ’66 to ’67 that I was in Israel, and then I went back to Dartmouth and continued in my junior year.

BURACK: So how did you find out about this program, and, like, what convinced you to go on it?

RESNICOFF: That's a good question. I—I—I think—back then there was just a lot of idealism. You know, it was—I mean, you know, I didn't know a lot—I think what I knew about Israel came a lot from movies like *Exodus*, and just the idea of people who were idealistic trying to establish this country, people coming out of the Holocaust. And one of my best friends in high school, a girl who was the daughter of my cantor at the synagogue, and both the cantor and his wife had been in Auschwitz [concentration camp] and terrible things, and although they came to America, many of their relatives ended up in Israel.

So I just did a little searching, and I forget how I stumbled across this program, but it seemed like it was—it was a good program. The only problem was I actually had to dis-enroll from ROTC, and the ROTC director warned me that for that year—I could re-enroll when I got back, but that that year, I would be subject to the draft, so I'd be taking a risk.

So I actually tried to convince some of the other Jewish students to do this with me, and they were all—some of them were very interested in the idea of working on a kibbutz for a year, but they were all too afraid that, you know, they would be drafted.

So it worked out. It was a very important year for me. I learned a lot about myself, and I was—I didn't get drafted, and I came back, and I—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —continued. Yeah.

I also remember my father was not so thrilled, about the idea of my dropping out of college and going to Israel—my parents—I think it wasn't that they were—they weren't anti-Israel at all, but they just wanted me to finish college. They were afraid that once I dropped out, I wouldn't go back. And I actually had the head of ROTC at Dartmouth, NROTC at Dartmouth write my father a letter, saying this would be a good experience; I'd mature; it would make me better—you know, as an officer.

And my father said, “Well, I don’t think that guy would say the same thing if it was *his* son, but okay.” So my father—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —gave me his permission. And I was young enough that I—I needed my parents’ permission to get into this program.

BURACK: You mentioned that you tried to convince other Jewish students to come with you. Did anyone end up coming with you?

RESNICOFF: No.

BURACK: And, as a secondary question—no. [Chuckles.] Were you active in Jewish life at Dartmouth, or what was Jewish life—did that exist at Dartmouth?

RESNICOFF: It—it—it—we didn’t have a Hillel, you know. There was no real Jewish student organization. We—Dartmouth had a history at that point of always having one great Jewish scholar. When I was—now I guess you have Susannah Heschel,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —Abraham Joshua Heschel’s daughter.

There was Herzog. There was a lot of different—so when I was there, there was Jacob Neusner, and I took a lot of the courses that he offered. I became friendly with him and still am in touch with him and his children.

So I was active in that sense. I would go to services a lot of the Friday nights. I think we had student-led Friday night services, but—but it wasn’t really a strong Jewish presence. And now it’s much, much more—you know, now I—I know the rabbi there at Hillel. I would—

BURACK: [Rabbi Edward] Boraz, yeah.

RESNICOFF: Boraz.

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: He even—when I got the award a couple of years ago for the Daniel Webster [Distinguished Public Service] Award in Washington, D.C.—they give an award every year for the best—the most active—I don't even know exactly what it means, but [chuckles] somehow they award—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —a Dartmouth graduate, who's been—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: active in public service, and he—

BURACK: Okay.

RESNICOFF: —came—came all the way down from Hanover to be at the award dinner for me, which I thought was very, very nice.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: But yeah so I know now—and when I—I visited Dartmouth a couple of years ago and spoke, over the Veterans Day weekend, to different Dartmouth groups, I did speak to the Hillel. And, you know, I was very, very impressed to see how far along things had come in terms of Jewish program there.

BURACK: And in terms of NROTC, were there other Jewish students with you in that program, or what was the makeup of that group? Not necessarily religious, but what type of students joined?

RESNICOFF: Yes, there were others. There wasn't such a—just—there wasn't a large Jewish student population at Dartmouth at that point.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: My impression was that there wasn't. So—and I'm sure the percentage of Jewish students at Dartmouth was still much greater than the percentage of Jewish students in NROTC, just like the percentage of Jews in Americas is greater than the percentage of Jews in the American military.

But I'm sure I wasn't the only one. You know, I'm sure there were—

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: —just a couple of others.

BURACK: What was it like being in NROT - NROTC? Excuse me.

RESNICOFF: It was a pain in the neck.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: It was [chuckles] something.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: But I took it with a grain of salt, but you know, it was so that I could graduate and go in as an officer. If you're going to go in the military, at least go in as an officer. And, you know, it was something very interesting, and there was a little bit about history, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. I don't remember if back then—I think that some of the NROTC courses were actually college credit courses. Some schools, they are; some schools, they are not. I'm pretty sure that they were. And so, you know, I'd have to take a couple of courses but then I thought I was missing out on other courses I might have liked. But it wasn't bad. And, again, it was a means to an end.

And I was patriotic, and I—I felt that being exposed to the kind of people who would end up in the military with me was good for me, you know, so that when I went into the military, you know, I—I already was comfortable.

BURACK: Yeah. And when you got back from Israel, that's when kind of antiwar protests picked up on campus.

RESNICOFF: Yes. Yeah.

BURACK: So how did you react to that? Or what was your kind of interaction with those groups and you as a member of NROTC?

RESNICOFF: You know, I—I think that it—it never was—there never were—at least when I was there, there never were violent clashes. There were never real—it was—it was around the margins. And, like I said, the whole idea of this referendum to get rid of ROTC based on the implicit threat that there *would* be problems if we didn't was about the worst, you know, that it got.

We—we—you know, while other colleges were having these giant demonstrations about the war, I remember that the big issues at Dartmouth were about whether you could have a woman spend the night in the dorm room.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: Or have—one I remember there was this giant things about more French fries at the dining hall.

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: We didn't have the —

BURACK: Dartmouth taking on the real issues. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: That's right. We were really—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —separated in many ways, really in the wilderness. And, by the way, speaking of the dining hall—you know, when I went up to speak at the Veterans Weekend—you know, I visited some of the new dining halls with all these, like, food courts which was just amazing.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —because when I went there, we had, you know, the regular dining hall, and I—I was a waiter. Most of the people who were on scholarship at Dartmouth—you know, one of the things we did was being a waiter. I ended up, you know, after being a waiter at the dining hall a number of years, being the one in charge of all the students who were waiters at the dining hall.

I also at Hopkins Center [for the Arts] worked behind the counter there, selling the tickets and doing different things. And just—I know it's a coincidence, but I also ended up being the student in charge of all the other students who worked at Hopkins Center.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So, you know, I spent a lot of—because I—in addition to the scholarship and the loan and the grant, you know, I did a lot of these other jobs, just to get the money because I was essentially putting myself through college with the help of the jobs and the loans.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: My parents weren't financially able to give me too much help, although I would say that when I went to Vietnam, [cough] excuse me, at that point there was a loan forgiveness program for the federal loans, where if you spent a year in Vietnam, 50 percent of your federal loans were forgiven, and then, because you spent a year—I spent a year on the rivers where you couldn't spend any money, I was able to pay off all my student loans by the end of the first year after college, which was very nice.

BURACK: That is—that is quite—quite good.

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: As a drama major, did you partake in the performances, or what was—what were your extracurriculars like at Dartmouth?

RESNICOFF: Yeah. I think drama was a lot—even in a fraternity—I was in Sigma Phi Epsilon (Sig Ep)—back then, we used to have—they don't have it anymore—you know, I asked about it when I was there for Veterans Day, and the fraternities evidently don't have it. We used to have a fraternity competition, where every fraternity would put on a play, so I was in charge—the two years I was in my fraternity, I was in charge of the directing the play that we put on.

I was in—a small part in the big musical. I remember we put on *Oliver*. One of the—we had some—some very, very talented people in our Dartmouth—in theater when I was there, and we had a very good professor, Rod Alexander, who I'm sure is not there any longer. And just—just some very exciting productions.

So both—you know, on the main stage at Hopkins Center and fraternity productions and other productions, you know, —and I mentioned to you that—you know, it was part of my senior—my—my senior project, directing this play in French.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: That was also another—there was a special series of productions at Hopkins Center, smaller in scope—they may still have it now—but so I, mine was put on, you know, as part of that series, the French production. And it was very successful, I have to say [chuckles],—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —and, you know, we got people who speak French and be in it. And so I have very, very good memories of Dartmouth, although, again, it was a very different place, not just because it was all male but there were no major—many of the major highways that are there now were not developed. We didn't have easy bus service to other places. Now, I understand, you can jump on a bus and go to Boston right from the campus,—

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: —right outside of Hopkins Center. I remember hitchhiking for blind dates, you know, through the snow. I mean, one time I remember there was such a snow, it took me, like, seven hours to get from Dartmouth to a blind date at Boston University,—

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: —and one of the people at my fraternity was kind of a local hero because he had this idea: He took a five-gallon gas can, and he, you know, cut it open, covered the inside with

felt or some material, put clips on it, and when he was hitchhiking, he would have the gas can, and people would think his car had broken down and they stopped to ask if they could help, and—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —he would always get rides. You know, and the rest of us [chuckles] wouldn't. And, of course, back then—that also seemed to be the time before we were afraid—afraid of any danger associated with hitchhiking, too. So you know now, when my daughter was growing up, you know, I told her, "Never let me catch you"—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: —hitchhiking." But, you know, I did my share during my days at Dartmouth.

BURACK: You were never afraid? That was going to be my first question.

RESNICOFF: No.

BURACK: I feel like hitchhiking is this scary thing now. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: Yeah. No, you're right. Now—now the drivers are afraid of hitchhikers, and hitchhikers are afraid of the drivers.

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: But, yeah, we didn't think of that at all. We just—that was the way to get away from Dartmouth, you know, for a night or for a weekend.

BURACK: Wow.

So as you came into your senior year, which was 1969 instead of '68—right?—because of the year off?

RESNICOFF: Correct. Correct.

BURACK: How were you feeling about graduating? And I assume by now you knew that you were going to Vietnam? Or—

RESNICOFF: No.

BURACK: You didn't know? Oh.

RESNICOFF: I didn't know I'd be going to Vietnam. And, by the way, you know, my senior year included the trimester in France, so—

BURACK: Oh, yeah.

RESNICOFF: —it was a very exciting, you know, senior year.

BURACK: Where in France was that?

RESNICOFF: Bourges, B-o-u-r-g-e [sic]. And I—

BURACK: Did you—

RESNICOFF: haven't kept in touch with the people there, but it was—

BURACK: Did you enjoy your time there?

RESNICOFF: Very, very much. You know, I stayed with a family that didn't speak any English, and, you know, they were—I forget how many of us, but different Dartmouth students living with different families there, and one Dartmouth professor there for the trimester. And we would come together to study, but a lot of it was just, you know, speaking to the families with whom we were staying and experiencing being in the country.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And I remember three of the other Dartmouth students and I, for one of the vacations, rented a car. I was the only one that could rent it and drive because the year I had spent in Israel—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —put me over the age, whatever it was, that I could rent a car. And we took a trip to England and just had a wonderful time. Yes, so it was a very, very good time. But I still didn't know I was going to Vietnam because—this is kind of a

funny story, but when we got our assignments before graduation in NROTC, we were told where we would be going. Some people were going to bases, so they knew, you know, exactly where it was. Some of us were going to ships, and so we would look up the home port of that ship, and I was assigned to a ship called [USS] *Hunterdon County*, and it was home ported in San Diego.

And my orders were to graduate from Dartmouth—I think I had about six weeks between graduation and the day I had to report, and I had to report to a school for eight weeks in San Diego and then go to my ship. So I sent a letter, like each one of us in Dartmouth, ROTC was supposed to do, to the commanding officer, saying, you know, "I'm in receipt of orders to your command, your ship. I look forward to reporting."

And in my letter, I said, "Since I'll be in San Diego at school for eight weeks, I'll look forward to stopping by the ship and introducing myself." So what I didn't know was that, although the ship was still technically home ported—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —in San Diego, it had been in Vietnam for five years.

BURACK: Oh, wow.

RESNICOFF: So when I finally got to the ship—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: So I didn't learn I was going to Vietnam until I actually arrived in San Diego. But the captain of the ship told me that everyone got a big laugh out of my letter. They—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: —they sent it around to all the officers—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: —saying, "Boy, is this guy, you know, gonna have a shock!"

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: — when he gets to San Diego.

BURACK: A good first impression. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So I—I didn't realize I was going to Vietnam until I got to San Diego. And, of course—you know, I had some fear, but, you know, like most young people, you know, I just assumed I'd come out okay.

BURACK: So after graduation, you went home and then to San Diego?

RESNICOFF: Yes. As a matter of fact, my—my father, you know, had died a long time before '81, and we had taken some cross-country trips as family, but my father was the kind of person that it was the destination, not the journey that was important,—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —and you just had to go, go, go, go, go. And it took us about three days to get from Washington to California. So my mother—

BURACK: Wow!

RESNICOFF: —had always said, you know, that she would like a leisurely trip, so my mother—one of my aunts, one of my mother's sisters was living with her, and so I said to the two of them that "I have six weeks to go to San Diego. Why don't we take a long—the kind of trip you've always dreamed about?" So with my mother and my aunt—you know, we took all six weeks to cross the country. I think we put on 6,000 miles instead of 3,000 miles, just zigzagging across. And got to San Diego, and then the two of them flew home.

And so then I was in the course for eight weeks, and then from there flew to Vietnam from—I forget the name of the [U.S.] Air Force base, but there's an Air Force base somewhere around San Francisco, and we flew on a military plane to Vietnam. I remember we stopped in Juneau, Alaska, just to refuel. And it was a—it was a military charter plane because I remember there was a movie on board, a

Walt Disney [Productions] movie, *The Six Million Dollar Duck* [sic; *Million Dollar Duck*] or something like that.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: And here we all—you know, at varying levels, I think all of us were afraid, and on the way to Vietnam, and we were watching this Walt Disney movie, and it just seemed surreal.

BURACK: Yeah. So you get to Vietnam in August? Is that timing correct?

RESNICOFF: Right. Correct.

BURACK: What—what was your first reaction? Did you go straight to your ship, or—

RESNICOFF: No, the ship was in the rivers, so we landed in Saigon, and everyone had to wait for transportation to get to the ship, and there were different ways, helicopters and different ways to get there. And I remember being in Saigon, and every time someone came towards me, I would walk to the other side of the street because, you know, I just thought everybody had a bomb and everything was dangerous.

And then I met another officer from my ship, who had gone—if you're a year in Vietnam, you get seven days' R&R rest and recuperation, where you go someplace. And he had just come back from his, and so he told me, "Don't worry. Don't wait for your scheduled, you know, flight." He's just gonna make it on his own back to the ship; I should come with him.

And so, you know, he had been there six months at that point, so he knew different ways, and we went on, you know, a boat for a certain amount, then transferred to something else, and transferred—and I was in kind of a haze, but I was just following him, and we did make it back to the ship.

And the ship was a converted LST. You know, in World War II they had these LSTs, where they would have tanks inside them. LST is Landing Ship, Tank. And they would—they would just onto the beach, the front of the ship would—like, a

big door would fall open, and the tanks would roar from the inside, go onto the beach, into the fight.

So at Vietnam, they took a few of these, I think about four or so, and they converted them for the rivers. Instead of the tanks inside, they made workshops to repair the small boats, the river boats, and they reinforced the hull so we could have two helicopters. And we would go as far as we could into the river. In the rainy season, we could go all the way up. As a matter of fact, I was on board when we were the first commissioned vessel to go into Cambodia when [President Richard M.] Nixon ordered us into Cambodia.

But in the dry season—we needed 11 feet of water, so we would go up as far as we could and then become the command ship or the mother ship, they used to call it, for the small boats. The small boats needed six inches of water. They were fiberglass and jet propelled. And we needed the eleven feet.

So, and my job was communications officer, so I was tasked with—I was the one that kept in touch with the other ships, with the—with the small boats, with the helicopters, you know, with the different teams that were sent out.

And also in the 12 months we were there, one month we spent in the Philippines, and one month we spent in Japan because every so many months they needed overhaul, and so it just worked out that I actually spent ten months on the rivers of Vietnam and the other two months, you know, overhauling in the Philippines and Japan.

BURACK: So as a communications officer, who did you report to, and kind of what was your day-to-day duties? What did they look like?

RESNICOFF: Yeah. Well, it was a small ship. There were about ten officers and 90 sailors. We, you know, any encrypted message that came in—these were the days before the computer, so actually the [unintelligible] school I went to in San Diego was how to handle classified messages, and we'd have to—every day the codes would change. We had this machine. You'd set the different wheels, depending on the daily codes. And the person who sent the message, if

everything worked, would have the wheels and the right, the same position, so that—so that I could decode them.

So I, anytime a classified message came in, I had to immediately stop what I was doing and go into the little room that was locked with security locks and operate the machine. I remember I almost never could finish a meal. I could never get a full night's sleep. I always had to be the one to do that.

I had to—you know, when we were having helicopter operations, you know, be the one on the radio phone, in contact with helicopters.

We also all took our turns standing, you know, duty as officer of the deck. There had to be someone 24 hours so that—I remember we had a rifle. If you saw a twig or a branch coming toward us, we had to shoot at it because it could be camouflage for, you know, a Viet Cong who was going to plant a bomb.

The days ended up going pretty quickly, just because of, you know, all the different operations that we were involved with, and the different—you know, people came on board because of helicopters, the boats. And I—I—I reported to the operations officer, who reported to the commanding officer.

So again, there were just ten officers, so it was, you know, very close ties, all of us.

BURACK: So when you were in the rivers of Vietnam, did you interact with other units? Is that the correct word? Or were you a pretty isolated boat?

RESNICOFF: No, units is correct. And I'd say because we became the mother ship or the command ship,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —we were constantly interacting with other people who wanted to come on just for a shower or—or some hot food or refuel a helicopter, rearm the helicopter. We broke all records the day we went into Cambodia because then we were refueling and rearming not just the Navy helicopters but also [U.S.] Army and [U.S.] Air Force and even Vietnamese.

And they were, you know, just landing to get refueled and rearmed, taking off. And, you know, so we were always interacting with, you know, others who needed our help as the command ship.

BURACK: What did you think of being the first ship to go into Cambodia?

RESNICOFF: Well, I remember we were afraid, and they brought a lot of body bags on board because everybody thought we would have casualties. It ended up we didn't. And, you know, the whole incursion into Cambodia—there were very few casualties, which may have been a good thing, I mean, because people cleared out when we went in.

But at that point, those of us in the rivers saw the issue very simply. It was like a place—an officer in America who would chase, you know, a criminal and you couldn't go over the line,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —over the state line. And so in theory, that operation, you know, was to fight back against the Viet Cong who were attacking us and then going over the line, and we couldn't go over them, so politically I'm sure everything was more muddied and more complicated, and I know there were divisions in America about the danger of expanding the war and everything else, but for those of us there who were or could possibly be the targets of the attack, you know, we thought we would—that it made sense to make the statement that we would fight back even if it meant crossing the line.

BURACK: So on that note, how aware were you of the political goings on when you were in Vietnam?

RESNICOFF: A little. You know, it was—it was—sometimes I hear people who were in Vietnam speaking as if they're the expert on everything, and it always reminds me of the, you know, poem about the blind man—blind man and the elephant, you know,—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —where each one feels another —

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: — part of the elephant and they think they know—you know, they feel the tail and they think the elephant is like a snake or whatever. And I really felt that was our situation, that in some ways, I understood things going on in my small area of operations better than others, better than people back home, but in other ways, you know, I was convinced that I knew less about some of the big-picture operations.

For instance, Vietnam certainly convinced me about the importance of leadership. We had the commanding officer of my ship—when I reported on board, was actually drunk a lot of the time, even though alcohol was strictly forbidden on U.S. ships, and he got us in danger a lot, and I think we, as officers, made bad decisions protecting him and not turning him in. As a chaplain—I would use that story a lot, talk about how sometimes you think you're helping people by covering and you're not.

But then the new commanding officer came a couple of months after I'd been on board, and got everything changed. He was very ethical. He was very strong, you know, and I think that he—and I learned how one officer in charge could make the difference between atrocities in one area or—or ethical,—you know, strong fighters but, you know, who kept values in mind in another. So—so I learned a lot about that.

I also learned about the — how dirty war is. I remember that, you know, we had—we were told which areas along the coast, along the river were free-fire zones, and that meant that there were no friendly people living there, and so if we saw movement, that meant it was the enemy and we should fire. And then later on, we learned that, well, hopefully most of the time that's what was happening.

There also were local chiefs, you know, in different villages who had arguments with other chiefs, and so they would report, you know, that that other area was—should be a free-fire zone so that we would fire, you know, on the enemies of the— and I don't mean military enemies. I mean the

competition or people they had arguments with. So we would be getting involved unknowingly, you know, and being kind of the muscle for these local chieftains.

And, you know, there were just so many things that—you know, we did realize, I think, that many of the people back home who were divided over Vietnam saw the complicated issues, but many didn't. And I—and I think that many people back home saw this as, you know, a civil war that we shouldn't get involved with, north against south, and others saw it as an incursion from the north and we were protecting the people in the south, and it was more—it wasn't like both sides were fighting because one were being slaughtered.

And I think the problem with Vietnam was that it was both. You know, in part it was—in some areas, there was a civil war; we should have not got involved. In others, it was innocent victims being slaughtered. And if you believe that we should go to help other people, then we should have been involved.

So it was just very complicated, and that, that feeling has lasted with me my whole life, that you just can't look at the situations in simplistic ways, that they are very complicated and ultimately, probably, a little dirty.

BURACK: To go back to your commander.

RESNICOFF: Right.

BURACK: So he was the commander when you arrived, the one who was drinking a lot.

RESNICOFF: Correct.

BURACK: So how did you sort of respond to that as a new officer and what was the —

RESNICOFF: Well, it's very interesting, and I've actually used this a lot in leadership classes and especially after the Navy, when I worked for the [U.S.] Air Force and I was going around talking about ethics, talking about values. Again, I was, like, one of about ten officers, and the other nine — in one way or another, it was part of my reporting on board—took me aside

and told me the situation. And they said, “Protect the old man.” You know, “the old man” was the expression they used to use in the Navy for the commanding officer, and, you know, he has two months to go. You know, “Protect the old man.”

And so I used to say, in my leadership courses and presentations, that it’s not the problem that people in the military don’t have values or in general that people don’t have values; it’s that they have the wrong values and, you know, that this idea of “protect the old man”—maybe it would work in some corporation, you know, with plausible deniability, but not where life is at stake. And at that point, you know, what we should have been doing is saying to the commanding officer, “You need to report yourself. You need to turn yourself in and say you need help, or else we need to—we will do something.” Because he was—we thought we were protecting him, but, you know, we ended up endangering all of us, including him.

I remember once we got beached along the river, and luckily we got off at high tide. But we were trapped there, like a sitting duck, and we never reported it. We never made an official report, just covered it up. And, you know, I just breathed a sigh of relief when—when he—he finished those two months and he was off.

BURACK: So was there someone on board that you could kind of talk to about your worries, or you just kept them to yourself, or—

RESNICOFF: No,—

BURACK: —they’re retrospective worries?

RESNICOFF: —because I was convinced by these others that the right thing to do was to protect our commanding officer. You know, it’s like police who protect the bad police. I mean, you—you fall into that trap. And I think today more and more, you know, things are changing, but, you know, I was convinced that I was doing the *strong* thing, and, as I say when I tell that story now in ethics courses, to other officers, I was really doing the cowardly thing, the weak thing. And, you know, that—so I learned lessons. You know, I learned a lot of lessons.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And, like I say, the new commanding officer—because it was such a small ship, ultimately, compared to these—like, an aircraft carrier has 6,000 people; we had 100 people—the commanding officer was not senior. You know, he, himself, was not that experienced. And all of us were kind of just doing the best that we could.

BURACK: Yeah. How aware were the sailors of what was going on? Or it was like everyone knew sort of thing.

RESNICOFF: I—I think that they probably knew there was some drinking. I don't think they knew the details about how much danger we were being put in, because the officers did a good job, again, of covering. You know, sailors went on with their daily tasks and their daily lives. So I think the knowledge was more among the officers, maybe some of the very senior sailors, but—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —in general, I think everybody was afraid enough of just being in Vietnam and in the rivers that this didn't add a lot to their concern.

BURACK: Did you ever have a chaplain on board?

RESNICOFF: Well, we had—we weren't big enough to have our own chaplain. Most of the ships didn't. So that's where we had a circuit-riding chaplain for the Mekong Delta, an Episcopal priest. And I became very, very friendly with him, and he made me what they called the Jewish lay leader—you know, whenever a chaplain is one religion, he or she, you know, appoints lay leaders for all the different religions, who then become kind of the principal points of contact when the chaplain has questions about different religions, when the different religious communities want to make sure people know a holiday is coming or what the needs are—you know, Passover is coming or something else is happening.

And so this chaplain would cover many different units, and when he showed up on the ship—you know, so he made—

he said, 'You're Jewish." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You just volunteered to be the Jewish lay leader."

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: [cross-talk; unintelligible].

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So he and I became friendly, and ultimately he was the one that encouraged me to think about being a rabbi.

But in the meantime, you know, he would—he would—when he met Jewish sailors on some of the different ships and some of the units, he'd give me their names, and there was an organization called the National Jewish Welfare Board. It still exists, with a different name and a little different character. But they would send us special supplies for Jewish Holy Days, and so I would be the one that got them and try to, you know, distribute them to the other ships, the other boats.

And one time, for Yom Kippur, this chaplain found—asked me if I could lead a service for Yom Kippur, and we went to a little island, An Toi. And there wasn't a lot of us there, and it was kind of in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. You know,—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —I went to Hebrew school, and I could read the prayers, even though I didn't speak Hebrew at that point. And so, you know, I led a simple service for Yom Kippur. And so as as these things happened, this chaplain and I got more and more friendly, and that's when he started to ask me if I'd ever considered being a rabbi. And at his urging, I started writing to the rabbinical school where I ultimately ended up. This chaplain even offered to try to get me out of the Navy early, after the year in Vietnam, you know, saying I could go out and come back and be a chaplain. And I said, well, I didn't want to make any promises. And also if I did ever end up being a chaplain, the experience as a regular officer—what we called a line officer would make me a better chaplain, I thought.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: So after Vietnam I was sent to California for a year of—I was assigned to naval intelligence, so I was sent to California for a year to learn Russian, and then I was sent to Spain to work with naval intelligence. And during that time in California and in Spain, I was corresponding with people at the Jewish Theological Seminary [of America], which is where I eventually went. And when I got out of the Navy, ended up going to rabbinical school and then thought I was going back in the Navy for one assignment, which would have been three years, but ended up staying for 25 years.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

So as a Jewish lay leader, you had the opportunity to meet all the other—or not all but most of the other Jewish soldiers—sailors in the area?

RESNICOFF: Either meet or, or be in contact with. You know, it helped me—because I was the communications officer,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —so I could speak with the communications officers on the different ships and the different units and say to them, "You know, I have some special Jewish supplies for this holiday," and there always were boats and—

Are you still there?

BURACK: Yeah. Sorry. Did it just cut out for a second?

RESNICOFF: I think I have another call, but I'll just ignore it. I'll call them back.

BURACK: Okay. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So I—because I was in touch with the other ships, I could figure out, you know, where to send the different supplies. And—and—and, you know, sometimes a boat would come by and someone would be on, and someone that I had sent something to, so they'd want to meet me, so I did meet—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —you know, some of the other Jewish military personnel, but it wasn't that frequent an occurrence.

BURACK: In your experience, how much did people sort of depend upon their faith, whether that be Judaism or a different one?

RESNICOFF: I think—you know, I don't think that much. I don't think we talked about it that much, because as a chaplain, you know, I got much more involved.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: But even then, you know, except at places like boot camp or at the academies, where people would do anything to get out of training, so they would go to chapel services, chapel services in general, you know, are not highly attended. People—there are some groups where that's an exception, and were very religious, but in general, I found that we didn't talk about religion very much.

As a matter of fact, when I was in Vietnam,—those are the old days, where it was forbidden at the—in the ward room, which is where the officers eat, to talk about sex, religion or politics. Those things were forbidden. And it was also a very different atmosphere back then. There still was a formality that we've lost on a lot of ships these days, where, you know, you went in, you stood behind your chair until the commanding officer came in, and when the commanding officer sat down, we sat down. And there were pretty basic rules about what you could talk about what you couldn't, and religion was one of the things we didn't talk about.

BURACK: So when you did—was Yom Kippur the service—the only service you did in Vietnam?

RESNICOFF: That's right. It was the only service I did in Vietnam.

BURACK: So what was that like?

RESNICOFF: It was a real experience. I mean, you know, I think that nobody who came was really traditionally very observant, but

people were proud to be Jewish, and they were curious about who else was Jewish there. And it wasn't a day of reflecting and coming together and thinking about big issues, but, you know,—and the prayers were very simple. You had some Hebrew prayers, some English prayers. And we certainly didn't do it all day like you do in a traditional synagogue. But we did something. And I think we all felt good that we did something.

BURACK: Yeah.

So over the course of your year in Vietnam, you interacted with the Episcopalian. Is that correct? The chaplain?

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: He was Episcopalian?

RESNICOFF: Yes, Episcopal priest.

BURACK: Episcopal priest. How did he kind of convince you to think about becoming a rabbi? What were your conversations about?

RESNICOFF: He—he was a wonderful man, who taught me about what it meant to be a chaplain. I'm still in touch with him. He's still alive. He even wrote a book about his memoirs, and about three pages in it is about me, which I'm very proud of.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: But you know —

BURACK: What's the name of his memoirs?

RESNICOFF: What was that?

BURACK: Sorry to interrupt you. What's the name of his memoir?

RESNICOFF: *All That Glitters*. Hold on one second. Let me—I know where it is, and I'll make sure I'm getting the—the name exactly right. But his name is Lester [L.] Westling [Jr.], W-e-s-t-l-i-n-g. And it's *All That Glitters … Memoirs of a Minister*

BURACK: Okay.

RESNICOFF: You know, he firmly believed, rightly, that the role of the chaplain is to help other peo- —other people—I mean, people of your own religion—you know, you always have a special relationship with, so I'll be a rabbi to Jews, but that as a chaplain you help people of all religions on their spiritual journey, strengthen them. And people of no religion, you help them. We have a saying in the chaplaincy, "You minister to your own. You facilitate ministry to others." So, for instance, you know, I'll never lead a Catholic or a Protestant or a Muslim service, but I'll make sure it happens. I'll make sure someone is leading it. And you care for all, and that includes people, you know, with no religion, because in the military, the only person who has 100 percent privileged communication is a chaplain. So even lawyers and doctors don't have 100 percent, which means —

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: People know they can say something to a chaplain in full confidence, you know, that they couldn't say to anybody else.

So anyway,—

BURACK: So back to—yeah.

RESNICOFF: —the chaplain—whoever he would work with on the ship, he would try to be available to them, not forcing religion on them but be available in terms of helping them if they had questions and helping them be stronger in their own religion.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

So after you left Vietnam in August 1970, you went straight to California for your next assignment?

RESNICOFF: I went to California. That's right. Monterey, California. Defense Language Institute. Forty-seven weeks of Russian. And then—

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: —from there I went to Rota, Spain, R-o-t-a, and that's where I worked with naval intelligence until I got out and went to Jewish Theological Seminary.

BURACK: What was it like working in naval intelligence?

RESNICOFF: It was very exciting. We—you had to take a special course, a special test to be accepted, which I took when I was in Vietnam. You know, it was—then you were with people who—we used to like to think that we were the cream of the crop—you know, passed the test and had to have certain backgrounds and were trusted. We'd get security clearances and did things that other people didn't know about. And, you know, we did—I rode submarines. I—I—I—I was flown on airplanes with all kinds of sophisticated listening devices and, you know, I had a team of people working under me. Spoke different languages, so we could, you know, listen in on communications at different countries around the Mediterranean [Sea].

And a lot of this stuff, we weren't allowed to even say we did. Now, because so many books have been written about it, we're allowed to say what we did,—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —but we can't—I can't say I was on this specific submarine on these specific dates, but I can say I was on submarines. And so it was exciting. You know, we thought we were doing something important, and we had this—Spain was a great place to be. And, you know, both California and Spain were great after a year in Vietnam.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: So, you know, life was good.

BURACK: How did your experience in Vietnam influence these years in naval intelligences, and vice versa: How did your years in naval intelligence—did it interact with what was going on in Vietnam, or was it focused on other areas? If you can answer that.

RESNICOFF: Well, I mean, I—again, many of the leadership lessons I learned in Vietnam were important to me throughout the rest of my naval career, both in naval intelligence and—and later as a chaplain. Naval intelligence helped remind me—kind of strengthened the lesson I had in Vietnam, that things are much more complicated than they appear and that we should beware of self-proclaimed experts that think they know so much.

You know, when I was in naval intelligence and people would be in arguments about this or that, Russia, whatever, the people who were the most silent, you know, were the people who knew the most information and we couldn't talk about it because, you know, we—sometimes you weren't even sure what you knew, because of classified sources and whatnot. And so I really, again, became aware of the fact that so many people think they know what they're talking about, and they don't, and they—

I remember my mother used to quote an old saying to me when I was growing up. You know, God gave us two ears and one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak.

BURACK: [Laughs.] That's a good one.

RESNICOFF: People rarely do that, I think. So, you know, I just realized people—there are many people, even commentators on television when I listen, you know, that don't seem to learn that they have a discussion. They have their set beliefs, and the fact that they don't want someone else's opinions, or even facts, to get in the way.

So I realized that there were a lot of things going on in the world that just are not so apparent, and some positive. And there's room, you know, for hope when other people didn't have so much hope, but also some room for caution when other people didn't think there was any reason to have fear.

BURACK: Yeah.

So after naval intelligence, you went to Jewish Theological Seminary?

RESNICOFF: Went to Jewish Theological Seminary.

BURACK: What year did you start?

RESNICOFF: So it must have been around ’72.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And—’69, seven zero—yeah. And I remember that Abraham Joshua Heschel was on my interview committee. Specifically, I learned later, he wanted to be because, along with [the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King Jr., he had been a big voice against Vietnam.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: But he had never really sat down with anyone, especially anyone Jewish, who had been in Vietnam, so he was on my interview committee, and afterwards we sat and talked and—you know, the time I was at seminary and I got to know him.

And, you know, the years at seminary were very important. I had a —six months of the time I was there I was in Israel. It was a program where you could go to Israel for a year, but halfway through seminary, I got married and my wife was one of the assistant attorneys general for New York, and she could only get a six-month leave of absence. So we got permission to just go for six months. And the time went pretty quickly.

And then afterwards—and while I was the seminary, I stayed in the Reserves and would go to different bases, doing a Passover Seder, doing a Chanukah service—you know, so I kept my hand in. And also chaplain school—you know, each of the services—Army, Navy and Air Force—has a different chaplain school, where you go with other—either ministers, priests, rabbis, imams who are on their way to becoming chaplains or, as in my case, a seminary student who was thinking of being a chaplain in the future. And so you got to meet other people and learn about each other’s religions at the same time you were learning about the military and the role of a chaplain. And so that time went pretty quickly. And

then we went off to our first assignment, my first assignment as a chaplain, which was in Japan.

BURACK: So just to clarify, you were simultaneously in chaplain school and in seminary?

RESNICOFF: No, the chaplain school—

BURACK: Oh.

RESNICOFF: —is—you did in the summer, and I actually did half of it in one summer, half of it in another summer—

BURACK: Oh, it wasn't, like, a long program.

RESNICOFF: No. At that point, the Navy chaplain—I think today it's a little longer, but at that point, the Navy chaplain school was eight weeks, and you could do it four weeks in one summer and four weeks in another.

BURACK: Okay. And when you were in seminary, were you the only one who had served in Vietnam, or were you the only one who had a military—like, desire for a military career—or not career, more military service?

RESNICOFF: Yeah, I was the only one in seminary at that point who did not go straight from high school to college to seminary. You know, the draft was over people's heads, and that was a time where both JTS, Jewish Theological Seminary, and many of the other Christian seminaries, where people were pretty honest that they enrolled in seminary only to avoid serving in the military. So we had a lot of people there who were—really were not as convinced they should be rabbis, as convinced they shouldn't be in the military. And so it was pretty anti-military bent.

And yet I was able to convince a few of the other seminary students to go in the military as chaplains as well, so there were two or three others who ended up going in; one other who stayed in as a whole career and retired. The others, you know, just had different—one assignment or two assignments. But I was the first person many of them knew or had met, you know, who had really been in the military, certainly in Vietnam, so there were a lot of questions.

BURACK: Did you feel like you had to constantly defend yourself?

RESNICOFF: No, not really. I explained myself, I would say.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And I even ended up speaking across the street—at that point it was Union Theological Seminary; now I think it may have moved to another location, but it was a major Protestant seminary, and I spoke there. And at that point, there were a few questions where, you know, I felt the questions were attacks. But, you know, I could deal with them.

And I remember one of the ques- —it was a very anti-military seminary. And I remember one of the questions was, "How could you, as a person of faith, you know, join the military?" And I said, "You're right. We should just take the animals, the people with no faith at all, and give them guns and have them defend our country." You know, again, it goes back to my feelings about ROTC, that we want people in the military who really would prefer not to be there but are there—they're not there for a career. They take it with a grain of salt. They do the best they can, and they inject some humanity and some leadership.

And yeah, but I think it was more of a curiosity—although there was one of my fellow rabbinical students who admitted later on—even in an article—that he had been head of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] at his university. He was violently, virulently anti-Vietnam, and he was prepared to hate me and was surprised that he liked me.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: And we ended up being friends and, I'm sure, learning from each other.

BURACK: Yeah. So when you left seminary, you went straight into a posting as a chaplain?

RESNICOFF: That's correct. Coast of Japan. I went with my wife. It was a three-year assignment, and after two years our daughter was born, and because—

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: —our assignment there was so positive and we had good memories because of the birth of our daughter, we decided, well, let's do one more assignment, then one more assignment.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: And that's actually the way I ended up doing 25 more years, 'cause I never really made the decision to make it a career. It was always a decision: Do I want one more assignment or not?

BURACK: So when you were deciding whether you wanted another assignment, what would your other option have been? Like, work for a congregation, or—

RESNICOFF: That—that always was an option. And, as a matter of fact, along the line, the different places we were assigned, I was approached, you know, by some congregations who were, you know, in the process of looking for rabbis, and—I mean, it always was a question—also, there could have been—at one point JTS was interested in having me come to them. There were organizations. There was a big Jewish organization—and there were always other options. But I felt I was doing something important. I felt I was doing something for a segment of the Jewish community that was often forgotten, the Jews in the military. Plus I felt I was doing something important for interfaith relations,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —because, you know, as a chaplain, when I helped other—not just the sailors and the officers but when I helped other chaplains, you know, we were building bridges of understanding and relationships that I thought were important for our country.

BURACK: So as a chaplain in Japan, what was your—what was your main, like, day-to-day sort of activity, or did it, was it —

RESNICOFF: Well, in Japan—

BURACK: —not constant?

RESNICOFF: —I was the only—yeah, I was the only Jewish chaplain in all of mainland Japan. There was another one on Okinawa [Islands], but in all of mainland Japan, so in addition to my role as a chaplain on the base, which meant counseling people of all religions but also leading Jewish services and dealing with, you know, different issues, I would circuit ride. Just like the Episcopal priests circuit rode within the Mekong Delta,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —I would circuit ride and visit the Army, Air Force, [U.S.] Marine Corps, [U.S.] Coast Guard bases all over Japan. So I spent a lot of time on the trains or in helicopters, being brought around to all the different bases. I would try to visit most of the other bases, you know, at least once a month, just for a visit, and then maybe once every three months for a weekend, which would include Shabbat and the Jewish Sabbath, and lead services.

And, of course, there I was the one, you know, who was trying to help the Jewish lay leaders at all the other bases, because where there was no chaplain, where there was no Jewish chaplain, the senior chaplain of all those bases would be appointing a Jewish lay leader, just like he or she was appointing other lay leaders. And that would be my point of contact also during the times when I wasn't there.

So it was very interesting. I got to know a little bit about the different services, the differences between the services, and really learned a lot.

BURACK: Do you see the role of the chaplain as more emphasized on, like, kind of visiting and reaching out to members of the faith or more on the interfaith side?

RESNICOFF: I think as a junior chaplain, it's more working within your own faith, and then, as you get more and more senior so you have chaplains working for you, you see the bigger and bigger picture,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —and you're working more and more so that the senior chaplains would have to make sure, you know, that even in a place like Afghanistan or Iraq, that you, you know, had visiting rabbis for the High Holy Days, that you had visiting, you know, additional Catholic priests, you know, at certain times when you needed them. You had visiting Mormon chaplains to meet with the Mormon military personnel.

So-so—as—you know, as—and, of course, my last assignment in the military, when I was the chaplain for the European command, which was over, at that point, 93 countries—the American forces in all of Europe and most of Africa, 13 million square miles, so I was the senior chaplain, which meant that all of the Army, Navy, Air Force chaplains of all religions in all that area ultimately would come under me for supervision.

And, you know, I would visit all these different bases, all these different places and see, you know, how we could coordinate, how we could share assets, how we could reach out and help the chaplains, who then would help the people.

BURACK: So that posting—was that right after Japan? That seems like a big jump. Or I guess a logical one.

RESNICOFF: No. No, that was 25 years later.

BURACK: Oh, never mind.

RESNICOFF: My first assignment was Japan, yeah, and that was my last assignment,—

BURACK: Okay.

RESNICOFF: —'97 to 2000, before I retired.

BURACK: So after Japan, where—did you come back to the States, or what was next for you?

RESNICOFF: Yeah, after Japan, we went to [Naval Station Norfolk in] Norfolk, Virginia, which is the biggest Navy base in the world, and there I was the Jewish chaplain for the Navy base, but also it's the home port for the [U.S.] 6th Fleet. Actually, not the 6th Fleet. The 6th Fleet was the Mediterranean, when I was the chaplain there. Now I forget exactly which fleet is in Norfolk, but I worked with the different ships, you know, who would, which would come into the port and which would go out as well.

BURACK: What was the biggest difference between working there and working in Japan? Besides the obvious.

RESNICOFF: By the way, is it possible to take a short break—

BURACK: Oh, yeah, of course.

RESNICOFF: —and continue?

[Recording interruption.]

BURACK: Hello. This is Emily Burack. I am in Rauner Special Collections Library in Hanover, New Hampshire, on Friday, February 12th, 2016. It is 9:15 in the morning, and I am speaking with Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, who is in Washington, D.C. right now.

Good morning.

RESNICOFF: Good morning.

BURACK: So let's pick off where we left off two days ago. We were just discussing your move from Japan, I think. Yes.

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: Yes, you had just left Japan and went to Norfolk.

RESNICOFF: Correct.

BURACK: Can you tell me a little about how that move was and how it was different being in Norfolk than being in Japan?

RESNICOFF: Well, in Norfolk there's actually a separate Jewish chapel, one of the few separate Jewish chapels in the Navy and possibly the oldest, and so my job in Norfolk was the closest to being a synagogue rabbi of any job I ever had in the military. I had services Friday nights and Saturday mornings. I had Hebrew school class for the children of the military people. I had, you know, all kinds of other classes and lectures.

And in addition to that, you know, I did all the things any chaplain does: counsel people of any religion, involved in a lot of programs to help the military. We had anti-suicide programs back then. They have gotten stronger over the years, but we had a good one there.

So, you know—and we also had interfaith programs, where chaplains would be on a panel and try to talk about faith from different points of view. But, you know, it was a large Jewish community in the military because—I think I mentioned last time, it's the largest Navy base in the world, which actually includes a lot of different little Navy stations around the area.

So it was a change from Japan, where I would go to—you know, where I was covering the whole country, and I would go to many, many Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard bases, and each one would just have a small group of Jewish personnel, and I would work through lay leaders to develop programs kind of remotely and then beef them up when I had a visit, but do it long distance.

BURACK: Did you prefer the more stable nature of the congregation sort of vibe in Norfolk?

RESNICOFF: No. I think I—each assignment that I've had in my career has been different, and each one has had different rewards, and I think that the fact that every two or three years I could change, try something new, is what I—I enjoyed.

BURACK: All right. So after you were in Norfolk, where, what was your next assignment?

RESNICOFF: So then I went to—if I'm remembering correctly, that's when I went to the 6th Fleet. The 6th Fleet—a lot of civilians picture a fleet as, you know, a set number of ships. The 6th Fleet is actually made up of all ships that are in the Mediterranean at a given time, so ships go in and out of the 6th Fleet as they go through the Straits [sic] of Gibraltar. And there's one commander of the 6th Fleet, a three-star admiral, and he has his own ship, a flagship of the 6th Fleet, and a staff on that ship.

So actually, when I went in, they tried something new. They had a rabbi, priest and a minister on the staff of the 6th Fleet commander, so I was the first rabbi. And our job would be to cover all of the ships, you know, that were in the Mediterranean at a given time. I would go ship to ship to ship. Plus the Marines, who were in Beirut [Lebanon], came onto us because Navy chaplains cover—in addition to the Navy, we cover the Marines and the Coast Guard.

BURACK: When you were going from ship to ship or in your other stations as well, did you seek out people to talk to, or when they knew there was a chaplain on board did they come to you?

RESNICOFF: Both. I think that a chaplain's work is just as important talking to people while you're eating, talking to people as you're walking around the ship and visiting different work spaces, meeting people. I think for a person to make a decision to make an appointment and come to a chaplain, you know, it's a big thing, and there's usually an issue, but the one advantage a chaplain has, where clergy in the civilian world don't, is that, you know, we're just always around while they're working, while they're eating, while they're playing, and we develop relationships so that people can ask questions off the cuff without setting up some formal meeting.

BURACK: I see.

So when were you—when did you start your assignment on the 6th Fleet?

RESNICOFF: Eighty-two to ’84. I forget exactly the month, but the 6th Fleet—that was the time of—it was probably the summer of ’82 to the summer of ’84, but, you know, it was during that time that we had the truck bomb attack in Beirut October 23rd, 1983, and I was there for that.

BURACK: Would you tell me, what was it, what was it like being there in Beirut—

RESNICOFF: Well, yeah I had.

BURACK: —during—when that happened and the aftermath?

RESNICOFF: Right. I—I had been going to Beirut frequently, just like I would go ship to ship and then Beirut, ship to ship and then Beirut. The Marines in Beirut were generally there six months at a time. Back then they were called a MAU [pronounced to rhyme with cow], a Marine Amphibious Unit; now I think it’s a MEU [pronounced mew], M-E-U, Marine Expeditionary Unit. And they would generally have a Catholic chaplain and Protestant chaplain with them, and then I would go, you know, as the 6th Fleet chaplain.

And, I would go on a regular basis, even when there was no special reason, although I would go to lead—I remember I was there for Rosh Hashanah one time. And, actually, shelling started right after we started our services, and ended up in a foxhole. I was there for—

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: —Chanukah. I remember I took a piece of wood, and I took empty shells and nailed them in and made a menorah, Chanukkiah [pronounced chah (with a guttural “ch”)-nu-key-AH] out of the shells, and I always link that to the image of beating your swords into plowshares.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: So I was, you know, using shells, instruments of violence and death, to represent the flame of hope and faith.

But the way I ended up in Beirut for the explosion was that there was an individual, Allen [H.] Soifert, a Marine from New

Hampshire, who was killed, and he was about—we had about 1,300 Marines in Beirut as part of the multinational force, and Allen Soifert was just the fifth American to die, and he died from sniper fire. And so the Marines—you know, there were hardly any Jewish Marines in this whole group, but they thought that out of respect to Allen, to their comrade, that it would be good to have a Jewish chaplain lead a service.

So I traveled to Beirut, and I remember I had to go from—you know, I was in Gaeta [Italy], the home port of the 6th Fleet, and we had to go to Naples to get a plane to Sicily, and from Sicily a plane to Cyprus, and Cyprus a helicopter into Beirut, so it took a few days, and by the time I got there—it was a Friday, and they had already flown Allen's body home to New Hampshire. The military and the governor of New Hampshire cooperated to get—as you know, according to Jewish law, you try your best to have the body buried within 24 hours. So, you know, it was just a memorials service that I was going to do in Beirut.

So I got there, and I did it on a Friday, and there was no way I could get back in time to Italy before Shabbat, the Sabbath, and I don't travel from Friday night to Saturday night, the Jewish Sabbath. So I stayed, and the plan was that I would go back on Sunday. And Sunday at 6:30 in the morning, Beirut time, was the attack.

And I remember that I happened to be in the bathroom, brushing my teeth, and most of the other Marines—it was a lazy Sunday morning, and it was near the end of their six-month assignment, so they were just, you know, calm, and most of them were young teenagers, and that's when the explosion happened.

There were two buildings where the Marines stayed, and I would alternate in one or the other every time I visited, and one had the Catholic chaplain and one had the Protestant chaplain, and I actually was supposed to be in the building that was hit, where the Protestant chaplain was, but the Catholic chaplain had asked me to stay with him. There was an issue he wanted to talk to me about.

And while I was brushing my teeth, you know, the building shook. I mean, the doors came off the hinges. The furniture fell. And I remember throwing myself to the floor, and for a few seconds afterwards, you know, we really were kind of slapping each other on the back and being happy that no one was hurt, because we thought we had been hit by a rocket or a mortar.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And it wasn't until only seconds later, when we heard the screams outside, that we realized the other building had been hit and we had just experienced the shock blast. After the explosion, an FBI team came over, and they said it was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever recorded. It was—you know, if you remember the newsreels, there was a four-stor- —the other building was a four-story building that just was reduced to rubble.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And the Protestant chaplain had been in the other building and was one of the few to survive, although he was buried for a number of hours, until we dug him out. And a lot of things that happened—it was four days of digging, still trying to find people that might be alive. And then, of course, digging for the body parts so they could be collected and put in body bags and flown home.

And four days after the attack, George H. W. Bush, who was vice president at that point, came as part of a White House team, leading the White House team. And along with him, the admiral of the 6th Fleet, my boss, came, [Paul] P. X. Kelley, who was the commandant of the Marine Corps, came.

And during that visit, Vice President Bush invited me to write a report of what had happened and send it to the president, Ronald [W.] Reagan. And that report ended up being President Reagan's keynote speech to Jerry [L.] Falwell [Sr.'s] convention of 20,000 Baptists in Washington, D.C.

BURACK: Wow. And there's the famous image that came out of that of you with the camouflage kippah [pronounced KEY-paw].

RESNICOFF: Right. What happened was at that point, it wasn't exactly legal to wear a kippah with a uniform, but it was case by case. It was very hard to get permission. And but as a chaplain, I had no trouble.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: The question was for a non-chaplain. And when the explosion happened, you know, we were literally—until the—until help came, we were literally tearing our clothes apart to try to wipe blood or mud or dirt, you know, off of people. And when I was brushing my teeth, I had a t-shirt on and trousers, and when we ran out to try to help people—and I remember the Catholic chaplain just said, "Follow me." You know, I followed him, and we started doing everything we could for the wounded until, you know, help arrived. You know, eventually helicopters would come.

And I don't know how long it took for—one of the things that happened is that, you know, most of the people who died—there were 241 who died—most of the people who died were Marines, but also there was a handful of people from other services, and the Navy corpsmen—you know, like physician's assistants—many of them—I think most of them were among the casualties.

And so the Navy people who actually would have been the ones administering—administering help, you know, were dead. So they started flying, you know, doctors and—and corpsmen in from the different ships around, because we did have a number of Navy ships off the coast, and helicopters to try to take the wounded back either to the ship—because some of the ships had pretty good hospitals on board—or to Cyprus—you know, wherever they could take them to get help.

But it was—it was—at one point, after I had torn my t-shirt apart, I used my kippah to just wipe some blood or dirt. It just got dirty and I kind of threw it away and kept working, and it was Catholic chaplain who had been a friend of mine for many, many years, Father George [W.] Pucciarelli, who had never seen me without my head covered, who actually tore a piece of his uniform off, camouflage uniform, and gave it to

me, and he said—he—he had a purple stole that he quickly threw around his neck, over his uniform, and he said that he wanted—you know, and I remember how he said it. He said, "In this country, where every religion is fighting with every other religion," he wanted the Marines to remember not only, you know, the chaplains helped everyone, regardless of religion, but the Christian chaplain and the Jewish chaplain side by side did that.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And so that story—it was, you know, told by President Reagan when he read my report, and he told it to other groups, I have a news article where a group of Chabad rabbis visited the White House, and the president told that story, you know, to them. And based on that story, which was read into the Congressional Record for the Senate and House, the bill to allow military personnel to wear kippahs with uniforms, which had failed to pass for two years, passed that year. And the people working on the bill told me that that story was what made the difference.

BURACK: Yeah. And that wasn't your first foray into working in politics. You had earlier worked on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, right? Before that or after that?

RESNICOFF: No, that's right, because that was '83. The explosion was '83, and the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was November '82, Veterans Day '82. And what had happened—you know, the Vietnam memorial was not my idea; that was the idea of an Army—an ex-Army corporal, Jan [C.] Scruggs, a wonderful man who just had this vision that—you know, Vietnam veterans were being mistreated. He had that understand, and he had a vision of a memorial that would change that.

And so he got a group together, and he asked me to join the group because I was unusual in that I had been in Vietnam before I was a chaplain. I had been in, you know, the rivers as a regular Navy officer.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —but then, by that time had become a chaplain, so I was first brought in to give the prayer at the groundbreaking. And it was interesting: The groundbreaking—you know, just about fifty or a hundred people showed up, and then at the actual dedication we had something like 100,000 people show up. And a lot of people who loved the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—as a matter of fact, once I wrote an op-ed likening it to the Kotel, the Western Wall in Israel, saying it's sacred ground, a holy space where people really do treat it as something sacred, and watching you see them coming, they leave notes. They leave gifts. They make rubbings, you know, of the names. They hold a baby up to kiss a name. And by this time you don't even know the relationship. You know, originally I'm sure it was children, and now maybe it's grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

But, you know, that memorial—it was—was really an example of the power that an image can have in terms of changing the vision of a nation, because before that memorial, people who were against the war took out their feelings on the war fighters, and these were, for the most part, young kids who were drafted, went over, just tried to do a good job, and they didn't go over to get rich. They didn't go over to rape and pillar [sic] and plunder. They went over. They were scared. They had a terrible year, and then they came back, you know, and there was no welcome parade. And, you know, many of them have never gotten over that experience. It was, like, a one-two punch of serving in the military and then coming back and being mistreated because of it. And so we have a high degree of homelessness and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder].

And so this memorial, which I should mention, was not the Vietnam War Memorial. Every other war memorial, memorial to a war had been called the war memorial: Civil War Memorial, whatever you want to say. This was the Vietnam *Veterans* Memorial, and it—it—people didn't want it to be built. Again, today it's very popular, but people didn't want it to be built because the people on the right said it should be built only if it glorified the war, as every other war memorial had done.

And the people on the left said it should only be built if it admitted the war was a mistake and glorified the

protesters. And to build a memorial that didn't take sides, that made no statement about the war—the slogan of Jan Scruggs and the group that, you know, pushed for this memorial was "to heal a nation." It was supposed to be a memorial that, as I say, made no statement about the war but instead said whatever your position on the war, let's mourn our dead together.

And I really do think it changed the way we treat our war fighters after that. You know, when we had the [Operation] Desert Storm—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —[Operation] Desert Shield, people started with their yellow ribbons, remembering, you know, the people there. And, you know, I think even till today, even those who are against the war, like, Iraq or Afghanistan, almost always make a distinction between their feelings about the war and their support for those, you know, in American uniforms who are fighting in the war.

BURACK: Yeah, it's a difference between those who decide for the war and those who actually participate in it.

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: So what was it like giving the closing prayer at that opening ceremony?

RESNICOFF: It was—it was an amazing thrill. You know, as I say, there was about 100,000 people. My mother was still alive, so my mother came. My daughter, you know, was too young to understand everything going on—she was four years old—but, you know, I—I remember thinking—you know, my grandfather escaped from Russia, came over in steerage, you know, on a ship to bring the family to America. My father was three years old, and here, one generation later, you know, I was standing, you know, in front of that memorial, saying the prayer. That's why it strikes me, you know, when—when some candidate like Bernie Sanders talks about the fact that his father was, you know, a refugee from Poland, came over, and here, he's running for president.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: So, of course, I was not running for president—

BURACK: [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: —I wouldn't put myself on that level but still, for me, you know, as a rabbi it was a very, very proud moment. It was one of those "only in America" moments that I have experienced so frequently in my life.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

And then you also, I know, worked to bring the Days of Remembrance [of the Victims of the Holocaust] into the—to the military.

RESNICOFF: Yes, yes, I'm very proud of that. You know, there was the Nationals Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust, and as many people understand, you know, the Jewish celebration, Yom HaShoah—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —Holocaust Remembrance Day—that's—that's religious. That's a Jewish remembrance. But the National Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust is a national American period of remembrance. And when the bill was passed, celebrating or observing these days, it was—part of that building, the [U.S.] Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington was part of it.

You know, it was to remember the lessons, which actually started with [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower when he saw his first concentration camp—death camp, we should say, Ohrdruf. When he was brought in and saw what he saw, he immediately said that we have to bring over reporters and photographers both from the U.K. [United Kingdom] and from—and from the U.S. to record this because—

He said two things that people—if we don't—if we don't record this, people—the day will come when people will say it's just propaganda. So he understood how important it was,

you know, to—to record what had happened so people could remember the facts.

And then he said that often the American G.I.s don't understand what they're fighting for. Let them un- —let them see this and understand at least what they're fighting against.

So the idea that we have to record this terrible tragedy, the Holocaust, which was linked to World War II but really was separate in many ways, was an American tradition starting with that first step Eisenhower took. Eventually it ended up, you know, being these National Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust, and—and eventually every state, plus Washington, D.C., took part in it in some way, in some states more than others, but there was usually a proclamation, there was, you know, many—maybe one event, many events.

But the military did not take part, so I said that of all, you know, communities in America, the military should absolutely take part because, again, it started with Eisenhower, and we gave our lives to fight to end the Holocaust. So it probably took about ten years, and there were very—there were various steps. First I got the [U.S.] Navy Chaplain Corps to prepare materials. I actually prepared the materials. And we sent it to all the chaplains, so chaplains could have, you know, ceremonies.

And then eventually we convinced the military—the Department of Defense to recognize it and make it a large—DoD wide, and we put together a guide to Remembrance ceremonies, and that guide—we had the a letter from the president, a letter from—we had a couple of editions of the guide. At one point, there was a letter I think from [President James Earl] "Jimmy" Carter and one from George H. W. Bush and also the secretaries of defense.

So it became an official military event. And still today many, many ships and many, many stations, you know, have official Holocaust Remembrance programs during that eight-day period.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And also the prayer that I gave—I was honored to give a prayer in the Capitol rotunda for one of the first official Holocaust Days of Remembrance ceremonies—was included in that DoD guide. And I know that many times, it's actually read as part of newer ceremonies around the world.

BURACK: Wow. Yeah.

So to kind of jump back into your timeline a little.

RESNICOFF: Right.

BURACK: So you were with the 6th Fleet until 1984.

RESNICOFF: Correct.

BURACK: And you were in Beirut. I know during this time—is this when you gave the interfaith prayer at the Western Wall?

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: The interfaith service? Yes?

RESNICOFF: Yes. We vi— You know, when we were in Beirut before the attack, even though there were many Navy ships off the coast, we did not send ships into Israel.

BURACK: Was there a reason?

RESNICOFF: We tried to—

What was that?

BURACK: Was there a reason you didn't send ships into Israel?

RESNICOFF: Yes. Because we were part of the multinational force, we tried to maintain neutrality. You know, the reason the multinational force started was when Israel went into Lebanon. And so we tried to maintain neutrality, so we didn't send ships into the port in Israel. And after the explosion, the decision was made that, you know, if we were going to be under attack, you know, that some semblance of neutrality was unnecessary, that our people needed to have some

opportunities to rest—for rest and recreation. So we started sending ships into Israel, mostly into Haifa but also into Ashkelon—and, you know, just to have some time off the ship, just to have some time, you know, to recuperate.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And during that time, another officer and I were successful in convincing the USO [United Service Organizations], the international organization, to start a USO in Haifa because so many American sailors were going in.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: You know, you have one aircraft carrier has 6,000 people, and then it has the escort ships that—you know, an aircraft carrier never goes alone. So you had thousands and thousands of American military personnel going in. And we started that. And because I was—I'm pretty sure I was the first Jewish chaplain to go into Israel on an official visit, when the flagship went in, and I went with the admiral, because a lot of Israelis, who were very surprised that there could be a Jewish chaplain, a rabbi on the staff of the admiral. And—because in Israel, in general, the chaplains really are just involved with religious issues, like keeping the kitchen kosher and—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —funerals and things like that. And so the idea that a rabbi could be an adviser to the three-star admiral who's the commander, you know, of the 6th Fleet—so there was a lot of interest in—in my role, in the role of a chaplain in general. Also the fact that in Israel, Jewish chaplains, at least at that point, rarely dealt at all with non-Jewish Israelis—I mean, they didn't deal with non-Jewish—

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: But we hardly dealt with non-religious Jewish Israelis. In fact, you know, as an American chaplain I dealt not only with non-religious Jews but with non-Jews.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: Really was very interesting to Israel. So there were a lot of newspaper articles about me. I was on television, interviewed, and one of the—there were kind of two results of this short-term notoriety—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —you know, interest in the chaplaincy. There was one that we were in Israel during the Martin Luther King Day weekend, and Mrs. [Chaim] Herzog—at that point the wife of the president of Israel—invited us to lead a, the first official and maybe the only official but certainly the first official Israeli ceremony for Martin Luther King Jr., and we did it in the president's residence.

And then the second was that I was invited to lead a service at the Western Wall, and it's in an area which was newly excavated at that point, called Wilson's Arch [at the Western Wall], which today is really hollowed out. It's a giant area. There's a women's balcony, and there's, you know, many different groups praying at the same time. But, you know, unless you go through a different door into the women's balcony, a woman couldn't go in.

And, but again, it was newly excavated, and I was invited to lead a service for the 6th Fleet personnel . Of course, now many of the spouses of the 6th Fleet had flown over to join us [unintelligible] while the ship was in Israel, and it was both mixed gender and interfaith, and I led it. And I remember that the head of the religious—the Ministry of Religions [now Ministry of Religious Services] in Israel, *Misrad Hadatot* was next to me.

And there were a lot of reporters, and, you know, afterwards they asked would this be something that other Conservative rabbis would be allowed to do, and, you know, the representatives said, "Absolutely not."

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: "This was for the 6th Fleet." You know, this was something very special.

BURACK: That's all.

RESNICOFF: That's right.

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: And so it was a real—a real honor. And I think many people have forgotten that ever happened, although I—I still have [chuckles] *The Jerusalem Post* article and photo—

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: —so I can prove it.

BURACK: [Laughs.] It definitely happened.

Earlier, you compared the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to the Kotel, the Western Wall. How would you compare those two experiences of leading prayer at both those spaces? In both those spaces, excuse me.

RESNICOFF: That's a very interesting question. I never really thought of it before. I think that the—you know, leading that prayer at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedication—and, by the way, I repeated that same prayer on the 20th anniversary and the 25th anniversary—

BURACK: Oh wow.

RESNICOFF: They brought me back. It was really a prayer where I was addressing the prayer not only to the 100,000 people there but because the video of that ceremony, you know, was seen—it was on C-SPAN; it was all over. I really focused my prayer in a way that I hoped would change the vision of America in terms of veterans, just as the memorial itself, you know, was trying to do. So it was—it was a prayer—you know, in a way, you can say every prayer is between you and God, but I think when you say a prayer out loud, it's also to touch the hearts, you know, and the minds of—of the people, the human beings who are listening. And so it, I felt it was very, very important to do that.

In Israel, it was just a prayer experience for the staff of the 6th Fleet. I didn't see it as trying to change the way Israelis

looked at the Wall, although it's interesting: Today, so many things are happening. You know, I just saw it as one more chaplain event for the military personnel. And, you know, as a chaplain, we often— in addition to the Jewish services, we often would give prayers at military events: changes of commands, retirements—you know, there were many times—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —when you gave a prayer and you had a mixed group of military personnel: different religions, and men and women. And so—you know, now, when I look back, I realize it was groundbreaking, historical,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —but not—not remembered. But at the point of dedicating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we all hoped that a real change would be occurring, and I felt that I was part of that effort to make that change. So I would say in many ways, that was the more powerful personal experience for me.

BURACK: Mm-hm. What was it like doing the prayer again at the 20th and 25th reunions?

RESNICOFF: It was—it was—you know, at that point it was pride, in a different reason because it was kind of—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —a feeling of success,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —the things really *did* change because of that—

BURACK: Mm-hm, did change, yeah.

RESNICOFF: —that dedication. Now they're building, you know, an underground educational piece of the—of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial because young people today—you know, to them Vietnam is like the [American] Revolutionary War or something, so we have to educate, and we have to also

emphasize these ideas of separating feelings about the war from the veterans in a new way. When we dedicated the Memorial, it really was an eye opener, a vision change, you know, for so many Americans. And they realized they were changing the way they saw the world. That's happened. We were successful.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And so doing it again was—was, you know proud, but it wasn't the same as the original.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

So you were in the 6th Fleet until 1984. And where did you go after that?

RESNICOFF: After that, I went to Rhode Island. We worked in Newport, Rhode Island, and we lived in Providence, Rhode Island, and it was the only time in my life in the military where I actually could stay in one place for four years because I had two different assignments—

BURACK: In the same place.

RESNICOFF: —in the same place. Yeah. I was sent as a one of the very first chaplains—I think the second Navy chaplain—certainly the first Jewish chaplain—to be a student at the [U.S.] Naval War College, which is in Newport, Rhode Island. And then at that point, the Navy, the Army and the Air Force—their chaplain schools were in different places. Now they've—all been consolidated, they're still different schools, but they're in the same place.

But my assignment was to go one year to be a student at the Naval War College and then three years teach at the chaplain school. And when I taught at the chaplain school—first of all, I was very honored that at the Naval War College, they invited *me* to give the prayer at the graduation, and a student had never given the prayer at the graduation.

And then they invited me to actually teach an elective course at the War College while I was teaching at the chaplain school for three years, and they wanted me to teach a

course on religion, war and peace. So I put together a course, comparing the approaches of Judaism and Christianity and Islam on war and on peace, and what in each of those religions would drive people to war, to fight, and what in each of those religions would drive people to take a stand against war and—and embrace the dream of peace.

So, also, one of the reasons I was chosen to go to the Naval War College was the chief of chaplains—you know, each of us—it's not exactly a thesis, but each of us had a focus, and the chief of chaplains wanted me to look at the ethnical responses to terrorism. Remember, the attack in Beirut was the first modern terrorist attack against American forces, and people don't always remember that. And, you know, we really had to —

I remember after 9/11 [the September 11, 2001 attacks], people were saying it's a wake-up call of terrorism against Americans and those of us in the military, especially those of us in Beirut, were saying it's not a wake-up call; it's a snooze alarm. You know, we already had been attacked in Beirut. We already had been attacked on the USS *Cole*. You know, somehow it didn't have the same impact in America until civilians were attacked.

So I studied the ethical responses to terrorism, wrote a paper, and then, as I say, I taught that course on Religion, War and Peace for three years on the side, while I taught at chaplains school.

BURACK: On the course of religion—on the topic of the Religion, War and Peace course —

RESNICOFF: Yes.

BURACK: Did you ever apply that to Vietnam and how kind of different faiths responded to Vietnam?

RESNICOFF: In a way, I did, because in the—in the—you know, I taught the course many times.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: The War College was on a trimester system, the same way Dartmouth is.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And, you know, so I would teach it almost every semester or trimester, and in the discussion, we certainly would talk about reactions, you know, to the different wars and why some religions seem to be more antiwar in general. We talked about the "just war" theories. And I should emphasize theories plural because, you know, there are many different ones.

But in general, what I looked at as I taught the course and as I distilled all the questions we could be dealing with—I really broke it down into two major questions. I started with the claim that all of the three major religious faith groups that we would be studying—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—were religions of peace. If you define that as meaning each of those religions, has a dream of the ultimate days of peace. You know, each one dreams of a time when there'll be peace in the world.

But I said that in many ways, those ultimate dreams are mutually exclusive, and you can't have, for instance, a time of peace when everybody is going to accept Christ and be Christian and a Jewish ultimate view, you know, that there still will be—

BURACK: That they don't

RESNICOFF: —Jewish [cross-talk; unintelligible].

BURACK: They don't work together. [Laughs.]

RESNICOFF: Or, you know, the Islamic belief that there'll be, you know, an empire ruled by Muslims, that other religions will still be there but perhaps as second-class citizens, you know, and therefore they will want to convert, but—I mean, there really—they're really differences.

But I said that, you know, if you take this—in fact, each one does dream. Then—but then the question is: What is the role of war on the way to peace? So this idea, number one, of

what *is* that ultimate vision of peace, and how do they differ, one from the other? And, two, what is the role of war on the road to peace? You know, and understand why, at the beginning, at the creation or formation of some of these different religions, they took one position because of historical reasons and then how that changed over time. And then we could start understanding, you know, where war and where peace fit into those religious theologies.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

And when you were teaching at the chaplaincy school, in addition to this course at the Naval War College, what did your courses there focus on, the responses to terrorism or more, like, general chaplaincy things?

RESNICOFF: Well, at that point, there were two courses at chaplain school. One was the eight-week course for new chaplains: rabbis, priests, ministers. At that point, we didn't have Muslim chaplains yet, or—today we have Hindu chaplains, Buddhist chaplains, Muslim chaplains.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: At that point, it was still just Jewish and Christian—Jewish, Protestant and Catholic, so that the eight-week course, which we called the basic course, which was a mixture of these clergy people who were on their way into the military as chaplains, or seminary students, you know, who were eventually going to go in as chaplains. At least—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: For one assignment.

And then we had what we called the advanced course, which actually was nine months long, the same as the War College, for—it was kind of a parallel to the War College in that the War College—the people who were sent to the War College were those on track to become leaders in the military. Not everybody who goes to the War College ended up being a general or an admiral, but there almost never was a general or admiral who didn't go to the War College.

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: So this was the group of potential top leaders in the military. And so the advanced course in chaplaincy was the same thing. These were already more senior chaplains, who were the group from which we thought the real leaders of the military—of the Chaplain Corps would emerge.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: So I was one of the chaplains who taught that course for nine months. You know, we dealt with—at that level, you know, you dealt with all kinds of subjects, not just interfaith and understanding, because the senior chaplains are the ones who have to, you know, look at large areas and make sure that all the religious rules are covered but also understanding the military in terms of where the military fits in with [U.S.] Congress and with equal rights, human rights, the [U.S.] Constitution, bureaucracy, how to be good administrators, what's the difference between a manager and a leader? There's a lot of leadership courses.

And actually, when I got to the chaplain school—the War College had just had a major change, where they had become accredited, and you could get a master's degree going through the War College. And the chaplain school made a decision—the chief of the chaplain's made a decision that he would like the chaplain school to do the same thing, that for the nine-month course, you get enough credits that maybe you didn't complete a master's degree but you had enough credits that you could finish it off, you know, at some other local college or university.

And so I changed the—I was tasked with the assignment of changing the chaplain school to make that happen, since I had just gone through the War College, so we changed the chaplain school to be—you know, up until that point, it had been you study one thing for a couple of weeks; then you study another thing for a couple of weeks. I changed it to three trimesters, to mirror the War College. Instead of having two weeks of interfaith, we'd say, you know, "Every Monday during this trimester is going to be a course on interfaith."

BURACK: Mm-hm. Yeah.

RESNICOFF: We really made it more like individual courses within a bigger picture, and we ended up getting accredited, and so that the chaplains could go through—now, at some point, the nine-month course was abandoned, and a lot of these decisions, the military because of money, and I don't know exactly when it happened or why. Now I think there's a much shorter advanced course. But that was my job, to kind of transform the advanced course and to be one of the instructors for [unintelligible].

And my specific areas of expertise were religious accommodation—in other words, the Constitutional issues that gave foundation to the Chaplain Corps, the role of the chaplain, and pluralism.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

So when you finished up that assignment of teaching, what was next for you?

RESNICOFF: I'm pretty sure that from there we went to Orlando, Florida, which at that point was one of the three—three—now I'm not sure if we went to—I think—no, from there we went to Pensacola, Florida,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —which was the center for what they called Chief of Naval Education and Training. That's the admiral who's in charge of every school in the military around the world. You know, there are so many schools that teach enlisted people,—

BURACK: Yeah.

RESNICOFF: —to teach officers, to specialty schools, general schools. So I was on—I was the assistant chaplain. There was a senior chaplain who was a captain I think at that point. I was a commander. And I taught—and I—so we were advising the admiral on issues that should be taught in all these different schools.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: You know, we would be advising in terms of how do you inject values into the school, how do you inject issues of religion? For instance, at the legal school, the justice school, they should be studying religion, you know, in terms of church and state because as these questions came up about religious rights in the military, generally both the chaplains and the lawyers would end up giving advice to the commanding officer, who had to make decisions about what was allowed,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —what should be done, what had to be done, what couldn't be done. So—so that was my role there.

And after that, after Pensacola, that's when I went to Orlando Recruit Training Center [sic; Naval Training Center Orlando], which is the technical name for boot camp.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: At that point, the Navy had three boot camps: one in San Diego, one in Great Lakes, outside of Chicago, and one in Orlando. As the Navy was shrunk, downsized, we ended up with only one, in Chicago.

But in Orlando I was the senior chaplain for the boot camp. And that was at a time when we had the men in boot camp completely separated from the women in boot camp in everything they did. In classes, in training, there was no communication. And while I was there, the decision was made to attempt to integrate boot camp, to bring the men and women together, and so that was really part of the focus of—of my time there, although I also did something different that I thought was very important, that—up until that point, when any recruit needed help from a chaplain, they would come and see the chaplain of their faith, so the Catholic recruit wanted something was important I could give him the [unintelligible] of the Catholic chaplain.

So I said that at boot camp, we're teaching the people about the military, the students about the military. That included teaching them about the chaplains, and so there were I think eight—I think we called them squadrons, you know,—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF:` —where the recruits were divided. And I had four or five chaplains working for me. So I said, “We’re going”—and I worked this out with the commanding officer. I said, “What I want to do is”—you know, give each chaplain, two of the squadrons, just like a chaplain—you might have two ships, and that that chaplain should go to the meetings, should get to know the staff, should get to know the recruits, and then if any recruit wanted to see a chaplain, that recruit would see his or her chaplain.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And just like in the larger Navy, if it was a specific religious issue—you know, someone was getting married and wanted questions about, you know, the ways, so then the chaplain’s job has to put that person in charge of the chaplain of the right faith. But 95 percent of the times that a sailor wants to see or an officer wants to see a chaplain, it’s more of a human issue than a strictly religious issue. And so, you know, I was very proud of what we did—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —did there. So that was, I think, one of my favorite assignments.

And also, you know, I think in terms of rewards, it was one of the most rewarding assignments. A lot of times, people think maybe the 6th Fleet, because of the work I did in Beirut, but here you had young men and women coming to boot camp, many of them who had been told their whole lives that they were worthless, they’d never make it. Their teachers told them; their parents sometimes told them.

They came in, and we made things very tough in boot camp. But the whole idea was to teach a young sailor that if he or she could make it through boot camp, they could make it through anything. And I used to tell them, you know, one day their life might depend on the confidence they had in themselves, and their feeling they could do something that looked like it was impossible.

So we used to—I used to remember those kids as they reported in that first day. I don't know if you ever—if you saw the movie, *An Officer and a Gentleman*. It was kind of the same thing that these ragtag, you know, people would report the first day, and eight weeks later the difference was so amazing, you had the feeling that you had touched their lives—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —and maybe put them on a direction where they believed in themselves.

BURACK: Wow. Yeah.

So under—in that time, women were becoming more involved in the military or?

RESNICOFF: Yes. Yes. There still were many restrictions.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: It's only now, you know, in the absolute present, where, you know, virtually every restriction has been removed. But there still were women going in, and—but they were trained separately, and—at least at the boot camp level. And we—we changed that.

BURACK: Yeah. Good.

So what year is it when you leave Florida, or?

RESNICOFF: Well,—

BURACK: Like mid '90s? I don't —

RESNICOFF: Yeah, in—I know that when I was in Pensacola, my daughter had her Bat Mitzvah there.

BURACK: [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: It was the first Jewish—it was the first Bat Mitzvah or Bar Mitzvah, you know, at the Navy chapel, so that was a very big thing.

BURACK: A big deal. [Chuckles.]

RESNICOFF: Yeah, and then—

BURACK: That's exciting.

RESNICOFF: — we went to Orlando. And if I'm remembering correctly, from Orlando, that's when I went to Stuttgart, Germany, so that would have been '97, because I was in Stuttgart, Germany, from '97 to 2000. And I was the command chaplain for the [U.S.] European Command. And, you know, the Navy—or the military, I should say, has divided the world into, you know, a number of different areas. And that area is commanded by a four-star admiral or general. And when an order comes out of the White House, it comes from the president and the secretary of defense together, and it goes straight to one of these we call combatant command-—commanders.

And—you know, it used to be that the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines didn't come together until D.C., the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And that caused a lot of different—a lot of problems, and so, you know, a few decades ago already, the situation was changed, where we created these unified commands and, again, as I say, from the White House, from the president and the secretary of defense, the war order or the movement order goes out to one of these admirals or generals, and then they take care of all the services within their area.

So, for instance, the European Command, which was headquartered in Stuttgart when I was the chaplain, was commanded by a four-star—at that point, a four-star Army general, Wesley [K.] Clark [Jr.], and we had at that point all of Europe and most of Africa, 93 countries, 13 million square miles. So within that area, every American in the military came under my boss, my general.

Under him there would be a four-star admiral in the Army and the Navy and the Air Force, and under them, you know,

other admirals and generals, so it was a chain of command. But this one person was on top, so he would, you know, be able to say, “We need to move this aircraft carrier here,” “We need to move this, these number of people there.”

So when I was there, we were involved in Bosnia and Kosovo, and that was the major—those were the major wars going on at that—at that point. And my job was to—you know, I was on the staff of the commander, so I was part of the advisers. But also, you know, to work through the leading chaplains, with all the chaplains in that area, to make sure that we were supporting the rights of the men and women in the military, you know, throughout that whole area.

Today we have a new combatant command called AFRICOM [U.S. Africa Command], which deals with all the countries in Africa so that—you know, it took away that responsibility from the European Command. But at that point, as I say, it was Europe and most of Africa.

BURACK: Wow. So you were responsible for all the chaplains.

RESNICOFF: Yes. And I did a lot of traveling. And we also—I became the representative of the military to religious leaders, much as the chiefs of chaplains in the other countries. So, for instance, every year, I led a conference for the chiefs of chaplains of all these other countries. It started out just for the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] countries before I got there. Then it was expanded to all of the countries—you know, these 93 countries that we had responsibility for.

But because it was the only chiefs of chaplains conference in the world, chiefs of chaplains came from Japan and Korea and from other countries from around the world. And also I was involved with—I got very close to the chief of chaplains in South Africa. He was the first black chief of chaplains. He had fought with [Nelson R.] Mandela, and, you know, when Mandela took over or made change—so he—he also became not only chief of chaplains in South Africa but a regional chaplain. They had their own chaplain organization for many of the countries in southern Africa. So I would go down and meet with them, lecture, talk to them about the issues of what a chaplain was.

I remember I was in charge—every year in Canada they had a seven-day conference of chaplains, and I was invited to lead that conference for seven days, which was interesting because they had no Jewish chaplains at that point in Canada, and they invited me as a rabbi to do that.

But in addition to all the work I did with the chaplains of the other countries, in addition to our own chaplains, I also worked with countries that had no chaplaincy and were just experimenting with religious rights because—as an example, the Czech Republic—when it was Czechoslovakia, under the Soviet Union, it was illegal for any soldier to even have a Bible. After the fall of the Soviet Union and during this time when I was at the European Command, I worked with the religious leaders there to help them establish their chaplaincy. I wasn't the only chaplain who was helping them to do that, but ultimately, because I was the command chaplain, you know, I was very involved.

So, you know, I gave lectures. Many of the countries, the former Soviet Union countries that were again either establishing chaplaincies or, if they weren't establishing chaplaincies, at least were working to make policies that involved religious freedom, you know, for the first time.

BURACK: Mm-hm. At these conferences or at your meetings with other chaplain leaders from other countries, what did you—what was the biggest takeaway from it, in the differences between the chaplaincies or something that the American chaplaincy does unique as in comparison to all these—

RESNICOFF: Well, I think—I think that America is one of the few countries in the world—not the only, but one of the few where the chaplaincy is structured to help people of all religions. For instance, most of the other countries, if you have a chief of chaplains, you would have a Catholic chief of chaplains, a Protestant chief of chaplains; some of them have a Jewish chief of chaplains. But in America we have an Army chief of chaplains, a Navy chief of chaplains—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —and an Air Force chief of chaplains, so that person can be any religion, and all the way down, you know, every position could be any religion. As a matter of fact, constitutionally it has to be that way because there can be religious test, so—but for the other countries—so that was different.

And so what happened in those other countries is, number one, many times there's a tension between the chiefs, a competition, so that in France the chief of chaplain of the—the Catholic chief of chaplains and the Protestant chief of chaplains had actually never met or talked together until our conference.

BURACK: Wow.

RESNICOFF: And there was this feeling that, you know, if you're a Protestant chief of chaplains, the Catholic chaplains are going to say, "You better not, I better not catch you talking to anyone Protestant," you know? Because the idea is if they talk, they will probably try to convert them. And so this—and also what fell between the cracks is—would be all the people who were not religious, so many of these other chaplaincies were focusing on the religious issues.

One of my failures—and I don't know if it's happening now—is that I met with the Israeli chief of chaplains, tried to get them to be part of this international chief of chaplains conference, and at that point the chief of chaplains really thought that the difference between, you know, the American chaplaincy and the Israeli chaplaincy was so great that there really would be nothing to talk about, nothing to learn. I hope that's changed now. You know, I hope I planted some seeds.

BURACK: Mm-hm, some seeds.

RESNICOFF: But many of the other countries this idea of expanding their vision of what a chaplain could do. In addition—additionally, expanding their vision in terms of the role of a chaplain, advising command, you know, was—was something that I think came out of these conferences.

And, you know, many, many fights in the world—you know, religion is part of them. Religion may not be the overriding reason for the fight, but certainly it's part of them. And we

were just realizing that. So I would give—even in advising in Kosovo, for instance, I would get the chaplains involved as liaisons to the religious leaders, you know, within Bosnia, within Kosovo so we would understand better, you know what the problems were with one religion dealing with another religion. And we often didn't understand that at all. We've become much better over the years of understanding religious issues as they relate to international relations.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

So in 2000 you leave the command, the general command.

RESNICOFF: Right.

BURACK: And talk me through your last—the last few years.

RESNICOFF: At that point, I knew I was retiring from the Chaplain Corps.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: So instead of retiring from Germany—to make it a little easier, once you've been in for a whole career, sometimes the military will cooperate and let your last assignment or your last partial assignment be somewhere you eventually want to settle, so I went to the chief of chaplains' staff. At that point, the chief of chaplains had an office in what was called the Navy Annex, just about a block away from the Pentagon. Now that building has been demolished, and the chiefs of chaplains are in the Pentagon.

So I was put in charge, for my last short time in the military, of all education in the Chaplain Corps. So the idea was to take advantage of the lessons that I had learned through my career and try to, you know, pass that on to the chaplains.

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: And then from—from that position, I retired, you know, and—I had been born—I was born in Washington, D.C., and I always wanted to move back to Washington, D.C., when I retired, and so I was able to do that very easily.

BURACK: Mm-hm. And kind of as the last question, what do you think the chaplain—what do you hope the chaplain does in the future? What do you see its role as expanding to or focusing on more?

RESNICOFF: Well, I think—I hope the chaplains live up to the dream of—as I mentioned earlier, this three-pronged mission of the chaplain:—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —to minister to your own, to facilitate ministry to those of other religions, but to care for all. And I think that sometimes in this world, where religion is polarized, just religious leaders, candidates—you know, we just—we just have much less cooperation in many ways among chaplains than I saw when I was a brand-new officer.

And so, just as an example, when the Pentagon was studying "don't ask"—the possibility of repealing "don't ask, don't tell" and allowing gays to serve openly in the military, the chaplains were one of the big impediments. They were one of the groups that were not welcoming that change, and so I got involved, even though I was retired already, with the leaders of that study at the Pentagon, who wanted to ask me what reasons—how could we approach this, what could we do? And then we were successful, and I was given the honor of giving the prayer at the presidential signing of the repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell."

And so in many ways, I've—I have been sad, you know, to see some of the things that go on with chaplains. But, on the other hand, you know, I'm a person of faith, and I—

BURACK: Mm-hm.

RESNICOFF: —hope things will—as a country, in many ways, we'll start living—living up to our dreams. Our dreams are the best dreams in the world. We just don't always live up to them. And I would say that goes for the military, too.

BURACK: I think we'll end on that note.

RESNICOFF: Okay.

[End of interview.]