Jeffrey L. Rogers ’66
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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LI: This is Ellen [P.] Li in Rauner Special Collections Library. It is August 19th, 2015, around 3 p.m., and I’m speaking with Mr. [Jeffrey L.] “Jeff” Rogers, who is calling from Portland, Oregon.

Thank you for speaking with me today. Can you tell me where you were born and what your parents’ names are?

ROGERS: First, thank you very much for doing this interview. I was born in Washington, D.C., July 26, 1944, and my father’s name was William P. Rogers. The P stands for Pierce, William Pierce Rogers. And my mother’s name was Adele Langston Rogers. My middle name is Langston.

LI: Great. And so you grew up in Washington, D.C.

ROGERS: Actually, my first 18 months, we moved five different places around the East Coast, as my mother followed my father, who was in training in the [U.S.] Navy for eventual deployment in the Pacific [Ocean] in World War II. So we moved around, and the first five years of my life we moved quite a bit. From age five, we moved to Bethesda, Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C. That’s where I grew up the rest of my young years, and my parents lived in that house for 60 more years.

LI: And so how did you like growing up in Maryland, right outside of D.C.?

ROGERS: I liked it a great deal. It was, of course, a much smaller place then. I used to ride my bicycle by myself when I was—I don't know, what?—10 years old or something, all around Washington, D.C., which would be harder to do these days with the traffic and developments.

But I loved Washington. Of course, it’s a fascinating city with all of the governmental buildings and the museums and all that is going on in Washington, so I had what I can say to be a very happy childhood.

LI: And did you have siblings?

ROGERS: I did. I do. I have three siblings. I have an older sister, Dale [Rogers Marshall], who is seven years old than me; an older brother, [Anthony W.] “Tony,” who is four years older; and a younger brother, [Douglas L.] “Doug,” who is two years younger.

LI: And so where did you go to school?

ROGERS: I went to elementary school through sixth grade at Bethesda Elementary [School], a public school about a mile from our house. I used to walk to that with my younger brother, Doug. And then in seventh grade I transferred to Sidwell Friends School in—just across the District of Columbia line in Washington, and completed the rest of my—I completed my junior high and high school years at Sidwell Friends.

LI: And what was that transition like? I assume Sidwell Friends was a private institution, correct?

ROGERS: Yes, Sidwell Friends was a private institution. It’s a Quaker school. Quite a few government officials and other people who are able to afford it send their children to Sidwell. It was a tough transition for me because I was the only one in my elementary school class who went to Sidwell. I didn’t know anybody there. I happened to have a very poor math teacher. Although Sidwell Friends is an excellent school, the math teacher I had in seventh grade was a terror. Used to throw chalk and erasers at kids. So I actually refused to go to school for a while.

And after some fiddling around on my parents’ part, figured out to convince me to go back after, I don’t know, a few weeks probably. It was a substantial period of time. And I went back and was tutored by a wonderful teacher there, who became my friend and actually was one of the main reasons I later went to Dartmouth.

LI: Wow. So in terms of the—the cultural differences between the schools, did you notice any changes when you went from, you know, Bethesda Elementary to Sidwell Friends?

ROGERS: Yes. Of course, it’s—it’s a little tough to compare them in the sense that I was in an elementary school at Bethesda and

then middle school and high school, so there was going to be cultural differences of a sort, age differences, just because of the age of the students.

But Sidwell, as a Quaker school, placed a very big emphasis on treating everybody with respect, dignity and acceptance. We had Quaker meetings. Not very many of the students were Quakers, and only probably a minority of the faculty members were, but the atmosphere of Quakers certainly permeated the school, which was one of sort of calm studiousness and acceptance of each other.

So there was probably less kind of youthful conflict and that sort of thing at that school than there might have been if I'd stayed in public schools, even though Bethesda Elementary was a very good public school serving, again, a pretty well-to-do part of the Washington, D.C., area. But I think the Sidwell environment was—was probably unusual and quite wonderful, actually.

LI: So in this calmer environment that you've described, you know, what was it like growing up in an era where America's recovering from the Second World War and there are increasing tensions with the Cold War and the Soviet Union? Did you—were you aware of everything that was going on globally?

ROGERS: Oh, yes, for a number of reasons. Sidwell certainly placed an emphasis on being aware. My dad ended up in government, in prominent positions, starting in the late 1940s, when I was about five years old. That's why we moved to Washington, D.C. And he and Mother were very attuned to current events and what was going on in the world.

And then in addition, you just couldn't avoid it in those days. There were lots of things happening. Of course, the whole communist scare, Sputnik being put up in the middle '50s. I remember distinctly going outside at night at watching the Russian satellite move overhead, and it was quite spooky. And in those days, we were—there was a great deal of fear, somewhat parallel to what I think is exaggerated fear about terrorism now. In those days, it was what turned out to be exaggerated fears about communism.

We all prepared for atomic warfare. They used to, as you know, have us hide under our desks to prepare for an atomic

blast, which is about the most futile and absurd anything you could do. People were building bomb shelters in their homes. We didn't have anything like that, but some people were. So there was great deal of—of fear and a sense of competition with the Russians. Of course, that's how the space race developed and all sorts of other things.

So I was very aware of that for both of those reasons.

LI: And in terms of daily life—I mean, as a child trying to just grow up and go through all the—the normal things in school, high school, what was the perception of those fears that you talked about among your peers? Was it—did people believe that there *was* genuinely imminent danger? Were you in—you know, in constant—constant fear?

ROGERS: No, I wouldn't say we were in constant fear. I mean, as—as teenagers we were pretty focused on our own flies and girls or boys, as the case might be and all that sort of thing. But we observed a lot of fear, especially in our parents. I remember very distinctly when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred a few years later. My parents were more scared than I'd ever seen them. And that was the culmination of a number of years where most of our parents—other students in school—most of our parents were [noise] [unintelligible] those fears, and that was visible to us.

I didn't live in daily fear by any means, but [noise] knew what certain government people did and others did because I watched it.

LI: So going back to your father working in the government obviously during this very tense period, what was that like? What was your household dynamic like? Did you talk about the current events of the time?

ROGERS: Oh, yeah. Growing up in Washington, D.C., with a father who was in government a number of ways meant that we talked a whole lot about current events and politics, and the dinner table conversations—in those days, we ate dinner as a family ritual every night. The dinner table conversations were almost always about current events and politics, with some sports thrown in for those of us who enjoyed sports.

But when I moved west many, many years later, I was struck by the stark difference in the kind of thing that people talked

about. I was just so used to talking about—about what was going on in the world and who was going to become president and all those sorts of things that had seemed perfectly natural for me, and Dad's—Dad's positions in government throughout those years and later just increased that tendency.

LI: Yeah, I'm sure.

So did—with the father in government and everything going on, did you have—how did that influence your view on America's decisions during this time and the competition with the Soviet Union, for example?

ROGERS: Well, Dad was an old-time Republican, which you hardly see anymore [chuckles wryly], and was a progressive Republican, as was my mother and so held views consistent with the progressive Republican Party at that time, which included the concern about international affairs and safety. You know, Dad's career was pretty fascinating, actually. I'll go through that at whatever point you want to in this interview. But it played a very big role. He was—he became a colleague of and then a friend of Richard [M.] Nixon in the late '40s and became deputy attorney general in the early '50s and attorney general in the late '50s, under [Dwight D.] Eisenhower.

And in those capacities, he had a lot to do with things like that Alger Hiss matter and the civil rights movement and directing the first civil rights laws, so there was a whole lot of that kind of thing going on all the time around us in our family and, of course, in Washington, more general.

LI: Mm-hm. And I guess did that make you more interested in government in general?

ROGERS: Yes, no doubt about it. As I mentioned, It was just the way things were. Like every kid, when they grow up I think they assume for quite a while that their world is the normal world, and it is for them. And that world of politics, government, current events, prominent people, parents starting to appear on *TIME* magazine covers and on TV and all that stuff—that's just kind of the way it was. But the result was it was very much in our minds, my siblings' and I—as well as, of course, my mother and father.

LI: Right. I'm sure that was quite exciting as well.

ROGERS: Exciting, but at that age you don't really know much. You don't know better. [Chuckles.]

LI: Right. [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: Yeah, in retrospect I think, *Wow!*, you know. But—and—and we knew it was exciting at the time, but it wasn't the kind of excitement that you would have looking at it from the outside. It turns out, obviously, all these people were just like normal people, and some of them had strengths and weaknesses. When you get to know Nixon a little bit by playing touch football with him, as we did—well, he wasn't a very good touch football player [chuckles], but—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: You know, you have a different view of somebody like him than you do if you're reading about somebody from a distance or watching them just on TV.

LI: Yeah. So I guess what was it like, for example, playing touch football with Nixon and having that sort of—obviously, you said that it felt normal, but I'm sure you were aware when you went to school that not everyone, you know, did that as a weekend activity. So how did that kind of play out in terms of your social life, or comparing your own experiences to those of your peers?

ROGERS: These are great questions, by the way.

The lucky thing was that at Sidwell Friends, we didn't—my siblings and I—all of us went there. We did not stand out so much for that reason, because lots of prominent people sent their kids there. Nixon sent his daughters, Julie [Nixon Eisenhower] and Tricia [Patricia Nixon Cox] to Sidwell Friends. You know, more recently, the Clintons [President William J. "Bill" Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton] have sent their daughter there, and the Obamas [President Barack H. Obama and Michelle Robinson Obama] have sent their daughters there. It's sort of the go-to place in Washington, D.C., for government officials, so McNamara's daughter—Robert McNamara, the secretary of defense under [President Lyndon B.] Johnson, was—his daughter was at Sidwell when I was. The Nixon kids were there,

although not in my class. So people took that kind of thing much more matter of factly than they might have if I had stayed at Bethesda Elementary.

It wasn't boring, but it wasn't—it wasn't a defining factor, and I certainly didn't try to play it up. to the contrary, when Dad was—had a chauffeur taking him to work in the '50s, before I could drive, he—his route to work happened to go right by Sidwell Friends, so he would drive me to school in the mornings, but I insisted on getting out a few blocks away because I didn't really want to be seen getting out of a chauffeured limousine every morning by my classmates.

So I was conscious that I knew that I wanted to pay attention to basically by downplaying it, but it wasn't something that defined me there, fortunately, because there were so many others in somewhat similar situations.

LI: Right.

So in terms of I guess being on what many would consider the "inside," did you—I'm sure that caused sort of strange feelings when you're also learning about, you know, the civil rights problems that were obviously very real growing up in D.C. and seeing both sides of the issues, with the government response and maybe the activity that was happening outside. How did that—did you feel—how did you feel being on the inside, on the kind of protected side of that interaction?

ROGERS: I guess that question could be answered at a couple different levels. I mean, on the—on the purely personal level, leaving aside Dad's role—if on a purely personal level, there was some sense of guilt, I suppose, that I was at a place like Sidwell Friends, which was a pretty expensive school to go to and extremely high quality, and just on the inside of Washington, D.C., and not far away—and actually when my sister started at Sidwell seven years before me, Sidwell was still segregated, and she worked hard to convince the administration to desegregate, and they eventually did. But to have a school like that desegregated, you know, when we were going to school there, was pretty shameful and pretty bizarre.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: And there were separate water fountains around the city, and back of the bus and all of that stuff. And so in contrast between our, quote, “privilege” and the situations that many others, mostly notably African-Americans, found themselves in was—was stark and distressing. And so that was at a personal level.

At a more public level or a governmental level, fortunately Dad was—both Mother and Dad were very progressive. They were Republicans but very progressive and strongly in favor of advancing civil rights. And Dad helped write the very first civil rights laws in the late ’50s. And even thought [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower doesn’t get too much credit for that, in fact it was under his administration that Dad and his predecessor as attorney general, that the very first civil rights legislation was enacted, and that was the forerunner for the better known civil rights laws in the ‘60s, especially when Johnson got through.

So, you know, fortunately I didn’t have to deal with any discordance between my personal beliefs and what Dad was doing

LI: Right.

ROGERS: So that made it a lot easier to see it from both sides because from both sides—for me, both sides were consistent. Both sides—

LI: Right.

ROGERS: —wanted to advance things, so that made it a lot better than it might have been at that level, although, again, at the personal level it was—it was kind of crazy to see. My kids now just marvel at the fact that it was like that only a few decades ago, you know.

LI: Yeah, I think all of us definitely do. It just seems to foreign.

ROGERS: Well, it seems so foreign, and we’ve come so far in some ways, but, of course, we have a long ways to go [chuckles]—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —to prevent return, recently,—

LI: Right.

ROGERS: —this past year or two.

LI: Yeah, definitely.

So coming back to the idea of being so intimately familiar with these figures of prominence, I think from an outsider's perspective there is both a sense of awe, in a way, associated with, you know, presidential figures and things like that. Did being so familiar with that world kind of dispel that enchantment, or was it an opportunity to just see more of the inner workings of that whole governmental process?

ROGERS: It demystified these people. In other words, it dispelled the sense that these are superhuman people. It dispelled any sense of—for the most part, of a saw of awe. I mean, if "awe" means kind of reflex admiration, these are superhuman people, it certainly dispelled that, no matter who they were, including my dad, whose career I greatly respected. You know, I saw his flaws. [Chuckles.] I saw his weaknesses, and I saw that, too. I saw Nixon. Nixon couldn't throw a football, you know? I mean, he was pretty awkward.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: And so you see people as humans that way, and with all the human struggles and issues they're dealing with. At the same time, in addition to dispelling the sense of awe, I did develop a sense of admiration because those are hard jobs. I mean, nowadays the anti-government—something that is so distressing and is looked on as if there's something inherently flawed with people in government. Well, what I saw and I've seen throughout my career because I've served in government quite a bit, obviously not in those kind of prominent positions, but what I saw and have continued to see is that there are an extraordinary number of really hard-working, dedicated people in government.

And in the '50s, if you look back at some of the newspapers articles that were written about people like Dad in those days, which I've done recently; in fact, I'm writing a memoir of myself. When you look back at those articles, there was a great sense of appreciation and respect for public servants, and they were thought of as people who made some personal sacrifices, as Dad did— I think Dad used to bounce

checks when I was in my 50s, and he was the attorney general he was bouncing checks at home. He just didn't make that much money. Four kids and expensive schools. So, I gained a real sense of admiration for how hard they worked, how dedicated they are, and that they are providing a public service.

Obviously not everybody. I could go through some of the Republican candidates nowadays, but I won't. [Both chuckle.] I don't respect them all. But over all, I learned that there is some real dignity in public service, and I admire those who do it well.

So those are the two things: reducing my sense of awe but increasing my sense of admiration.

LI: Right. And does that mean that you held those officials to a higher standard or you just more understood the difficulty of the things they were grappling with and that they were, you know, human?

ROGERS: Back then, you mean?

LI: Yeah.

ROGERS: No, I wasn't really holding them in any—you know, I was in no position to hold them to a standard particularly, because I was growing up. I mean, I—I just—I learned a lot about them. I learned a lot about the good and the bad side of politics. I learned—what I said about admiring those who do it well, which I think it's a large number of them, and, at the same time, recognizing how transitory it is. And Dad was quite good about recognizing that people were treating him with such obsequiousness, not because they necessarily thought he was a wonderful human being—some of them did—but they were doing it because he held government office, and when he would be out of government office, people would drop him just as quickly. And that wasn't because it was Dad; it was just people in general.

So what I learned was to be realistic about—I think if you're realistic about politics, about government—you know, the combination—no awe, admiration, and an understanding—and realism, I think, about it.

Dad, even though he was in very good positions, wouldn't take himself that seriously. He used to have a sense of humor about himself, you know, so I guess that's some of the ways I would summarize the effects of having grown up in that kind of what turns out to be an unusual environment when looked at from the outside.

LI: Mm-hm. Right.

And so what were your interests in school when you were growing up?

ROGERS: I developed an interest in science early on and decided I wanted to be a doctor. In retrospect, I think there was an element of rebellion, what I considered and sometimes jokingly call "wippie" rebellion.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: My father was a lawyer. My mother went to law school and graduated but never practiced. Eventually both of my brothers became lawyers. My wife—both of my wives [chuckles], my kids later on, et cetera. I grew up in a lawyer family completely, and I tried to set another path to become a doctor, which we will get to, I suppose. It turned out not to go that way, but that's where I focused in high school, was in science, thinking that I would be a doctor, but thinking that I would follow my own path.

LI: Right. So what was kind of the decision, then, to go to Dartmouth? What were you looking for in a college when you were thinking about moving on from Sidwell Friends?

ROGERS: I guess I was just looking for a very top-quality college. It was sort of expected in my family that you would go to college and you'd probably go to an Ivy League school. All four of us, my siblings and I all went, I mean between us we've gone to Dartmouth, Harvard [University], Yale [University], Cornell [University], Princeton [University] and so forth. So I was in somewhat of a closed universe in that sense, so I applied [to] mostly the Ivy League schools. I applied to Yale, Dartmouth and Colgate [University]. Colgate had been where my dad had gone. Got into all three of them.

One of the main reasons I ended up going to—well, there are several reasons I ended up going to Dartmouth. One

was my teacher, Harvey [K.] LeSure [Jr., Class of 1942]—I mentioned him, not by name, earlier. He was the fellow who kind of was assigned to be my tutor when I came back from refusing to go to school for a while in seventh grade. Harvey LeSure was a wonderful guy, and he was a Dartmouth graduate. And he loved Dartmouth, and he talked about Dartmouth all the time. And he took a liking to me, subtly at first and later not so subtly tried to convince me to go to Dartmouth. And I think he was significant reason that I did.

In addition, when I visited—I think you mentioned—you might have mentioned you were struck by the rural quality of it and a lot of things about the school. Well, back then, too, the setting is magnificent. I loved being out in the country. I've always liked the outdoors. It was all men at the time, as you know. That wasn't really a factor for me, as I think back. I'm not quite sure why. It should have been a factor one way or the other, but I don't think it was.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: I loved the relative smallness of it, the focus on undergraduate studies and, you know, all the things that people talk about about Dartmouth. It just struck me. It was one of those times in my life where it just plain felt right, and it's hard sometimes to articulate the reason. I was just drawn to it.

LI: Yeah, definitely. And so when you eventually made the decision to come to campus, what was—what was the climate like back then?

ROGERS: Old. "You guys don't know nothin' these days".

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: I think there's far less snow. I mean, it was—it was a wonderful climate, I'm sure much like today but probably with greater extremes, at least on the cold side. You know, the fall is absolutely gorgeous. I'm sure it still is. I haven't been there for a few years, but one of the things that I missed when I moved west to Portland, Oregon, was the New England falls, the colors, you know. It's hard to beat that. So the falls were—fall was spectacular when I first got there.

Winters were very cold, Lots and lots of snow. The [Dartmouth] Green was covered constantly in the winter with quite a few feet of snow, and it stayed clean because it snowed so much. And, of course, Winter Carnival and all those things, which I know are still going on, were—were very prominent in those days.

And then spring came, with the mud. I mean, the mud—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —was pretty yucky for a while, as everything melted and thawed. And then in summer, I wasn't—I didn't stay there in the summers, but to the extent I was around at the beginning and the end of them, it was beautiful too. A little bit buggy at times, I think, but I loved the climate. It was extreme enough that it felt kind of rugged but—but rugged in a country way rather than like being trapped in a big city in big snowstorms.

LI: Did you—was one of your goals to get away from a city after growing up so close to one?

ROGERS: No, not—not explicitly. I had grown up, like, in the outdoors. My mother, especially, was an outdoors person, and we used to go on hikes with birdwatchers, which was not cool when we were in high school, but—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —did it secretely. And I was athletic. Played all—got letters in all the sports at high school. I was recruited by [Robert L.] "Bob" Blackman, who was Dartmouth's football coach then, but I didn't want to play football. It was just too bruising a sport, and I'm glad I didn't. But I played intramurals, which I loved except when I coached our fraternity intramural football team to an "unfeated" season; "unfeated" meaning we lost every game.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: We were un-undefeated, and so called "Coach" by my fraternity mates, and they still call me Coach, having lost every game that year.

So I love the outdoors, but I wasn't trying to escape Washington. Washington in those days did not feel like a

huge, oppressive, urban environment, but you—you know, how wild Dartmouth felt was definitely an attraction, not as an escape from the city but just as something I was attracted to.

LI: Right. And what was—what was, you know, mainstream culture like when you got here? What was the Dartmouth mainstream?

ROGERS: What was the cultural environment?

LI: Yes.

ROGERS: Not—not as rugged and alcohol laden as the image had it. I always thought, anecdotally, from what I observed, that there was more drinking at some of the other schools than at Dartmouth, but it was—you know, the image is sort of a hard-partying school but also—and which I think was exaggerated—but also as an extremely high-quality college with a real emphasis on undergraduates, as I've mentioned, and a lot of enthusiasm. And there really was a lot of enthusiasm for the school. People liked being there. Not everybody. Some—some left fairly early because it was one of those places, if you didn't like being way out there, if you didn't like the winters, you really didn't like them. But if you did, you loved it. So I had a sense that most people were happy there. Most people studied hard but also were able to relax and play. I felt like there was a lot of attention to student welfare.

As you can tell, I like Dartmouth, so I have a hard time—I have a hard time dredging up things that I didn't like. And I thought the culture grew that way. There were—there were—it was far less diverse in those days. Obviously, it was all male. Secondly, my fraternity had two black guys, great guys, but only two. I don't know—I don't know what the statistics would show about Latinos or Asians or others, but it was certainly far less diverse than now. And that would be one of its shortcomings, and that reflected the times, of course.

So I guess kind of a little bit of a summary of what I think of as the culture and the environment when I started there.

LI: And, you know, being so aware of current events when you were at home, did that carry over when you came to Dartmouth?

ROGERS: Yes. Not quite in the same way. I no longer had every meal consisting of a political discussing with somebody as I did in all of our dinners at home. However, a lot of the students there were, of course, smart, aware, tuned in to what was going on, so there was that awareness. And, of course, we had some—some huge events during my time there, including the [President John F.] Kennedy assassination. And those kinds of things brought great attention, obviously, on the part of the students.

What wasn't developing yet was [the] Vietnam [War], the awareness. I started in the fall of 1962, graduated from high school that spring and started [unintelligible] into Dartmouth. So it was before Vietnam really got going. The civil rights movement was prominent, and Kennedy had been elected. There was a lot of excitement about him, although I have my own personal opinions, to some extent, about some of them mentioned? but he was certainly an inspiration.

So there was a lot of attention to those things, but not quite on the same of intensity as I had experienced in my high school years at home.

LI: Were there many—you mentioned, you know, not much Vietnam-related activity on campus yet, but in terms of the civil rights movement, did you find that there were a lot of protests, or what was the reaction like on campus?

ROGERS: I don't remember very much. I mean, I guess I would say there was a drawback to Dartmouth in the sense that its isolation, relatively isolation, especially in those days, tended to I think lessen the—the amount of passion or the demonstrations—I mean, you demonstrated on Main Street or the Dartmouth Green, and this wasn't going to get the same amount of attention as if you demonstrated in Boston or at the Pentagon or something. So there was probably a little sense of this whole detachment, being in Hanover.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: And so I would say that—that—that was a weakness of—of Dartmouth. It was not that people didn't care, but it wasn't the throbbing concern that it was becoming in other places.

LI: Right.

And, switching gears a little bit, can you—you mentioned the Kennedy assassination. Can you tell me about the moment of hearing that news?

ROGERS: Oh, yeah. I was in organic chemistry class. I can pretty much see myself with the beakers and stuff and pretty much picture exactly where I was standing in the lab, and heard it by word of mouth and immediately closed things up and went back to the fraternity house and watched television straight for 48 hours or something like that, with just a little bit of sleep.

LI: And what was your initial reaction?

ROGERS: Devastation. Disbelief. Nothing like that had happened. I mean, that was the first of a series of world-shattering events over the next decade or so, but that was the first one that just was kind of—completely threw you off your bearings. Like, *It cannot be happened. That can't be real*. And a sense of real grief and some sort of confusion. Fear but not fear for physical safety but just a fear for what that meant for the country.

LI: Hmm. And do you—sorry. I was just wondering. Did you—speaking to your father about that, with him, so involved in the American government at that time?

ROGERS: Yeah, I did. I can't remember any specific thing that was said. I mean, there was just this shared sense of the sorrow. And he and Mother certainly felt that, too. I mean, Bobby Kennedy had replaced Dad as attorney general, and Dad had sort of mixed views of Bobby Kennedy. Especially in those days it was a mixed bag. I mean, later he sorted out his own life a little bit and his own beliefs, and so—but in those days, the Kennedys were very complex. I guess they were always complex and still were. And my parents had kind of a complex view of them.

Nonetheless, having the president, Kennedy or anybody else, assassinated was just beyond words. It didn't matter

what you thought anything about them personally or about their politics; it was tragedy of the deepest sort for—for everybody: for families, for administration, for the country, for the world.

So, yeah, I talked with my parents about it. I don't have distinct memories of what was said, but everybody felt the same, as far as I know.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: It was just shock and profound disbelief beyond words. I mean, America had come out of World War II, seemingly invincible and starting to make progress on civil rights. Things are pretty stable. The '50s, although there was a great deal of turmoil under the surface and a great deal of bias and discrimination and anti-gay and all the things that we've been struggling with ever since—although that was all brewing under the surface, on the surface the '50s were very calm, very sort of like the best of times for many people, not for everybody but for many people. And—and to have Kennedy assassinated was like—all of that was just blown apart—

LI: Right.

ROGERS: —and sort of started—you know, began the next decade of real turmoil.

LI: Could you speak about that turmoil a bit, especially since some of it overlapped with your—your time in college?

ROGERS: Yeah. Well, of course, a summary of things include the Kennedy assassination, Bobby Kennedy assassination, Martin Luther King [Jr.,], Vietnam, [the] Watergate [scandal] a little bit later. Those were the big ones, I guess, and I may be missing some.

On the good side was the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, the somewhat mixed issue of—of more sexual acceptance, although certainly you didn't find a glimmer yet of accepting gays and lesbians. But it kind of laid the ground for those kinds of things. You know, Woodstock [Music & Art Fair in Bethel, New York, August 15 to 17, 1969]. Man, there was a lot happening in those days! [Chuckles.]

LI: [Chuckles.] Definitely action packed.

In terms of Vietnam, when did you start realizing or believing that this conflict was going to become a very important part of America's history or that, you know, things were escalating?

ROGERS: It's so hard to say. It was so gradual, which is part of the problem, of how we got into the darn thing.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: You know, it was kind of—under the radar for a while there. I guess—I guess to some extent the Gulf of Tonkin thing [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution] and, even more so, when the [U.S.] Marines landed at Da Nang, ended up being eventually—when the Marines landed in the spring of 1965. I mean, that's when it really became a bigger reality for most of us. But it had been building up for so long that it was, you know, like—like grass growing outside, you know? You don't pay attention to it day by day, but if you let it go, eventually it gets pretty darn tall. And that's the kind of thing that was happening there.

Again, most of us at Dartmouth were focused on our studies and where we were going to go after school and that sort of thing, but after a while you couldn't—you couldn't avoid it because it was going to hit you in the face. So I would say '64, '65, so my junior and senior years, stayed prominent in my awareness.

LI: Right. And so in those—you know, the latter half of your Dartmouth experience, what were you—were you still focused on pursuing the medical route?

ROGERS: Yeah. Yes, I was pre-med. Like you, I had a dual major. Half of it was history. Like you, I was a history major, but my other half, unlike you, in computer science I was pre-med basically, so I was a history major. I never quite know why because I had never really taken completely to history, but I think part of it was Harvey LeSure, the fellow I mentioned, w was my mentor—my tutor and then was a major reason I went to Dartmouth—he was a history teacher in Sidwell Friends. And I think the fact that he was a history teacher led me to declare as a history major but also pre-med.

I was very much focused on medical school, and as a result, I was working my behind off. I mean, I was—I was spending—I was not—I was not a big party guy. I worked. I studied. I sat in the library, Baker Library [Fisher Ames Baker Library now Baker-Berry Library] a lot. [Both chuckle.] And it paid off. I mean, I did get in to Harvard Medical School, so I—I was very much focused on medicine, still, during—in those years.

LI: And obviously pre-med is so demanding in terms of the course load, and then you also had this history major. Did you feel like you were able to take advantage of the sort of liberal arts approach that Dartmouth still stands for today?

ROGERS: Yes, very much so, but maybe not quite as much as I would have if I had not put so much emphasis on—on pre-med. But, yeah, I think going—yes, I took advantage of it being a liberal arts school, and I think that was extremely valuable for me. I took a pretty wide range of courses. And having also focused on history, that helped broaden my experiences.

LI: So what were your favorite classes, for example, when you were here?

ROGERS: Yeah. I did tend to like science classes. I liked biology quite a bit. I liked chemistry fairly well. I think the science classes. But some of the political science stuff, too, that I enjoyed. Unlike some people, I don't have particular classes that stand out in my mind quite as much; it's more an amalgam or a sense that this was a really good education, with a lot of caring professors. But, again, I've mentioned Harvey LeSure, my high school tutor and mentor, a number of times. I didn't end up having anybody like that at Dartmouth so much, surprisingly. But I consider that I got an extremely good education.

LI: And you mentioned that you felt as though your education was broadened. Just in a sense of the scope of classes that you were taking, or was there another way in which you felt that Dartmouth had expanded your awareness or knowledge?

ROGERS: Certainly in the scope of classes, yes. But also just the atmosphere. I mean, although we had a good time there, people worked hard, and the professors were top quality.

And, you know, going to school with students from all over the country and from a wider range of demographic and economic backgrounds than I had at Sidwell Friends—that was part of the broadening experience as well, I think.

LI: Were your views challenged? Or did they change by those interactions with different sorts of people?

ROGERS: Not in any dramatic way that I can identify. I think at the time, I sort of considered myself somewhere in the progressive Republican category. I mean, I've later become a Democrat all the way down the line and probably pretty radical in ways, but in those days I was sort of in a fairly middle-of-the-road kind of approach, both politically and socially. So, you know, there wasn't any great turn at that stage. There was later in my life, but not at that stage so much. It was a—it was a pretty—it was a pretty solid and pleasant broadening experience, but it was not—it's not an abrupt shift, by any means, in my perspectives about things.

LI: Mm-hm. And so I guess approaching—you say you got into Harvard Medical School. Did you go there immediately after Dartmouth?

ROGERS: Yes, I did. I did my senior year at Dartmouth, by the way, as a Senior Fellow—they still have Senior Fellowships, is that right?—

LI: I believe so, yes.

ROGERS: —where a relatively small number of high-achieving seniors get to be Senior Fellows, which means they don't have any course requirements whatsoever. There was nothing I needed to take in my senior year. However, I needed to write some kind of a project, and I kind of wasted my senior year (one of the things I do regret) by dreaming up some kind of project called something like Readings from Three Great Periods of History—Great Readings from Three Periods of History. I don't even remember the name of it, exactly,—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —which shows how—how sloppily I did the thing. So I didn't do myself a service, really, in senior year. But I did take a variety of additional courses, and I did still focus on getting into medical school. And I got into medical school. I went

directly there. My dad actually tried to convince me to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship, and I might have had some chance at it, in those days, anyway, but I didn't want to. I just wanted to go on to medical school, because that had been such a big part of my aim, my identity. So I got accepted to several schools and decided to go straight to Harvard.

LI: And you mentioned your father tried to I guess dissuade you from going to medical school. Were your parents, in the end, supportive of that—of that choice?

ROGERS: No. Actually, I probably gave a misimpression there. No, he did not try to dissuade me from going to medical school. I mean, I think he puzzled as to why I was going to medical school, because, as I have mentioned, the whole family was lawyers, and this would be a big departure from Rogers and [unintelligible]. But he was proud. I mean, you know, it's hard to—I guess it's hard to be too critical of someone going to Harvard Medical School, so—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —he—they were supportive, but Dad thought that I could take a year off or so and get a Rhodes Scholarship. For some reason, being a Rhodes Scholar gives you, like, a lifelong label.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: It's one of the few things where if you talk about somebody and you—you always proceed it by saying he or she was a Rhodes Scholar. It's like a kind of coronation. Normally I don't care about those things, but it's one area that I regret a little bit not having applied for so I could get that automatic label, of the smart person the rest of my life, but it really hasn't gotten in my way at all [chuckles] not to have it.

LI: [Laugh].

ROGERS: Anyway, I said no to Dad. "I'm not going to apply. I'm going to Harvard medical School." And he said, "Great. That's fine." They both—they both were supportive of it, and that's where I headed after my senior year.

LI: And what was that transition like?

ROGERS: Terrible. I've looked back on it a lot and never been able to sort it out entirely. The end result is that after completing a year, I dropped out of medical school. I don't know all the reasons, but I went from idyllic Hanover and Dartmouth to a really part of Boston where the Harvard Medical School is—it's not in Cambridge; it's across the river, in a less pleasant part of Boston, with extremely smart people, whom I liked, and I worked just incredibly hard. And two-thirds of the way through my first year, I was doing fine. I got honors grades, and I was doing fine. But I got mono, mononucleosis, a pretty severe case of it and left school in the spring of my freshman year at Harvard Medical School and went home to my parents' house to recuperate.

I was starting to think I didn't want to stay in medical school. I was having a hard time sorting out whether it was a result of illness or whether the illness was a result of my unhappiness or whether I really was unhappy or not. Even now, as I look back on it, I can't sort that all out entirely, what caused what. But more and more I started thinking, *Medicine is not right for me, for one reason or another.*

After recuperating for a few months, I went back in the fall of 1967. I had graduated from Dartmouth the year before, in '66. I went back to Harvard Medical School in the fall of 1967 to complete my first year because I didn't want to just drop out without having gone back after my illness. I needed to test out whether the illness was the reason I was feeling like dropping out or whether I really didn't want to be a doctor.

I went back, completed my first year, was encouraged by my professors to stay, but I just didn't want to, so I dropped out in late fall 1967 and went back home one more time to my parents' home, trying to sort out my life at that point.

LI: And what about it? You said you lost interest in medicine. Can you articulate why, or is that still just one of the unknowns?

ROGERS: Well, it's a little bit of the unknowns, but I have sort of standard answers that—that are at least part of the truth. I started thinking that medicine would be too confining for me in the sense that, although there are plenty of exceptions—people in public health and so forth—to a large extent, many doctors spend their life in a hospital or in an office with not too much exposure outside and not too much involvement in

the community, for good reasons. But unfortunately, for instance, there are relatively few doctors in public positions. There are relatively few doctors in Congress. There are relatively few doctors in most community organizations. That's because they're working so damn hard and because they're so devoted to what they do and it's so consuming.

So I started thinking I didn't want to be restricted that way. I didn't want to be consumed. I had grown up, as we discussed, in this sort of—paying attention to the world environment, being involved in what's going on, and the idea of being a doctor started seeming to me as something that would draw me away from that and keep me isolated and secluded. So that's at one level.

Another level: I had a hard time with anatomy class. I mean, disserting human body is a—is a—is a challenging experience, and I started thinking, *I'm not sure I like that part of medicine.* You know, if I'd stayed, I probably would have ended up in something like radiology or psychiatry or something, perhaps. But for those reasons and others that are hard for me to identify, what I do know is the fact that I dropped out of medical school in fall of '67.

And I have never regretted it since. I wondered for quite a while whether that had been a good decision, but I was sure and suspect that it was the right thing for me, mostly because I've been so happy with the way my career did go.

LI: Right. And so when you did return home, what were you thinking at that point in terms of, you know, your next steps?

ROGERS: Well, you know, the thing that was the obvious thing looming on the horizon was I had given up my student deferment, and this was at a time when the Vietnam War was raging. The fall of '67. You know [the] Tet [Offensive] was early in 1968. The protests were increasing. But at the same time, the draft, which was still in place, before the lottery had started a few years later—the draft was obviously at the forefront for me because I was not subject to being drafted into the [U.S.] Army and being sent out on—out into the bush in Vietnam, and in Army infantry grunt.

So the—the contrast between having been—kind of ethereal, detached, clinical at academia or Harvard Medical School and then now facing being a combat soldier in

Vietnam—that was a pretty stark—pretty stark change of identity and life situations for me.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: So I had to figure out what the heck was I going to do, given this new reality and the fact that I was feeling completely disoriented and didn't have a sense of identity anymore, and it was a very—very tough six months or so.

LI: At that point, did you believe in the war?

ROGERS: No. I—I was not an active protester. First of all, again, I was just so absorbed in my own angst and staying out of it still physically and all those things, but I was not an active protester, but as I remember writing before I went over there, I used the phrase "stupid war." I think it kind of sounds like [unintelligible]. I don't know if it's right to [unintelligible]. This kind of "stupid war." It just didn't make sense to me even then. But I'll just say I was not out marching with protesting.

LI: Right. And so in thinking that it was a stupid war, I mean, obviously you eventually went to Vietnam, but what did you think about the draft or the possibility of serving there?

ROGERS: I was terrified. You know, very few—I don't know what the statistics are. You probably have them—how many people from Dartmouth ended up in Vietnam, but I imagine it's a relatively small number compared to the number who graduated in those years. And if that's correct—I assume that's correct, right? You know, it's a relatively small number.

LI: I would assume so. I don't actually have the statistics, though.

ROGERS: No, none of my fraternity mates and my other close friends went to Vietnam. I was one of the few. And I could have avoided it easily in a number of ways. Staying in medical school was the first one. When I dropped out medical school, I went to see a counselor for a while because my whole world had been turned upside down, and he offered to right me a bogus deferment, based on anxiety or whatever, and I said no. I said, "I am capable of serving, and I'm not going to accept the bogus deferment." And I've always been glad that I didn't do that, and sort of proud that I didn't do that.

But I did look at every other avenue of perhaps not being drafted into the Army. I looked at going to Canada, which I was just not willing to do. I was not a conscientious objector. I mean, I despise war, but I was not a conscientious objector, et cetera, et cetera.

So it came down to were there other alternatives in the military other than the draft that were more palatable or less unpalatable. And eventually I ended up applying for the Navy Officer Candidate School, which I was qualified to do because I was a college graduate. And started that. Started Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, in the Navy, in—in May of 1968, expecting that I might well be on a ship in Europe or something. But I didn't know. But it was better than being drafted into the Army.

LI: Right. And in terms of considering whether or not to be exempt from the draft, did you feel a sense of obligation to be on the same plane as every other American of your age at that point?

ROGERS: Yes, if I understand your question. Yes, I didn't—that's the reason I turned down that offer of a medical deferment. Yeah, if that's what you mean. Yeah, I—I didn't want to use my privileged background in a—in a non-genuine way.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: You know, I felt some sense of obligation. If others were doing this, why should I not do this? But I don't want to glamorize that too much. I was not somebody that said, "I'm going to join the Marines to show I can do it" or because other people are—you know. Took a middle course. I mean, I didn't actively try to avoid my obligation, but I tried to direct my service in a way that was less—less dangerous.

LI: Right. And what was the family reaction to deciding to go into the Officer Candidate School?

ROGERS: My dad, who had been a Navy officer in World War II, on the aircraft carrier in the Pacific, was hit by kamikazes and so forth—my dad was proud of me, pleased. I think Mother was proud and scared. My siblings were kind of puzzled that anybody in our family would—any of the four of us, the three siblings and I—were puzzled that I would be willing to go into the military when I had a way to avoid it.

LI: Mm-hm. And do you think that your dad's—did your dad's service influence that decision at all?

ROGERS: Yes, I think it did. You know, I was proud of him. He didn't talk very much about it, like most war veterans. He rarely talked about his service. He didn't know much about it except kind of some of the more sanitized recollections. But, yeah, I'm quite sure that it had some effect on how I felt about the Navy and my decision to go that route rather than some of the other possible routes I might have taken.

LI: Mm-hm. And when you joined, what was that process like?

ROGERS: Really tough. I was still feeling really disoriented and still physically kind of weakened, very anxious. I got orders to go to Officer Candidate School they said that in Newport, Rhode Island, for four moths. I drove there, and I remember that as an extremely scary and unpleasant trip. You know, I was going into a completely new world, and—you know, again, from Dartmouth and then Harvard Medical School to marching in formation and getting your head shaved and doing all that stuff you do in the first training in the military.

So it was—it was difficult. I wasn't sure—I was sure that I had the ability to make it through; I wasn't sure that I had the emotional wherewithal at that point to make it through, but I did.

LI: Do you—it sounds like you went from, you know, such a mindset of uncertainty and then going into this environment where you were instructed what to do, you know, all day, every day. Do you think that was helpful in any way or even more disrupting?

ROGERS: That's another fascinating question. I've actually never thought about it. I think—I think at some level it was helpful, and I've never thought of it quite that way. Not having to make decisions anymore [chuckles], for the most part. You know, just being told what to do. I suppose that you lose some of the challenges, not in a very pleasant way,—

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: —but in a way that maybe helped me get through it. Once you're in the military, you're in. You don't just say, "I'm sorry,

I think I'm gonna leave now." [Both chuckle softly.] There may be ways out, but they're not very pleasant. But—so, yeah, good question. And I might add that to my personal narrative as I think about it.

LI: [Chuckles.] Feel free.

ROGERS: [Chuckles.]

LI: And can you describe for me what your regimen was like, the daily activities and, you know, what that training process felt like?

ROGERS: Yeah, it was a mixture of sort of typical military vigor, you know, with a lot of marching in formation and a lot of making sure your uniform is completely the way it should be: everything is in position. And being forced to stand at attention till you felt like you were going to faint. So there was—oh, and cleaning—you know, cleaning toilets with toothbrushes and all those kinds of things. There was sort of that—kind of standard military size, certainly not as rigorous as in the Marines or in the Army Rangers or SEALs [U.S. Navy's Sea, Air, Land teams] or something like that, but—but enough to be really pretty unpleasant and demeaning in one way; but, of course, there's a reason for it: just to make you into part of a machine designed to conduct war.

On the other hand, there was another part of it because this was Officer Candidate School, rather than basic training or boot camp. And the other part of it was classroom stuff very much like a regular classroom except much taller buildings, no Dartmouth Hall or Baker Library or anything. These are just cinderblock buildings with standard kind of classrooms, and we studied the hardest subjects having to do with being an officer in the Navy.

And I happened to turn out to be pretty skilled in navigation, and I enjoyed that, so I studied that quite a bit. And then there was being in simulators where you're driving a ship around but in—but in an electronic stimulator. And then sometimes actually piloting small ships around the harbor there in—in Newport.

So there was a combination of activities. Oh, also firefighting, getting dressed up in funny boots and pointing hoses at oil fires and all that stuff., So there was quite a

range of things there, some of which was just miserable and some of which was actually quite interesting.

LI: In terms of the interesting parts, what was most exciting?

ROGERS: Navigation for me was the most exciting. I guess they identified me as having some abilities in that regard, so I was kind of pointed towards doing some additional work after OCS in the navigation area and eventually became a navigator on a ship, among other duties. So that was probably the most interesting part.

But there were other parts, too. I mean, the piloting of the ships was great fun. And you learned a lot about the military culture. And, you know, we had some down—. We played basketball and catch ball and other things like that.

So it was a mixed bag but a pretty intense four months over all. I mean, once again, given my background and how I sort of rose through the leadership positions to the extent they had such things there, and I was one of the four guys in my regiment that was sort of the top officers.

So we'd been in that environment where I felt completely out of—out of place for a while. I ended up doing pretty well, which had kind of been my history, but it was such a different setting now. Doing well at Officer Candidate School felt pretty different than doing well at any other school like Dartmouth College.

LI: Right. And what was the communication like? You know, you're obviously going through such an intense and singular experience in the sense that it's, I imagine, so different from what your friends from Dartmouth were doing, for example, so how much interaction did you have with either friends from home or people outside, and, you know, what was it like being in this very surreal bubble?

ROGERS: Yeah. It was surreal. It's interesting you used that word because "surreal" is the term that I use most often when I talk about that whole period of my life, especially actually, the year in Vietnam, surreal in every sense. But fortunately, not only family was really supportive and I was in close contact with them, but a number of my Dartmouth friends were. My Dartmouth friends ended up—were then and have ended up being the closest friends I've kept from any of my

past schools. I mean, closer than Sidwell Friends friends or my medical school friends or eventually my Yale Law School friends. My Dartmouth friends, I think, partly because I loved Dartmouth so much, but with my classmates—we kept in touch.

So that was very helpful at—when I was in OCS and even when I was in Vietnam, although it diminished some then because communication was much harder. But I kept in touch with them, and none of them were in a situation like me. They were all in graduate schools of one sort or another. They were all kind of—didn't know what to make of the fact that I, who had been sort of a leader—I was president of the fraternity at Dartmouth and been sort of a leader—and all of a sudden I would be in this completely foreign environment. So it seemed strange to them, just as it did to me. And yet they were very supportive and very helpful.

LI: And when you were there, did you ever question your decision to join?

ROGERS: No, not given the alternatives.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: I mean, I questioned, H*ow in the world did I get here?*

LI: Right.

ROGERS: Most people do when they're in war. *Wait a minute, this wasn't the way things were supposed to be. I was supposed to be in my third year of medical school by now. Here I am. I'm floating around in little Navy boats with little funny hats, with the possibility of going to a war on the horizon. What's goin' on here?*

But it wasn't like, *Well, I should have made another decision,* because there wasn't any other good decision, that was the problem.

LI: Mm-hm. And what kinds of people did you meet there and interact with there? How did they compare to all of your other experiences, either growing up, at Dartmouth or at Harvard Medical School?

ROGERS: A somewhat more wide-ranging group. To get into OCS, you had to be a college graduate, so—so it wasn't like this was a wildly different group of people, as actually was true when I got to Vietnam. I was with a much wider range of—people with a wider range of backgrounds. But at OCS, it was like a wider range of college graduates. I mean, it was sort of a minor change from what I'd been in before, but, you know, again, Dartmouth and Harvard Medical School and Sidwell Friends—they're sort of the elite or snobby or whatever word you want to use, but a slice of Americana. And OCS guys were—and it was all guys—were from a wider range of schools: more state universities and lesser-known schools, so it was a somewhat bigger range of personalities and education and probably just brains than I had been used to, but not dramatically so.

LI: Mm-hm. And did you engage in open conversations about views on the war, or was that kind of, you know, taboo, in a sense?

ROGERS: It wasn't—I don't know that it was taboo, but it wasn't really discussed. I mean, I think everybody—I know everybody was uncertain about where they were going to go, and we didn't find out until about the third—almost the beginning of the fourth month of the four-month program, so you didn't know where you were going to go, and everybody, of course, had Vietnam in the back of their minds, although interestingly, not very much of us in my regiment, so-called regiment, ended up being sent to Vietnam. Actually, just two, me and one other guy.

So everybody know, obviously, about Vietnam. It was very high in our awareness but not high in our discussions. We were in the military, our fate was beyond our hands, and we just focused on doing what we had to do, and it was pretty intense. It didn't have much time to think and ponder and discuss as I did before and after, in other settings.

LI: Mm-hm. And can you tell me about that—finding out where you were going to go?

ROGERS: Well, I got a letter from the Office of Naval Personnel, I think it was, that basically said, "You're going to go to Vietnam for a year, on a hospital ship." And I had no idea what that meant, but I knew it wasn't something that I was hoping for. I

was hoping not to see the word “Vietnam” in orders that I got, so it was quite scary.

It was tough for a little while to try to figure out what that was all about. It was a regular Vietnam tour. I mean, it was not like—many of the Navy ships that ended up, like, firing artillery towards—into the war were ships that were stationed elsewhere, like in Hawaii or something and just traveled into Vietnam waters and back out. The hospital ship I was sent to, I learned, was considered to be in country the whole time, for the whole year, and therefore our duty was, like every other soldier sent to Vietnam, we had a 12-month, 354-day assignment, in-country Vietnam tour, so—when I learned that, it was pretty terrifying.

And the more I learned about what it would be, I was somewhat more relaxed, and I started feeling like at least I would be on the good side of the war. I would be in a ship trying to help people who’d been injured in the war, taking care of people. That was a lot better than, from a personal point of view, being on the ground shooting at people or being shot at. So I started becoming more at ease with it and actually started taking some pride in the fact that I wouldn’t be escaping this entirely.

LI: Mm-hm. And pride in—did you take pride in the fact that you would be involved in the war but not necessarily causing directly any harm to the opposition?

ROGERS: Yes, a lot of pride in that sense.

LI: Was that a consideration?

ROGERS: pride in this context doesn’t quite ring true, but I guess I—I had some pride that I hadn’t pulled strings or—or taken my bogus deferment, that I was doing my part, even though I didn’t believe in this war. I mean, it’s kind of a strange thing. I mean, pick a side. I think every single person of my generation, especially men but not just men, every single person was affected at some personal level by the Vietnam War. No matter what my peers did, the war was a looming presence in their lives. Most of them found a way not to go. That’s fine. I respect that. But many of those who didn’t go feel some guilt for not going. I felt some guilt being largely on a ship and not subject to being shot at, probably.

And those who went to Canada or changed their whole life, those who ended up in prisons—everybody was affected by it, no matter what you decided, whether you were a Marine in the very worst combat, like Khe Sanh in Vietnam or whether you were a defector to Canada. It didn't matter. Everybody was affected in some ways that were difficult.

So that's my overall view, and the ways I was affected were pretty complex as [unintelligible] And I think women were less affected, directly, certainly, but, I mean, they were affected in other ways, including brothers, fathers and—everybody. Well, that war was a complete and utter disaster. It left a huge mark on our country.

And I'm actually glad, in retrospect, that I was involved in some ways because I think it gave me some perspectives and some strengths in the long run, but it was hard to see at the time.

LI: Mm-hm. And how much time did you have between finding out where you were going to actually leaving?

ROGERS: I had the remaining month or so of Officer Candidate School, and we graduated. And, by the way, one of my most fun moments was when—since I was one of the four top bands in our regiment—I was marching up front, in all of our fancy white uniforms, and with a fake sword and all that stuff, and General [Lewis B.] Hershey, who was the head of [the] Selective Service [System] at the time (not exactly a loved figure) was there, watching our graduation, and as I marched by with my fellow graduates, I marched right by his reviewing stand. You do this maneuver with your sword where you flip it up and then you pull it up to your shoulder, and as you do that, the tip of my sword caught a rim of my cap, my hat, my cover, and knocked it off right in—right in front of General Hershey.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: And I was really embarrassed, and then I really thought that was an appropriate gesture.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: I just threw it out, right in front of the head of Selective Service, the guy who ran the draft. My parents were there. I

saw Hershey as my eyes drifted through the crowd, and he was scowling. You could tell—

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: —he didn't like somebody in the front messing up like that. And then I saw my parents, and they were kind of suppressing laughter. They thought it was wonderful. And that really reassured me. And I thought that was a good moment. I sort of gave a figurative finger to General Hershey, and my parents had it in perspective, so that was one of my—one of my more satisfying moments in OCS.

LI: [Chuckles.] Certainly.

ROGERS: So anyway, I did that, and then I got sent to San Diego for about two more weeks to do additional training in navigation and seamanship and preparing me to go to this ship.

LI: And mentally what were you—I'm sure there were so many things going through your head, but how did you at least try to prepare or think about being gone for a year?

ROGERS: You know, in some ways I didn't. There were sort of—it was a little bit like what you put your finger on at OCS, which is I didn't have any choice. I just did what I was told. And, you know, I didn't know what to expect, really. I exchanged letters with the fellow that I was to relieve on the ship. Since everybody was there only 365 days, you know, we didn't go over as a unit; we didn't come back as a unit. Nobody—almost nobody in Vietnam did.

So I wrote to the guy I was going to replace as navigator, and he told me more about the ship and what the duties were and more about Vietnam, and I started becoming somewhat reassured, so I learned more about it, but I just didn't really know what to anticipate. But I knew that it didn't matter, because whether I anticipated it or not, it was going to happen, so I just kind of almost—you know, in a stupor. Just let it happen. I wasn't like I had to decide what classes to take or any of the other things along the way. You were just told, "Here's what you're going to do. Here's where you're going to go." That's it.

LI: And what year was this? What period of time?

ROGERS: The fall of 1968.

LI: Okay. So how—how much was the impending election on your mind at this point?

ROGERS: Not—not too much. You know, I was so focused on my stuff. Dad was out of government then. I didn't know he was going to end up back *in* government,—

LI: Okay.

ROGERS: —so I wasn't terribly focused on it. I did have—of course, Nixon was the candidate, and Dad was an associate of Nixon, a long-time associate of Nixon, for better and for worse, and so I was aware of it in that regard, but it didn't really become prominent until the day after I got to Vietnam, when Nixon was elected.

LI: Hmm. So can you tell me about, I guess, first arriving in Vietnam and experiencing the ship?

ROGERS: You know, I should have asked you earlier: Are we able to take a five-minute break, or is that disruptive?

LI: Sure. No, we can absolutely pause.

ROGERS: Let's—let's do that, and that's a good chance to do that because we're just starting into Vietnam, and so if we can just put it on hold for a minute, that'd be great.

LI: Absolutely.

[Recording interruption.]

LI: This is Ellen Li, still in Rauner Special Collections Library, and we are back after a brief break. And I am on the phone with Mr. Jeff Rogers.

So we were just talking about—about to get to your Vietnam experience, so if you could just explain or reflect on what it was first like to arrive there and see your ship for the first time.

ROGERS: Yeah. After my three weeks or so of additional training in San Diego, I reported to Travis Air Force Base outside of San Francisco and flew on military planes to Vietnam. The route was kind of symbolic of what the whole war was like. It was kind of a disjointed trip. I flew—we stopped—and the military plane stopped in Hawaii, Guam and then the Philippines, and then I traveled down from Manila, where we ended up, to [Naval Base] Subic Bay, where I was supposed to find the ship I was going to be on, the USS *Repose* , AH-16—and that's hospital ship 16.

But the *Repose* was not there, or it wasn't where they told me it would be. I had to figure out where the ship was and how to get there. It took me several days to find out that it had left dry dock, which is where it had been at Subic Bay. Ships over there would go to Subic Bay periodically for upkeep and go into dry dock. The ship wasn't there. I had to figure out where it was and how to get there.

I learned that it had gone back to its station in Da Nang Harbor in Vietnam. And then I had to basically hitchhike (on planes) to get there. It was not—no one gave me a ticket. No one told me, "Here's the flight you're on." They just said, "You gotta get to your ship." So I asked around and found a plane that was going to Da Nang and got on that. That's how much of the war went. It was sort of this ad hoc stuff.

And we flew into Chu Lai. I remember a real rapid descent, and planes would spiral down at a very steep angle so as to make it harder for enemy—the bullets—anybody to shoot the planes down. Landed a Chu Lai for a little while and then got another plane up to Da Nang, where my ship was. And, again, kind of wended my way on Navy taxis through the little town of Da Nang and then took a boat out, in Da Nang Harbor, out to the ship. I got there on November 4th, I think, in 1968.

LI: And did this round-about process kind of create a sense of—or heighten the sense of anticipation, or was it more of a frustrating experience?

ROGERS: It was a puzzling experience. I mean, I would have expected things to be running a little more together than that, you know. I talked with the niece, who served in Afghanistan not long ago, and she talks about how they had scheduled planes and it was more like commercial airlines in the kind of

she had, whereas in Vietnam it was this hit-and-miss sort of thing, and so it was kind of puzzling. Like, *Hmm, this is kind of a weird way to get somebody to a war duty.*

LI: Right. And could you describe the ship for me?

ROGERS: Yeah.

LI: Physically.

ROGERS: The ship was a little over 500 feet long. It was a converted World War II—it originally was built in the ’40s as a cargo ship, but they later converted it and one other Navy ship to hospital ships, about 500 feet long. Painted white with a big red cross on it, indicating it’s a medical facility. Not a very sleek ship. We did not have guns. I mean, there were some personal guns on the ship, a few, but this was not a warship of a typical sort. It didn’t look like a typical Navy ship, and it was not particularly in great shape, although it had a very good hospital on it.

We had both the hospital part of the ship and the ship’s crew part. The hospital part consisted of doctors, nurses—this was one of the very few places in Vietnam and I think one of the only—one of only two Navy ships that had women on it in terms of nurses, Red Cross workers. And we had patients, a lot of whom were Marines. We were in an area of Vietnam that had a heavy presence of Marines. Marines, and the next most prevalent military contingent on the ship as patients were Army. Some Navy patients. And then we had Vietnamese civilians, including kids, to the extent we had room to take them into the hospital.

So it was a very unusual environment for a Navy ship. It was unusual in the way it appeared, it was unusual in its role, and it was unusual in who was on board. So that’s kind of a little bit of a picture of what it was like. But the main message is on “different”.

LI: Mm-hm. And how would these patients get to your ship?

ROGERS: The largest number of them would be brought by helicopter, and we would stay close to the battle patients and to the onshore medical facilities. So some of them would be helicoptered out directly from the battlefields where they were injured, and we would be the first medical facility they

would be brought to. Some of the others would go from the battlefields to the smaller, onshore medical facilities and then be flown out to us.

Some of the patients were brought out by boat when we were in the harbor, but that was unusual. A large majority were by helicopter, the exception being that the Vietnamese, who knew that we would treat anybody, whether they were South Vietnamese civilians or South Vietnamese Army [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] or even Viet Cong or even North Vietnamese. We would treat anybody.

Some of those were brought out to us by small kind of sampans, fishing type boats that would be rowed out and paddled out through these heavy seas to our boat, and we would drop some kind of a hoist overboard and lift these kids up or these patients up.

So people were brought to us by all sorts of means, but the largest number were brought by helicopters directly onto the small helicopter flight deck in the aft of our ship.

LI: Okay. And so you mentioned that you would serve anyone and help anyone. Did that mean that your ship was sort of a neutral space in terms of, you know, did any Vietnamese ever interact with Americans on board? What was that sort of culture like?

ROGERS: Yeah, anybody could interact with anybody. And, of course, it was reflective of part of the weirdness of that war, which is for most of the Vietnamese, if they were other than engaged in actual combat, you didn't know which, quote, "side" they were on or what their background was. And many of the Vietnamese would be loyal to one side during the day and the other side at night, and it was kind of chaotic that way, so there was—there was this atmosphere on the ship of—what's the word? Mixture, melting pot? Kind of like, *Wow, this is sort of reflective of this war. We got a lot of soldiers and Marines, but then we got a little bit of all kinds of other—other people.* And, you know, again, *We don't know. We can't sort of it out. We're here to provide medical care to people, and we're gonna do it.*

You know, just like you take the worst criminal offenders in the world, in the country here, and if they're doing mass shootings but they're injured, hospitals treat them. Well, we

did the same thing over there. It didn't matter where they came from or what their circumstances were. If they needed medical treatment, we would give it to them as long as it wasn't bumping services to a U.S. person.

So there was some interaction, you know, and we didn't know all of the interaction. When the—when the patients got better enough, they could be up on the decks. We'd have people sitting up on chairs, with all kinds of casts and bandages and things. It was—actually, the word you used, and I said it's my major word for my experience in Vietnam: surreal. It was bizarre.

LI: And was it—you know, in some ways you're so far removed from the warfront in the sense that you're not doing any fighting, but you see the direct results with the wounded coming aboard your ship and your ship's sole purpose being to help those who have been wounded, so what was that disparity like? Did you—did you think about it a lot? Was that on your mind?

ROGERS: Oh, yeah. And that's another aspect of that surreal thing. Like you say, we were not in any direct combat. I mean, there was always some concern about that. We always had to have some guards out so that any sappers [Viet Cong or NVA solders who got inside a perimeter, armed with explosives; members of the Viet Cong elite C-10 Sapper Battalion] who might come—who might swim out to the ship and plant explosives or something wouldn't do it. So we were always aware of some potential danger, even to the ship.

However, nothing like that actually happened during the year. There was no attack on the ship, so we were not—we did not experience that kind of a threat. And in that sense, we were definitely removed. However, we were close enough—certainly when I was on shore—I was on shore quite a bit, but even when we were on the ship, we were close enough that we could see the tracer bullets going through the hills all the time. We could hear some of the explosions. There was one large attack on a Navy pier not far from us in which quite a few people were killed, and we heard that and saw that explosion.

So we had this—this awareness all the time that it was going on very close by us, but we were not directly in it, and yet

these people would be brought out, just as you say, and we'd unload them from the helicopters and they would be bleeding or coma or sometimes dead, and it was, like, *This—this doesn't make sense.* We were living in a relatively comfortable environment on the ship because it was designed to be comfortable enough for patients, so it was air conditioned. We'd have women on the ship. It was then a reasonably comfortable living condition, at least for us officers. And yet these bloodied, dead and dying guys would appear out of nowhere from these helicopters.

Again, it was kind of mind boggling, and it made no sense. You have these young guys, you know—I was 24. I was much older than most of the people in Vietnam. The average age was 20. And, you know, a lot of these guys who'd be brought in were 18, 19 years old. They were kids, from our point of view, from my point of view. And for what purpose?

LI: Right.

ROGERS: Yeah, it was bizarre.

LI: And did you ever, as an officer, not necessarily, you know, a doctor or a nurse treating these people directly—would you talk to the patients about what it was like out there, or was there not that much interaction?

ROGERS: Yeah, no, we had a reasonable amount of interaction, not a huge amount. We were mostly focused on our jobs. But, yeah, had some interaction, and we would—and the more you heard, the more you thought, *This makes no sense whatsoever.* And the more I realized that the news reports were so misleading. I mean, we didn't have easy access to news because in those days, halfway around the world was a long [chuckles] ways away, so—but when we did get news, the reports were so contrary to what we were seeing and hearing.

One of the biggest battles when I was over there was so-called [Battle of] Hamburger Hill, A Shau (or A Sầu) Valley, and the newspaper reports we saw said we were winning a great victory, and the Marines we treated, who had come in from there, said we were getting wiped out, completely wiped out. And they were. We eventually took the hill, but at a huge cost.

So, again, it was—nothing fit together. The intelligence we would get about what attacks would happen almost always were wrong, so it was very disorienting.

LI: And so you think that those misleading news reports were intentionally misleading or, you know, where was the loss in translation? I mean, maybe you didn't know, but it seem like they were just trying to—

ROGERS: I had some knowledge of that, but mostly speculative, but I think the government was being intentionally misleading, and the media was relying on the government. And, you know, eventually the media had fairly good access to what was actually going on in the war, and that assisted the growing protests. You know, [CBS journalist] Walter [L.] Cronkite [Jr.] went over there and came back and basically started talking against the war. And that was huge in those days because Cronkite was a legendary figure. And when he was able to see for himself, the media started coming around more on it.

But there was a lot of misleading information being given. I mean, the government—you know, Lyndon Johnson knew that it was a disaster and that it wasn't going anywhere, and yet he kept fighting the war.

LI: And did you—

ROGERS: [unintelligible].

LI: —convey these—these sentiments to your father at all, who was—

ROGERS: Yeah, I did to some extent. Yes, I did to some extent. Actually, the letters I wrote home became the subject of a chapter in a book written by a professor who happened to have my son as a student, and my son wrote a paper about letters home, and the professor liked the letters so much—and my son was on—. She wrote this chapter about my letters. And in the letters, I gave some—I gave to Dad some indications of how misleading I thought stuff was and how much of a waste I thought the war was.

LI: I actually read the letters that I could find online. And that definitely struck me, the sense that—you know, having so much frustration, of feeling like there were just two

completely opposing viewpoints in terms of what was actually happening and what was being reported.

ROGERS: Yes, at least for a long time. I think that changed some as the war went along, but, you know, I was there at the height of the war in the sense that when I got there, there was the largest number of Americans, 535,000 or something like that, so I was there right—right at the peak. And as it continued to drag on and on and on, people became more aware, I think, of what was going on, but it was a slow process, like worms.

LI: And were you ever privy to any more information than everyone else on your ship with you, because of your father being in Nixon's administration?

ROGERS: I was not—not through Dad. Dad had an extremely high level of integrity and never told me anything confidential. On the other hand, because people were aware that Dad was secretary of state by that time, I was treated with kid gloves, and I was given privileges that I shouldn't have been given, but—

For instance, when I one time traveled up into the Central Highlands—this is a fellow I had met, who invited me up there to see what it was like—I was given multiple briefings by the generals, like that. I was an ensign at first and then a lieutenant JG [junior grade] when I was over there, the lowest ranks you can get. And these generals were sucking up to me because they thought I had some kind of influence, which—it didn't—I mean, maybe I had some indirect influence, but I didn't—Dad was not—didn't tell me anything—I was not a part of the administration. [Both chuckle.] But sometimes I was treated like it.

So I didn't have access to Dad, but I did have access in other ways because people thought that I somehow was important.

LI: Right. And did that create any sort of uncomfortable relationships on the ship as well?

ROGERS: No. For some reason, people were—nothing seemed to bother people. I really appreciated that. I like to think it's because I wasn't full of myself that way. I mean, I—I—I respected the people that I was working with a great deal,

and I knew that the enlisted guys knew a hell of a lot more than I did about how to run a ship and all that, so I didn't feel like, and I didn't hold myself out to somehow be above anybody else. And I think people responded well to that. So I didn't—I didn't feel any tension. I mean, I got teased about it occasionally and that sort of thing, but—but it didn't create a problem or me, thankfully.

LI: Right. And to kind of take a few steps back, what was the daily life like there? You were there for 365 days. What were your main duties, and what was the typical day?

ROGERS: Repetitious and boring, punctuated by moments of excitement, horror and so forth when the helicopters came in with the patients. My duties, although I worked up to them a little bit at the beginning of the time there—I ended up being navigator, so my duty in that regard was to make sure we knew where we were when we were sailing up and down the Vietnamese coast up to the DMZ, demilitarized zone, and back to Da Nang, and in harbor and helping us head into the harbor and anchor in the right places. Also navigating our way over to the Philippines, were we went four times for upkeep during the year. So navigator was one of my primary duties.

I also became qualified as an officer of the deck underway, which meant that I could be basically running the ship, in command, although the captain is always ultimately in command, but he's not on the bridge much of the time, so I was officer of the deck underway, and you can be the person on the bridge who's giving the commands, steering the ship and as fast or where you're going and all that.

And then my third basic duty was as an LSO, a landing signals officer. The officers of the deck, the OODs, like myself, would take turns going back to the flight deck when helicopters came in, and using hand signals to help direct the medevacs [medical evacuation] and other helicopters onto the flight decks and trying to keep that safe. And fortunately we didn't have any accidents while I was there, except when a helicopter missed the deck and ended up in the water, but fortunately was able to get out and nobody was hurt, so we were very fortunate that way, because landing those helicopters took an amazing amount of skill. I can't tell you how much I admired the pilots, especially the pilots that of the medevacs, who were bringing the injured

guys in. They had to be awfully skillful and awfully cool to land in rough conditions. If we were out, steaming up and down the coast in high water, the ship would be bouncing around. They were—they were really quite amazing. So anyway, that was my third duty, helping to bring the helicopters in.

We had miscellaneous other duties, but those are my things: navigator, officer of the deck, and landing signals officer.

LI: And being on a hospital ship, which obviously is concerned with medicine, how did that make you or did it make you reflect upon your decision to, you know, leave Harvard Med and leave, you know, the medical path?

ROGERS: Yes, it kind of reinforced my decision. Basically—although I did spend some time in the hospital, basically I wanted to kind of stay away from it. I had this sense I wanted to get away from medicine. Well, hell, I wanted to get away from medicine and they sent me to a hospital ship. [Both chuckle.] Not quite as good an escape as I would have imagined, although it turned out to be very fortunate. So I think it reinforced my decisions that I was right. I felt no draw or actual—spending extra time as needed in the hospital, and I didn't.

LI: Right. And did you—I mean, obviously you were so isolated, I would imagine, on that ship. Did you have much contact with the Vietnamese or the Vietnamese culture at that time?

ROGERS: Well, some. I mean, I'd go ashore fairly often. As the year went along, I'd go ashore more often. Only kind of superficial contact. I mean, be walking along the streets of Da Nang or other places in the country. When I flew up to the Central Highlands, we went and went to, you know, a couple of Montagnard [indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands of Vietnam] settlements and had some contact with the Vietnamese there and took some photographs of them and talked with them some.

But when you're in the military over there, you're sort of in a little bit of a U.S. kind of transplanting over there. So it was certainly not an intense cultural immersion in the sense of direct contact with the Vietnamese. It was very much in passing contacts.

LI: And was that reassuring, feeling so—having the concept of American transplanted into Vietnam, or did it kind of contribute to how disorienting and bizarre and surreal the experience was?

ROGERS: The latter, yeah. Yeah, it added to that. And it added to the sense of *What the hell are we doin' here?* You know, a big, powerful country, who, by the way, is completely impotent in this war, but *What are we doin'? We're invading their country and destroying the countryside and a lot of them dying, and*—yeah, it was disorienting, surreal and very distressing, in the sense that we had completely upended their daily lives, although fortunately we didn't destroy their culture. But, yeah, it was not good.

LI: And I guess in terms of—who were your main lines of communication between—within the American Navy and the military? How did you receive your information?

ROGERS: As an officer of the deck and so forth, we—we got intelligence—we got lots of intelligence information directly to us. Also received newspapers and Armed Forces Radio [and Television Service] and that sort of thing. So there were lots of sources of information. A lot of it was suspect in terms of we couldn't necessarily rely on it, but there was big delay in information from the U.S., to a large extent, [unintelligible] the newspapers stories [unintelligible]. I mean, we were a long ways away in those days. Halfway around the world was a very big thing, of course.

LI: Right. And did everyone on the ship have similar feelings about, you know, being so confused by the purpose of the war?

ROGERS: Well, I couldn't speak for any- —everyone, but, yeah, I think—I think—it was hard—it was hard to be over there without starting to wonder, *What the hell is this all about?* Nothing ever seemed to change. It was the same thing day after day, just more people getting injured and killed. You know, the whole body count philosophy made no sense whatsoever. We didn't know who the enemy was, and who friends were.

I think people—my general sense was people had just sort of tuned out. They'd given an American—they did what they had to do, and if they were unsure and fighting they had to

try to keep themselves and their buddies alive and do all the things that they needed to do, but people weren't doing much philosophizing about it. It was, like, "Here we are. There's nothin' we can do about it. We gotta make it through 365 days. We gotta stay alive, try to keep our buddies alive and then get the hell outta here."

LI: Yeah. So how did you kind of cope with that sense of being resigned to the current state of things and the monotony of your time there as well?

ROGERS: Well, again, you know, it's like—there's no way to cope other than to just do it. You know—how do I convey this? It's like—that's what's so different about the military. That's what's so different about war. You no longer really had any choices. You just do what you have to do. And you don't think too much about it. You know, you try to count off the days, and you count each day, and if nothing terrible happens it's a good day. You figure eventually it'll end, but you had no choice.

So it as not even a matter of—it's almost—it's sort of a matter of numbing yourself out, and that's certainly true of the actual combat vets. They become deeply emotionally numb because they have to. That's the only way they can survive. And we were little bit like that—

LI: Right. And so were you thinking a lot about what you wanted to do once you came home? Were you thinking of home all the time?

ROGERS: I had already applied to law schools and been accepted, so I knew that was what I wanted to do. But, yeah, I was thinking about it, but you try not to think about it too much because you can't speed it up. You just try to find distractions. You try to find some things that are pleasurable. And what it was, it was unusually—unusually nice to have women on the ship. It wasn't the whole heavy-duty fraternizing because it was against the rules, and you didn't have time to do it, but humans are humans, so there was—you know, I hung out with some of the nurses, and that was a distraction, although often they'd be talking about the patients they were taking care of and how hard that was, so it wasn't, like, it was a complete relief. But mostly, as I said, I had no choice.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: [Unintelligible]. I tried to sleep, and I tried to eat, tried to wait for tomorrow.

LI: And what were your favorite distractions then?

ROGERS: Nurses. [Chuckles.] Sorry.

LI: [Laughs.]

ROGERS: [Chuckles.] Yeah. But, as I say, sometimes the discussions with nurses were not uplifting.

LI: [Chuckles.] I can imagine. Wow.

And I know you mentioned—

ROGERS: I really admired the nurses and the medical people. I mean, the Red Cross workers and the nurses were—were amazing, amazing.

LI: And it must have been probably hard for the nurses in particular, I'm sure.

ROGERS: Oh, yeah. But some of them were deeply affected.

LI: Did you—I mean, in terms of the range of—I'm sure it was traumatic to be constantly or, you know, frequently seeing all these people who were so badly injured. How did you sort of react to that or deal with that aspect?

ROGERS: Well, it was—it was complex, like everything out there. I mean, it was traumatic in one sense, but, you know, always remind yourself, *Well, your trauma of seeing this is nothing like what that person you're seeing is experiencing*. But it was the waste of it. It was the utter waste.

In my work now as a counselor with—with combat vets, the word—one of the words that comes up most often about that war is "waste." And it's not that that means you don't respect the people who are fighting the war. I respect them a great deal for doing what they were asked to do and doing it well. But asking those people to do that was a waste.

And when I would see these young guys being taken off the helicopters or in gurneys to be sent back to Japan or to the

U.S. or, worse, the body bags, the word “waste”—like, *What the hell? I mean, these are 18-year-old kids, and the war makes no sense. It’s futile, and yet it keeps going day after day after day, year after year after year. How can that be? What is this all about?*

A lot of the grunts started saying, you know, “It don’t mean nothin’.” And then that’s what it started doing. There was no meaning. There was no reason. I’m not a pacifist, but I became about as anti war as you can become without being an outright pacifist.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: I sort of forget what your question was, but that’s what happened.

LI: Yeah. And so this idea of waste and everything being so arbitrary—was it also difficult to reach day 365? You know, it wasn’t like you were leaving after accomplishing some feat in the sense that there was a goal besides, you know, doing your job for one year. How did that feel?

ROGERS: Just like you—just the way your question suggests: a sense of futility, a sense of sadness, of loss, and a sense of yearn for not only the people so directly affected but for the country, really. And, of course, for me it was complicated additionally—I don’t mean complicated worse than another people. Not at all. But complicated additionally, in an unusual way by Dad being secretary of state and advising Nixon, who, contrary to Dad’s advice, was the primary mover of keeping this damn war going for another five years after he got elected, saying he had a plan to end the war. Just about as many people were killed during the time I was there and afterwards as they were before I was there. That’s hardly a quick end to the war.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: So it was—it was—added to the surreal quality for me was, you know, my dad was one of the few people in the governmental, fortunately—his advice consistently was to get out and get out quicker, but he and [Melvin R.] Laird—he and Laird, as secretary of defense, were not able to persuade Nixon and [Henry A.] Kissinger to do that.

LI: And did you talk to—

ROGERS: So that would trigger— I'm sorry?

LI: I was just wondering: Did you—to what degree did you and your father exchange opinions on the war?

ROGERS: I told him mine, but he didn't tell me his very much. I knew he was—I knew he thought it was a war that should be ended more quickly, but he never violated confidentiality. He never told me or my siblings about internal discussions. But I do know, when he took office in the beginning of 1969, that he had told one of my siblings that he thought we ought to get out entirely from Vietnam within six months. And he was pushing that all along. But the result unfortunately—what actually happened was we didn't get out for five years.

LI: Mmm. And, I mean, what was the process of coming back like?

ROGERS: Strange and relatively uneventful for me, compared to many people who came back to great contempt, [calling] names and so forth. I came back as an officer to a stable family situation. I tried to put Vietnam out of my mind, to a large extent. People didn't ask me much about it. Typical kind of thing, where you don't talk much about it. But it was relatively smooth for me. The people that make the best transition back tend to be ones like me that have strong social support. Then, of course, I was not in direct combat, so that's quite a different thing.

LI: So you didn't—you tried to resist thoughts about Vietnam once you were home.

ROGERS: I'm sorry, I didn't do what?

LI: You were saying you tried to put Vietnam out of your mind once you were home, which obviously, I'm sure, is the natural reaction. So did that mean—you know, once you were back, did you have any resulting obligations, or was it once your one-year tour was over, then you were—you were done?

ROGERS: No, I had another year of active duty obligation. I was in the Pentagon. After Vietnam, you get some preference in your assignments, so I was able to get into the Pentagon. I was in

a weird little program in which I was helping administer the exchange of officers from foreign navies to train for a while with the U.S. Navy.

And as a part of that, interestingly, I went back to Vietnam for just a week. I flew back with Dad. It happened to coincide with a time he was going to Vietnam and elsewhere on a round-the-world trip. Flew back with him part of the way, and then I flew on military planes to Vietnam, and I did a report for my office about the so-called Vietnamization of the Vietnam Navy. So I spent another week back in Vietnam.

And speaking about bizarre, you know, and surreal, you travel with your Dad, who was secretary of state, back to the place you'd been, although I went to different parts of the country. It was pretty bizarre.

LI: And what—

ROGERS: I got out after the end of that. I got out after two years and had no subsequent obligations other than being in the [U.S. Navy] Reserves, which didn't amount to anything, really.

LI: Right. And when you went back, what did you—what was your assessment in terms of Vietnamization?

ROGERS: Basically that it was a joke. I didn't say it quite so directly, but, I mean, the Vietnamese Navy was very small anyway; it didn't have a very big role. But the whole idea of turning the war over to Vietnam made no more sense than turning Iraq or Afghanistan over to the Iraqis or Afghanis. It's a futile kind of concept. It just showed our ignorance then of other cultures, of what was really going on in that country.

LI: Mm-hm. And did you have any communication with people still on that hospital ship once you had left?

ROGERS: A little bit, for a little while. Not very much. I didn't really make good friends over there, again because we weren't over there as a unit. People were constantly coming and going. We didn't really get to know people all that well. But I kept in touch with a few.

LI: Mm-hm.

ROGERS: But not for too long.

LI: And then once you were home and, you know, free of all obligations, did you just go straight to law school?

ROGERS: Yeah, I started law school in the fall of 1970.

LI: Nineteen seventy, okay. And what was that contrast like? You know, you've gone from—they're essentially polar opposites. You're back learning in school.

ROGERS: Yeah, I was back to "normal." [Both chuckle.] I was going to Yale Law School, Sidwell Friends, Dartmouth. That was where I was more familiar. But my whole approach to life had changed. I was much less driven. I worked much less hard. I had things in a different perspective. I started having my motto be "Do it while you can" because I'd seen that life was unpredictable and short, in a way that I knew intellectually before but never really internalized.

I happened to be in a class with Bill and Hillary Clinton, speaking about more surreal.

LI: [Chuckles.]

ROGERS: I'd grown up with Republican officials and presidents and happened to know the Clintons and have stayed in touch with them to some extent ever since, so adding to the weird twists in terms of my life.

LI: And how did you even try to find a sense of purpose, you know, in law school or going into law thereafter, once you had seen what you had seen in Vietnam?

ROGERS: Yeah. My career moved towards working with or helping individuals. I never became a corporate lawyer or went to a big law firm. I started out as a public defender after law school. I did other jobs working with mentally ill people. I became a manager of an office in the city of Portland and became a mental health counselor. So I found purpose in working with individuals rather than more abstractly, more principles, such as corporate law or appellate law. I respect people who do that a great deal. I'm not criticizing them in any way, but for me that wasn't satisfying to me. What was satisfying is working more directly with people. And that was sort of consistent with my initial interest to be a doctor, and I think being in Vietnam probably intensified that sense of

trying to do something that made some kind of difference in the day-to-day lives of people.

LI: Mm-hm. And going back a little bit, obviously you mentioned how you grew up knowing the Nixons well. Obviously, your father was his colleague. How did you interpret the whole Watergate scandal?

ROGERS: A complete, utter disaster by Nixon.

I'm sorry. I keep [coughing]. I'm going to run and get a bit of water. I'll be right—back real quickly. Just stay right there. Don't change the tape.

LI: Sure. [A slight pause.]

ROGERS: Looking back at Nixon, he did a lot of good things at one level: opening to China, the EPA [the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency], helped provide universal health care, and yet he was a strange, paranoid guy who destroyed himself and did so dishonestly.

And Dad became very disillusioned with him. One of Dad's phrases was, "I never before had a friend who turned out not to be a real friend." Nixon asked Dad to fire [H. R.] Haldeman and [John D.] Ehrlichman, which Dad refused to do. "You hired them; you fire them." And so Dad and Nixon had quite a falling out at the end.

And I interpreted Watergate, as others did, as a Shakespearean kind of tragedy that, along with Vietnam, started our country on a—down a difficult path for a long time and led to—led to [President] Ronald [W.] Reagan and led to what I see, personally, as real unfortunate attitudes in the country about government, of public servants.

So I think Vietnam and Watergate were two of the great tragedies of our—of my lifetime in the public sphere, along with the assassinations we mentioned earlier.

LI: And when you say "an unfortunate American attitude towards public service," did it personally tarnish *your* perception of the government, or did you sort of see it as an isolated event with one individual and that it didn't reflect on government as an institution?

ROGERS: I don't—I think at the time, it did not reflect on government as an institution—well, let me rephrase that. I don't think Vietnam reflected on government as an institution. I think Vietnam—I'm sorry, I don't think Watergate reflected on government as an institution. I think Vietnam did. I think we were still enamored of World War II and were unable to save ourselves from getting mired down in Vietnam. And that reflected poorly on Lyndon Johnson, on Richard Nixon, on Robert McNamara, and probably more than specifically the government, it reflected poorly on our country, the militaristic attitude that we can solve the world's problems if we're strong.

LI: Right.

ROGERS: I think it led to a real decline in government. I mean, I do think nowadays that there is, in the federal government, especially Congress, of course, there's a pervasive problem. But I worked for many years in local government, and I—I greatly respect government over all. And most of the people who work in government, I respect. But there are some very huge flaws, especially in Congress these days, and I think that's a direct result of the anti-government attitude that started back in the years we're talking about.

LI: And have you perceived a change in that sort of American imperialistic mind-set that you know, might have started at the turn of the 20th century, now?

ROGERS: Well, the terrorists won, in a sense. I mean, September 11th [the attacks on September 11, 2001] threw up into a panic worse than any panic we'd been in since the communist era in the '50s, and we have overreacted. And getting involved in Iraq—I mean, I marched against Iraq. People had started—it just was so obvious there was going to be another Vietnam, and I think it was and is.

And, you know, I've been pretty discouraged in recent years, less so the last few years. I think my personal opinions about [President Barack] Obama and the democrats are much more positive, but getting involved in those wars just is such a sense of deja vu. So I'm concerned. I don't know. I think it's up to your generation and to my kids, a little older than you, to get us back on track, solve these problems, and stop worrying about—stop fighting wars and start fighting climate change and paying attention to the real problems.

So that's my sermon.

LI: [Chuckles.] Yeah. I mean, definitely.

In terms of—well, how long did you practice law once you came back?

ROGERS: I practiced law for 30 years. Graduated from law school in '73, retired as a lawyer in 2004, got a master's degree in counseling, became a mental health counselor for the last 12 years, and much of that time has been counseling combat vets who have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] or related problems, the largest number of whom are Vietnam vets but also Iraq, Afghanistan vets, World War II and Korea [Korean War] vets.

So it kinda did full circle for me, and the fact that I was a Vietnam vet, although not a combat vet, gives me an ability to understand a little better than some might what my clients went through, and I'm—you know, I'm familiar with many of the places they describe and battles they were in. I was there either then or when I went back in the year in the Pentagon or when I went back with my son in 2004. And he was the same age I was when I was over there.

So this work as a counselor has kind of brought a lot of things back together for me. It kind of gets me back in the outfield, where I started out, an intern, being a doctor, and now I'm not a doctor but back in the outfield of the mental health field, working with Vietnam vets. And, of course, the connections there are obvious. So it's a really satisfying personal stage of my life that way.

LI: Do you think it's made it easier to digest and process all that's happened by being in this field now for 12 years?

ROGERS: Yes, undoubtedly. And it's part of the reason I wrote this life history originally, a memoir. And in doing that, I looked back over lots of records and a lot of stuff from the Vietnam years and put a lot of things together. That's been very satisfying for me, to kind of write the narrative for myself of my life and seeing how all these threads—and they were woven together over the years. If you ever have a chance to do that, you ought to do it for yourself, too. It's really worth—worth doing. And I think actually your interviewing—

LI: Yeah, I'm sure.

ROGERS: —and what you're doing in this project is—is a part of that, not only for me but to others you're talking to, I think, and I think extremely valuable.

LI: I certainly hope so.

And you mentioned that you went back to Vietnam in 2004 with your son. What was *that* like? Where did you travel, and how was that experience? What made you go back?

ROGERS: Like many Vietnam vets, I was just sort of drawn back, and my son really wanted to go. He'd heard enough about it. When we first got over there, I went to Saigon, like you did, and I didn't have any strong reaction. I'd been in Saigon during the war. I traveled with my dad, by the way, when I was on there—over there for a year. He came over to do some studies of things going on, and I traveled with him around the country then, including flying down to Saigon to meet him and fly around the country with him by helicopter.

When I was in Saigon with my son, I didn't have any real strong reactions., My son, Ty, kept asking me how I was feeling, and I was feeling sort of numb. I didn't—I didn't know what I was feeling. Saigon was not a place that meant a whole lot to me, even though I'd been there during the war.

But then we flew up to Da Nang, where my ship had been stationed, and we took a cab out with a Vietnamese guy who spoke no English, couldn't figure out why we were wanting to go out to that part of the bay. I wanted to out to see the bay where my ship had been anchored.

When we got to the bay, the cab drier just stayed there. We walked out to the bay—as I approached—the bay looked out over this scene. I just lost it. I mean, I just um- —and—but what was going through my mind is I was looking out now at a peaceful day with fishing—small fishing boats at anchor, quietly bobbing there, and everything seemed okay. And when I'd been there, there were warships out there and a hospital ship and planes all around and tracers in bullets, people being helicoptered onto the ship and so forth.

And somehow seeing it at peace and calm was overwhelming for me. It was like somehow this country survived and these people survived, and we didn't destroy it, and it felt like it was okay, and I felt the guilt I had had for not being in combat and also for what our country did in war—was somehow relieved by the scene. It was very cathartic. That was the most intense moment.

And then we traveled up to Khe Sanh.

LI: Would you ever want to go back?

ROGERS: I would definitely go back if I had a—an appropriate time to do it. Yeah, I would go back.

What I do is my clients go back if they can pull it off. It's powerful—it works for all of them, really. War is—is something quite unique.

LI: I'm sure.

ROGERS: No matter what your role, it's [chuckles], again,—

LI: To say the least.

ROGERS: —not like anything else. I have a sign on my wall in my counseling office that says: "Human combat is unlike any other human experience." And I would broaden that to be "war is unlike any other human experience, no matter what your role is in the war."

LI: What do you hope that America ultimately learns from Vietnam?

ROGERS: Oh, good question. Hmm! I don't know, it's hard to come up with anything that doesn't sound like a cliché. We need to learn what war is really all about. We need to recognize that we don't solve things with wars. We need to pay attention to other cultures. We need to be more humble. We need to be more a part of the world. We've been actually so arrogant. You know, this is a great country, but we're not the greatest country on earth. There's no such thing. We're all part of—we're all in this together.

I'm losing my voice. [Chuckles.] We're all in together, and I think we need to learn that. And I don't just mean all Americans; I mean all—

LI: I'm sorry. I've been holding it for three hours.

ROGERS: Those were last experiences I had, at least. I'm glad we did, but I don't usually talk for three hours. [Laughs.]

So anyway, those are the kinds of things to learn.

LI: [Chuckles.] Yeah. I definitely hope those materialize, for sure.

ROGERS: It's up to you.

LI: Well, I think that—that feels like a great place to stop. Yeah. Unless you have some final thoughts about other Dartmouth—or your time in Vietnam—

ROGERS: No, I really don't.

LI: —that you want to say.

ROGERS: I mean, I think we covered a lot of material. I really appreciate the time, and I'm impressed with the way you did this. Either you're really smart or they trained you really well. These interviews are [unintelligible]—

LI: I really appreciate—

ROGERS: —a good interview—

LI: —you taking this time.

ROGERS: —and very thoughtful questions.

LI: [Chuckles.] Well, thank you for answering so thoughtfully as well.

ROGERS: You're welcome, Ellen.

LI: I really appreciate it.

[End of interview.]