Kent Yrchik-Shoemaker
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[SARA D.]

HARRIS: Okay. Hi. This is Sara Harris. Today is Tuesday, August 9th, 2016, around 3 p.m. I'm in Rauner [Special Collections] Library today with Dean Kent Yrchik-Shoemaker [pronouncing YUHR-chek SHOE-mah-ker]. This interview is for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project.

So first of all, I just want to thank you for so much for meeting with me.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sure.

HARRIS: To start off, I'll just ask some biographical questions. Where and when were you born? What were your parents' names?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, and my father was Karl [G.] Shoemaker [pronouncing it SHOE-may-ker], and my mother was Grace [Burson] Shoemaker.

HARRIS: Got it. And what did your parents do for a living?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: My father worked at the University of Wisconsin[-Madison], in the agricultural and economics department.

HARRIS: Interesting. Did you have any siblings?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Two older sisters, so I'm the youngest.

HARRIS: Were you close with your family, growing up?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yes.

HARRIS: Growing up, did your parents talk a lot about current events going on? Did you—were you aware of their political views?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Great question. Yes. I was thinking back to Wisconsin, and we moved when I was six.

HARRIS: Oh, okay. Where did you move to?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So we moved to a suburb of Washington, D.C., and my father was working for the [U.S.] Department of Agriculture from Washington, with all the land grant universities.

HARRIS: Got it.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So I heard about the economy and about things about agriculture. [Both chuckle.] And about colleges, and because he worked in Washington bas- —as a civil servant, there were always sort of conversations about things.

HARRIS: That makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And I do remember—whatever year it would have been—John [F.] Kennedy introducing the Democratic presidential nominee at the Democratic Convention, and I remember watching that. I'm guessing I was eight or nine years old. For some reason, my father said, "That guy might be president someday."

HARRIS: Wow. Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And he wasn't a Democrat.

HARRIS: [Laughs.]

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: But it was just—

HARRIS: He was worried.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —I remembered that statement.

HARRIS: Got it. Do you remember when JFK was assassinated?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yes, I was—at that point, my father had been transferred to the Department of Agriculture in London, England, so he was at the embassy, so I had lived in England for about seven or eight months when that happened. And being so far away from the States, it did not seem real at all. It was difficult to grasp, other than sort of by living in England, realizing how—how much Americans—

how violent the society was and how much they used weapons, given the British police didn't even carry weapons.

HARRIS: Wow. Yeah. So what—just to get these dates—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sure.

HARRIS: So when did you move to D.C. from Wisconsin?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Nineteen fifty-six.

HARRIS: Okay. And then you were there until moving to London—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In '64.

HARRIS: Okay. So was the rest of your high school in London?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. it was a high school that was the biggest group of students were [U.S.] Air Force dependents, Air Force brats, as they called themselves. And so it was mostly American teachers, and most of the students went on to college from there.

HARRIS: So your dad wasn't in the Air Force—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No.

HARRIS: He was just a civil servant. And what was it like growing up in D.C. and then moving to London? Did you like your childhood, or was it hard bouncing around?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, I didn't consider it bouncing around after I met folks in high school who every two years—you know.

HARRIS: Right. Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And I lived in Virginia from first grade to eighth grade. When I got there, I was a Yank, so everybody else was a Confederate in the grade school, and so in the—at recess there were fights because I wasn't—I wasn't a rebel.

HARRIS: Interesting. So the culture in Virginia was really different—oh, you mean in London.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In Virginia.

HARRIS: In Virginia, so the culture in Virginia—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: As a sixth grader.

HARRIS: Yeah. How was that different than Wisconsin? Can you explain those fights a little? [Chuckles.]

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: They were still fighting the [American] Civil War in 1956, and in fact we lived in what was considered rural northern Virginia. And they still had a chain gang working on the highway, so that inmates were literally chained to each other—

HARRIS: Jesus!

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —by the leg irons, and they were, like, digging, clearing the drainage ditches and—

HARRIS: Oh, my gosh.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —things. And the schools were segregated. If that gives you some sense.

HARRIS: Yeah. So did you—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And there were some kids whose parents were, like, at the Pentagon or in civil service, and they weren't as exactly Confederates, but in school you had Virginia history over and over again, and there was a real emphasis on the Confederate States of America as part of that.

HARRIS: Wow. So you lived in a northern suburb of D.C.?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Northern Virginia, so it was south of Washington.

HARRIS: Okay. Got it. And what was that like, experiencing racism [chuckles]? Like, was it very different than Wisconsin?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, I'm trying to thing, You know, Wisconsin—I don't remember seeing any African-Americans, if I stop and think about it. And in Virginia, there were neighborhoods and areas in northern Virginia, and when I went into the seventh

grade, they had—the schools were expanding so quickly, they built seventh and eighth grade schools where it used to be one through—one through seven and eight through twelve. And at that school of 1,100 students, there was one African-American, because they had segregated.

HARRIS: Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And he was in my class. Alexander Pierce Smith was his name. And his father was a lawyer, and there was a homeroom and then three classes together. It was like a high school. You went to each period differently, but the homeroom was all males, and I figured out later that they put Alexander Pierce Smith in with all males because they didn't want him with a white female.

HARRIS: Jesus!

Did you remember having discussions about this with your family? Was that a topic?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I don't—I don't remember discussions about that, but I remember discussions when there started to be women in civil service. And I remember my father complaining that somebody was appointed to a high position in the Department of Agriculture because they were a woman, and that was the only reason.

HARRIS: Interesting.

So you moved to London for high school.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah it was in the middle of eighth grade.

HARRIS: Middle of eighth grade. Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: So what was *that* culture like, compared to Virginia?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: The American—The American high school. There was a, quote, "private" American high school but right in London, and then the school for Air Force kids and others was out in the suburbs.

HARRIS: What was the name of that school?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: London Central High School, which makes no sense but that was—

HARRIS: [Chuckles.] Got it.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —the name of it. In Washington and in the suburb, there weren't very many poor kids in the elementary school. Sort of a couple that were identified as being poorer than the other students. And there wasn't anybody that I would describe as rich. So it was kind of—

HARRIS: Middle class, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, just very typical middle class. And so then the high school I was in, the only sort of distinction was some kids' parents were officers, and some kids' parents were enlisted. But on the—and they could live together or live on the economy, so there was a housing area, and the military—certain rank, you had a certain size house. And that was true, like, even sergeants and up to captains, and then there were, like, colonels had separate houses. And so nobody had, like, a fancier house or anything than anyone else.

HARRIS: Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And there were a few kids in the high school whose parents worked for, like, General Motors [Company] or Chrysler or something, and they were obviously—had a lot more money than sort of everybody else. But I don't remember it being an issue, because it just seemed like everybody knew what everybody else's parents made for income.

HARRIS: Wow! It was all just laid out there. [Chuckles.] Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So it just was. Yeah. So it just was—and I really liked that there wasn't sort of—I don't know what the term would have been at the time, but because of—the Air Force kids had moved so much, there just weren't cliques, and people just got to know each other.

HARRIS: It was inclusive. Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And if you were new, it wasn't that you were different; it was just that you recently arrived, like everybody else.

HARRIS: Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So there was a sort of constant turnover, and there was just a kind of egalitarian—about—about it. And there were a bunch of African-American students for the first time. The eigth—when I went from seventh to eighth grade, then they went from one male to three or four African-American students out of 1,100. At the high school of 500 then, maybe there were 20 or 30—

HARRIS: Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —which to me seemed like—

HARRIS: Yeah, a lot more.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Wow. It's a different thing. And they lived together.

HARRIS: The African-Americans?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. So that was a different experience, and I just thought that was good—

HARRIS: The African-Americans lived with the other Air Force children?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, yeah, on the base.

HARRIS: And were you in the minority of not having a parent in the military, or was it a mix?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yes, the minority, but there were—yeah, I guess that's true—you know, whatever it was, 15 percent, 20 percent, and maybe the company kids were 5 or 10 percent or something like that.

HARRIS: So you were in high school what years?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: From '64 to '67.

HARRIS: Okay. And what was it like—like, what was the discussion about international events during those four years, especially because kids' parents were enlisted or in the Army? What were things discussed about, I don't know, the war, the Vietnam War?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [Pause.] I'm trying to think. As a senior, I remember there was a discussion—

HARRIS: Yeah, in 1965, when the American ground troops went to Vietnam was.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It wasn't an environment where there was much questioning of that. And as a senior in high school, I remember we were on a trip, students, talking about it and just thinking—some reservations about President [Lyndon B.] Johnson. And for a lot of my friends, anybody who wasn't going to go to college was going in the military. It was what they were going to do, which was certainly true in any community in the country. There was a draft through the '60s, and it was just more of a given that kids who were Air Force brats and—

I don't remember very many of them disliking the lifestyle. They had been around the world, and wherever they were in the world, when you went on base and you went to the BX [base exchange] and you could buy American clothes, or you went to the bowling alley or you went to the movie theater, you were, like, back in the States because it was—

HARRIS: Mm-hm, a little microcosm.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —it looked just like a base in Kansas. And so there was sort of a—

HARRIS: So you lived on that base.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, we lived—

HARRIS: Okay, okay, but most of your friends lived on that base.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —in London, in an apartment, and so there was maybe half the school?

HARRIS: Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Maybe. Yeah, and the other half just lived different places, and they had the choice—what I was going to say?—about—thinking about the draft and—[Pause.] The draft—so it wasn't so much a factor in 1967, but friends of mine went into the service.

HARRIS: Yeah. Was there, like, a fear of that, or were people very accepting of the draft?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: That was, like, what they were going to do. Sometimes it was a threat. I was involved in sports, and we would travel to France or Germany to compete with other American high schools, and we got in trouble in Germany, and we were—the guy who was driving the car tried to get away from the police, and we ran away to—it must have been an American community. Anyhow, the police ended up picking us up, and we were at the police station. And when the one father came, he said to his son, "You're going to be enlisted tomorrow." Because as a 17-year-old, he could have been. So I found out later his dad let him graduate. So there was this sort of thing—you know, there were times when that was sort of a threat.

HARRIS: Yeah. Interesting. So you played sports in high school. Is that your main thing you did outside of classes?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: What did you do in your free time?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was the senior class president, and—yeah, that was pretty much—I was in a play, but it was not memorable. [Both chuckle.]

HARRIS: That's important. [Chuckles.] What sports did you like?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Cross-country and track and wrestling. And actually what I was going to say earlier was something about sort of the American identity and the British identity and—my friends who had been there a couple of years—we could pass as British. You know, we would take off our belt, and

we would dress a little bit differently, and we could do a version of a Cockney dialect and sort of pass—we could pass.

And there were times, like, in the summer when all the tourists arrive, and it was sort of like—there was a popular book called *The Ugly American*, and so these tourists were "What's wrong with England?" and then "Why do you have to wait so long?" and "Why can't they—don't they serve their food the right way?" and "Why don't they"—you know, living there and having a strong American identity but appreciating things about England. It was, like, "You're just obnoxious."

HARRIS: Yeah. That's an interesting perspective.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And so—there was that kind of di-—I mean, we stayed very much to ourselves because there was the high school and all the activities in the high school.

HARRIS: Yeah. Did you have British friends, or not really?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, no. Somewhat of a friend on a Babe Ruth [League] baseball team. [Both chuckle.] And when I was a senior and after I graduated, I joined a British track club, and the British attitude about sports was sort of more broadly, "Have a go." Not competitive, but, like, do it.

HARRIS: Yeah. Just go for it.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And there would be, like, cross-country races, and then there'd be lots of food and beer afterwards. And it was just—you did it. And so I was on this track club, and the Jamaicans from the West Indies—the sprinters all wanted to know American slang so they could pretend to be Americans, because at the time, African-American sprinters were the fastest. And at the track—so there was a sort of fitting into the British thing about being on the track club.

HARRIS: Mm-hm, wanting to get involved in that culture, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Because we went to the—we competed, and it was—on the one hand, there was somebody who' been in the Olympics, almost ten years out of shape and was people—so it was just "have a go." So there were sort of both aspects

of that. But that—that sort of concept about the ugly American—I think we were critical of things like foreign aid policy, and money just being—seemed like it was wasted. The shah of Iran got a lot of money, but he was a dictator and he was a friend to America, and so we had critical ideas about things like that.

HARRIS: About outside—critical perspective. Interesting. And that came kind of from your peers, not really from the parents.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Right.

HARRIS: Or it was a mix.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. I'm trying to think about conversations with—Yeah, more from the peer[s] and maybe slightly more from kids whose parents were at the embassy. And the embassy was—there was a little bit more of sort of a class element there, because whoever the top of the hierarchy were sort of—

HARRIS: And what exactly—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —in some cases, of independent means. And, you know, Foreign Service was service, but it wasn't for the income.

HARRIS: Yeah. Interesting. And what exactly was your dad doing there?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: As an agricultural attaché, he researched agriculture in England, and if there was something that would be of benefit to the States, then back through the Department of Agriculture—it would go back to the land grant universities,—

HARRIS: Got it.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —where there's always an agriculture department. And the land grant universities coordinate what's called a network of county agents, so every county in the country that has agriculture has a county agent, who gets research and other information about government policies and so on, through the universities. So we visited farms to see Aberdeen Angus

cows in Scotland and Herefords in Wales. And then if American producers had surpluses, they would contact the embassy and say, “Is there a way we can find buyers for this?” So my father would connect—they were meat producers—with Field [Foods] or Hormel [Foods Corporation] or something, and they wanted to sell meat products that there was a market for in the States, and like in England, steak and kidney pie and brains and things were hugely popular and almost you can’t find them in the States.

HARRIS: Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So he would—

HARRIS: Facilitate that, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —coordinate—and part of it was entertaining, and part of it was at the office, but it was also—these folks would come in from, say, the meat company or the raisin producers from California, and he would contact English potential buyers and get ‘em together. So there was part of it promoting trade.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. And when you thought about the future in high school, were you worried about the draft, or did you think about military—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No. I don’t know when, but I just never had any doubt that I would do ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps]. And there was a—maybe at 10 or 11, there might have been a time when I’d thought about going to the [U.S.] Air Force Academy, but I didn’t like the idea, the concept that a service was going to train officers all on a certain way.

HARRIS: Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And actually, I appreciated land grant universities. In the summers, there were conferences, so we went to the University of Rhode Island, we went to Purdue [University], we went to a couple of other places, and I just thought that was, like, great.

HARRIS: When did you do that, in high school?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Through—no, through grade school.

HARRIS: Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So for a long time, land grant universities had mandatory ROTC, so students, like, instead of PE [physical education] they had to—they had to—the males had to be in ROTC for two years, and then they could decide whether—or maybe even a year, but they could decide whether they wanted to stay, but they had to do it in the beginning.

And when I got to Michigan State [University], then I was in Air Force ROTC, but it was completely optional, and I don't remember, there might have been a hundred in the very beginning of the first year, and then it was, like, 20 by the end of the year.

HARRIS: When did you go to Michigan State?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sixty-seven to '71. And then by the summer of my freshman year, I got a ROTC scholarship, so it paid for all my tuition and some of my room and board.

HARRIS: Wow. So you've just—you always wanted to go into the ROTC. What was your thought process? You just felt that obligation to serve, or—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. That was a given. Everybody's parents had had a role to play in World War II, and so there was a—there was a concept of public service. And I remember thinking there was—from Kennedy, the Peace Corps and VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America, now AmeriCorps VISTA] were very popular through the '60s, so people coming out of college might have gone into the Peace Corps. And I think at the time at Dartmouth there was probably—it was fashionable to go into the Foreign Service.

HARRIS: Yeah, definitely.

Did your dad talk about his World War II experiences?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: He was exempt because he was providing the—food.

HARRIS: Yeah, that makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: You not only had to have food in the States, but you had to figure out how to produce enough to send it for the troops and whatever. And then—yeah.

HARRIS: So you left London and went to Michigan State. How did you choose Michigan State?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I wanted an American experience, so it was part of an American identity. I sort of compared it to University of Michigan and University of Wisconsin, where there were more grad students and more grad students teaching undergraduate courses, and Michigan State was oriented more towards undergrads. And I didn't know what I was going to study, and it was huge, so they had everything.

HARRIS: That makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And I had a couple counselors in high school say, "Well, you ought to go to Harvard [University]. You could quality." And I didn't have an interest in being in an elite—and I think culturally that was—

HARRIS: Yeah. Why do you think that was?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: A piece of it was that sense of egalitarian that there sort of is in the military, or had been in my experience. In terms of social movements, which certainly were an influence, Harvard would have been seen as—as socially elite, and that didn't hold appeal. For—I don't think he held appeal for many people. And the sort of corollary at Michigan State was that they had had more fraternities than any college in the country, and they were closing left and right because people had no interest in—fraternities seemed superficial.

HARRIS: Hmm. Could you elaborate on what you mean by social movements? Like, of the time.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [Pause.] I'm thinking this in the moment. I don't think I thought it at the time or whatever, but there was a huge middle class through the '50s, and a growing middle class. And actually, because of [the] G.I. Bill, so many people had gone to college that wouldn't have otherwise, there was sort of a sense that the land grant universities were relatively

affordable, supported by state and federal money, and everybody would have equal access to money. The civil rights movement from ’62 to ’67 and women’s rights and [the] Equal Rights Amendment—all that was happening and put in question the sort of power structures that had been in place.

HARRIS: Yeah. So during the civil rights movement, how did you feel about, like, hearing about that stuff on the news in high school, I guess? And college.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I thought it was the right thing, and I do remember my father not thinking much of African-Americans. Ironically, I can remember him calling policemen “cops” and, because I was a crosswalk monitor in elementary school, I corrected him and said, “It’s ‘policemen,’” which was an unusual thing for me to do.

HARRIS: Would you get in arguments ever about it?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, but I had different opinions than him. And I—I was glad Alexander Pierce Smith was at my middle school, and maybe part of that was sort of bad feelings about the Confederacy and so on, but—[Pause.]

And in Washington—and that’s all relative too, there was such poverty among African-Americans. I mean, nothing like in the South but compared to everyone else, clearly much, much poorer.

HARRIS: That impacted you.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And substandard schools. So it did feel like in the ’70s, that a lot of things were going to change, and rightfully so. And in the ’60s.

HARRIS: So just going back to that Confederate atmosphere for a second.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: So you felt your parents were not necessarily opposed to it. They were, like,—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Not in terms of race.

HARRIS: They were okay with that.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: Okay. And so you came to Michigan, to the university. What was that like? Was that a culture shock after being in London?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In some ways, yeah, just to be totally back in the States. But at the same time, a lot of my friends—it was a quarter system, and a lot of my friends sort of could just afford—and some of them would go and work in the factory two or three terms and would save up enough to do two or three more terms, and because it was quarter, then summer was just kind of a normal term. And I would say 95% of my friends had campus jobs, and that was just the culture.

HARRIS: Did you work?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. And the—the residence halls—there was, at the time, 600 females in one tower and 600 males in another tower, and in between there were classrooms, so half of your freshmen courses—your core courses could be in your residence hall, and then the cafeteria held, like, 1,100 students or something, and so virtually all the employees in the cafeteria were students. And the janitorial staff—there was, like, one staff person, and everybody else was students, and the students, second or third year, became supervisors. I worked at the reception desk in the residence hall. And so—

HARRIS: Throughout college?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. So everybody had a job.

HARRIS: Wow. And so were classes mixed genders? It was girls and boys.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, yeah. And when I was a sophomore, then for the first time, women could visit the men's residence hall, so we went a little crazy for a little while [both chuckle]. And there was—and it was—college administration had been *in loco*

parentis, so rules—and everything was rules driven. And so in the late '60s, all that went out the window, so by the time I left Michigan State, there were residence halls with a female floor and a male floor, and there was actually only one female only hall and one male only hall. So it just completely changed.

HARRIS: Yeah. And you think that was—was that a result of just the changing atmosphere in the Nation—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Social change, yeah. And because of the draft and 18-year-olds, 17-year-olds being in the military, the voting age and the drinking age was changed to 18. And because they built a clubhouse for the golf course on campus and they wanted to serve alcohol, they—they got the local law changed that alcohol could be allowed on campus property, where it hadn't—where it had been against the law. And it had to be 100 feet from a classroom.

HARRIS: So that students getting that changed?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So the residence halls went from dry to wet overnight, and that was another—

HARRIS: When you were there.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. So I was a junior when that happened.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Wow. So the campus was changing. What was the racial composition at Michigan State? Was there—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [Pause.] I don't know the percentage. It would have—it would have been one of the higher percentages among public universities, and partly because of Detroit, so I had a number of black friends, and that was a source of pride. But it was tricky at times, too. With one friend, we'd end up having conversations, long conversations in his car, and that was sort of—and he—

HARRIS: Conversations in his car about?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Race and—

HARRIS: Racial issues, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —other issues. So if we ran into each other in some other setting, if we talked too long, somebody would just—somebody would, in some way, disapprove.

HARRIS: Really? Like, friends around? Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So he wouldn't—his sort of place would be jeopardized. And when I was a senior and I had a friend who had already been in the Army and so he was in college on the G.I. Bill—and so—and they had apartments in the—you know, they had converted rooms into apartments in the residence hall, and a lot of us stayed because you had to live in the residence hall to keep your job. And so he was in the apartment across the way, and so—

HARRIS: Was he African-American?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. He could be in and out of my apartment, and vice versa, and one of my roommates was a little uneasy about that. And if his friends showed up, then it was sort of clear that I wasn't as welcome. And on our floor my first year, there were 48 on the floor, and Stan and Herb were the two African-Americans. And I think by the end of the year, it felt like there was a lot of tension about that. Early on, I would help Herb with math homework. Well, I don't know how much of it was—was racial.

HARRIS: The tension?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, because it seemed like people characterized each other as either idiots or not. Or "turkeys," which was a term, or "assholes" or whatever, you know? It seemed like things were very judgmental on that kind of personal basis. But—over four years, it felt like—probably just because there was more militancy among the African-American students, it felt like there was more of a divide than when I got there. But [chuckles] that's not a way to think about it. Just it was more acknowledgement. So—

HARRIS: Yeah. Do you remember when [the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] was assassinated?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yep.

HARRIS: Was there a big reaction on campus?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [No immediate response.]

HARRIS: I guess it was June of ’68, so it was in the summer.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: The—yeah, yeah. And, yeah, I was working a construction job in Kansas, and it was just—reminded me how much of a gun culture—I mean, it sounds strange now, with mass killings, but, like, where else in the world do people get shot than the United States?

HARRIS: Wow. Very different than London.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. I mean, I’m not sure there was ever a shooting in the time I was in Eng- —in London.

HARRIS: Wow. So different. Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So it was, like, you know, I have an American identity, but, like, oh man, we’re the country that kills people.

HARRIS: Yeah.

So what was it like joining the ROTC? Were you parents supportive?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No.

HARRIS: Really. Interesting.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I think my mother was just worried, and my dad said, “It’ll get in the way of a career, and you should join a Reserve unit,” and that’s what connected kids did. They got into a[n] [Air Force] Reserve [Command] or [Air National] Guard unit to avoid the draft. And it was all connections. And I remember my dad saying—at the time, he had retired from Agriculture, and he worked for Land O’Lakes [Inc.], and—

HARRIS: So was he living in London.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: We were living in Minneapolis.

HARRIS: Your family had moved?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, they had moved to—back to Virginia when I was a freshman, and then the middle of my freshman year, they moved to Minneapolis. He had retired from 30 years in civil service and was an economist for Land O'Lakes. So he said, "You know, what are you doin' in ROTC? I can get you into a Guard unit because I know other executives in Minneapolis." Honeywell [International, Inc.] was there, and 3M [Company], and they had whatever kind of economic get-togethers of the executives or whatever. So he said, "You know, I'll do that." And to me, that—that just smacked of, again, sort of elitism or whatever.

And the idea about ROTC—I'd said before about the academies. On the flip side, ROTC would just sort of represent young men from all the states who were—whose education was not dictated by the military, and they would have whatever ideas—and there were debates among ROTC cadets and debates on campus about the war and so on, and—and there were ROTC cadets that had all kinds of reservations about the war.

HARRIS: Mm-hm, and you felt that was—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: But it was separate from the service.

HARRIS: Interesting. All right. So what was your, like, daily interactions with ROTC? Was that in addition to a normal class load?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, I think as a first year, there was—there might have been class once a week, and then there was a drill once a week, and you put your uniform on. And when I was, like, a junior or so, there were very few ROTC left, and so I—and you had to wear your uniform on Friday, when you had drill. And nobody gave me a hard time. Nobody spat on me or anything.

HARRIS: Did any of your—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sometimes they would, like, fall in step with me and go left, right, left right. And I—I—I just always thought of it at the time as, like, curiosity. I mean, among 44,000 students,

there's like 40 or 50 Air Force ROTC, so you just didn't see them. And so whether it was accurate or not, it always—that was just how it felt to me, like they were just sort of curious.

HARRIS: So there wasn't any campus animosity towards ROTC?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Wow. Great question. Not that I experienced in any kind of organized or consistent or any other way. When I was a senior, my roommate was active in the Students for [a] Democratic Society, and so they were, well if you know about them.

HARRIS: Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: But we got along fine. He called me [chuckles] "Washing Machine" Shoemaker—

HARRIS: [Chuckles.]

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —because I was learning to fly. When you're in ROTC as a senior, you get to get flying lessons. So we got along fine. And his distrust of the government, I fully understood. Could cite lots of examples. And our—we lived in a—as a senior, I lived off campus, and our phone was—was tapped that year. You could tell they were listening. And [President Richard M.] Nixon did a lot of that, so there was this sort of interesting combination of absolutely no respect for the president but a concept of public service. For me.

HARRIS: Interesting. So were you involved in any of the antiwar organizations or protests?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. Not very much. The one I remember was a march to the state capitol. Michigan State is in East Lansing, and Lansing is about seven or eight miles, so there were, I don't know, a couple thousand of us, so we went to the statehouse.

HARRIS: Do you remember what year?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sixty-seven. It might have been '66. '66 was—no, '67 was [the] Kent State [shootings], when the Guards shot—

HARRIS: I think Kent State's shootings were in 1970.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. I graduated in '71. It was my junior year.

HARRIS: Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was thinking of high school.

HARRIS: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sixty-six was junior year of high school, yeah. And I just remember there were—we got to the statehouse, and there were legislators up in the balcony, and they were just ridiculing people's long hair and whatever else. And so it didn't feel like it was about any issue; it was about the gulf between questioning the government and our perception that there was no questioning of those in the government.

HARRIS: Yeah, yeah. So you didn't feel any, like, internal conflict of being involved in ROTC and involved in the antiwar—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No. The—the—I don't know how much of this is hindsight, but just that sense that ROTC and the military ought to just represent the folks in the country. And some other people called me "the ROTC hippie."

HARRIS: [Chuckles.] Was it unique for—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Which was fine—which was fine with me. And I—and I didn't—well, you ask about a class. First and second year was about an hour a week, and junior and senior year was three hours a week. We did projects and stuff, and there were things about nuclear disarmament and this and that. And those were lively discussions and varied points of view, and I thought that would never happen at an academy.

HARRIS: Yeah. That's a good point.

So did your perception of the Vietnam War change over the course of college, I guess, with the Tet Offensive or Nixon's presidency?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. When I was a freshman, my best friend had joined the Marines. I was back in Washington, D.C.—back in

Virginia for Christmas vacation, and he came up from—he came up from [Marine Corps Base] Camp Lejeune. He had just finished Marine boot camp.

HARRIS: Was he a friend from London high school?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, yeah. And was headed to the West Coast and Vietnam. And what was your question again?

HARRIS: I guess just your perception of the war, how it changed—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Oh, oh—

HARRIS: —with new events happening in Vietnam.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was never a fan of Johnson, I guess I was sort of grateful that he got the civil rights legislation done, but it was Kennedy's ideas, or Robert [F.] Kennedy or—you know. And so I didn't have any confidence in Nixon being—or Johnson being part of the decisions about the war. And I'm not sure I had confidence about people like Gen. [Creighton W.] Abrams [Jr.] and so on, because just watching the news, it just seemed like a mess. And contradictions. There were all these reports about how many Viet Cong were being killed, and it was laughable, how inaccurate—

And so my friend Steve stayed with me three or four days. And we went and saw his girlfriend at Mary Washington [College, now University of Mary Washington], and he headed out, and when he got to Vietnam, he was at Khe Sanh. Do you at all about that, or—

HARRIS: Not too much.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It was on the main road from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and it was just a hilltop. And so he wrote me from Khe Sanh, and he said, "We're on this hilltop, and the B-52s [Boeing B-52 Stratofortresses] drop tons and tons and tons of bombs all around the area," and that's the only way they weren't overrun by thousands of Viet Cong. And—but the Viet Cong would run up and drop mortars on them and stuff, and so his letter just talked about the boredom, but then they would jump for their lives to get in the bunkers. And—and his best friends were African-American.

HARRIS: In—in Vietnam.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In Vietnam, yeah. And he was—he was—he had lived some different places in the world, and he had been sort of a Philly kid and just moved easily among groups. And at exactly the time of Khe Sanh, Johnson, like, doubled or tripled the number of troops.

HARRIS: Mm-hm, in ’68, ’69, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, ’68. That was the end of my freshman year. And, you know, by the end of the next year or whatever, it was clear that didn’t make any difference. It didn’t make any difference. And—

HARRIS: So hearing about your friend’s experiences made you even more, like, critical of the war.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. And as I—I think I was a junior. It was interesting: the ROTC or somebody invited this speaker. His name was Wesley [R.] Fisher [sic; Fishel], and he had been part of AID [U.S. Agency for International Development] in Vietnam, and he talked about how they had rigged the election so that [Ngô Đình] Diệm would get elected as the president.

HARRIS: Yeah. Wow. He openly said that.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And he just plain said—he just plain said this. He was in AID, and AID—AID was, you know, supposed to be agriculture development, but it was—train police in Vietnam and arm the police. And he just said—and I thought, *Wow!*

And there was a magazine—not *Mother Jones*; maybe it was *Ramparts*? But there wa- —he was—reported in *Ramparts*, which was a very radical publication, and the irony was he was just saying it to this audience of ROTC, and I remember in that moment just thinking—because somebody said—

HARRIS: Do you remember when the speech was?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: When?

HARRIS: Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It might have been spring of '70. It might have been my junior year. It might have been in my senior year, but—you know, somebody asked a question about—you know, "Why did you have to rig the election?", which isn't a question that would have been asked at the Academy. And the audience was, like, ROTC. I don't know if there were other students there or not, even. Somehow it was mostly ROTC. And he said, "Well, we couldn't take a chance. We didn't think he was that popular, so we couldn't take a chance that he'd lose the election." And I'm thinking, *Yeah, that sounds like our foreign policy.*

So there was this mental dichotomy between being critical of the government and foreign policy and this idea that you serve, and this other thing about ROTC was just that that was a citizen soldier, and it seemed to me that that's what the military should—should be. So that's how I compartmentalized it or whatever.

HARRIS: Do you think other people in the ROTC had a different—had a similar view of the Academy as being different and more of, like, indoctrination?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yes, some. I do remember actually saying that, and I remember there was a debate, like, on other campuses, whether ROTC should be allowed to stay on campus. And I remember being at—there was a big meeting about it, a rally or something—it was sort more a meeting because somehow there were presenters and questions and answers, like, you know, Alumni Hall or whatever. And I might have been a sophomore, and I think one of the juniors who I respected in ROTC got up and said, you know, if you do away with ROTC on the campuses, then all the military leaders would be from the Academy, and that would be too like-minded. And I was exactly with his thinking about that.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. So did you feel like students on campus, some students on campus, like, wanted the ROTC to be, like—to leave Michigan State?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: They did, and as I said, it's funny because I never experienced it personally. And it certainly wasn't like UC

Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley] or Harvard or any of the other places where it *was* shut down.

HARRIS: Yeah. Interesting. And how did the antiwar protests and marches, like, affect you on campus. Did they feel very present and constant, or was it speci-—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Kent State was very hard.

HARRIS: Also being in the Midwest.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I think any—any—yeah, Ohio and any college student—the idea that our government would shoot students because of a different ideology. Besides the death, it was a pretty hard concept. And classes were cancelled, and people were upset, and—[Pause.] And I don't remember discussions—I mean, I was—the class—I remember I was in a contemporary art history class, which at the time meant that you did things in class, like have happenings and be-ins and things. And we talked about it there. And I don't remember whether we talked about it in ROTC class.

But it was—I don't think it happened *in* college, but later, I was pretty paranoid. But in college, the reality was our phone was tapped. We could hear the thing—

HARRIS: So there—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —and my apartment mate had some kind of a narc following him around campus, and it was laughable because, like, the guy had short hair and shiny shoes, and that was not how you dressed in the '60s and '70s.

HARRIS: Yeah, that was clear—yeah. Was there, like, a fear of the government? Like, I mean, your phones were bugged.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: There was—yeah, it was, like, they could do that. And I do remember, in London, thinking that—there was something at the embassy, but Martin Luther King was demonized by the government, and [FBI director J. Edgar] Hoover said, "He's communist." And I remember some kind of sentiment about that around some embassy function or other parents or something, and—and—what was it, the U.S. Information Agency? Which you don't hear about anymore

but at the time was sort of propaganda. They had films and things at the embassy. I must have gone to something, but it was just all about how Martin Luther King was a communist, which was Hoover's take—

HARRIS: Attack on him. Mm-hm.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And then Nixon was very much into that point of view.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. How did you know your phones were bugged?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: We could hear the clicks and stuff.

HARRIS: Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So then we'd say things like "Why are you doing this?" And there was a movie at the time about federal agents or whatever who were wiretapping and one guy who got—kind of went crazy over the fact that he was doing that.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. So your apartment mate was one of the leaders in student democratic so- —

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: He was the campus leader for Students for a Democratic—

HARRIS: Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And he went to Washington a couple of different times, so he—he would have been known.

HARRIS: Yeah. What was his name?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: William J. Lowe. And then he went to Ireland and—and met with members of the Sinn Féin. And when he was crossing back from Northern Ireland in that time period, the border building was blown up so there was a time when he thought he was going to get arrested for that. And he went on to study at Trinity College of Dublin [The University of Dublin, Ireland], and [chuckles] he also was a laborer in the Underground in London, because everybody was Irish that did the digging, even in 1970.

HARRIS: Wow. So he went to Ireland after college?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, he was a political science major, yeah. And his father was a police precinct captain in New York City, so there were generational—which was just—

HARRIS: Was that common?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —manifest—yeah—it was just—exactly the—if you couldn't trust anyone over 30, where did that leave your parents?

HARRIS: Did you—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And the sense, you know, with baby boomers and the sense of "everybody's my age"—was part of the experience.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Did you feel you become more distant with your parents, kind of grew apart from them?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, with my father. You know, the business about him getting me into the Guard unit. And it was a little more complicated than that because I had—I had friends who got into the Guard. It was, like, one day there was an opening, and the word spread or whatever—they knew somebody, and if they showed up exactly the right time—so three or four of them got into the Guard.

And Michigan—the college students had—there weren't enough draftable men, so the draft boards couldn't meet their quotas, so if you didn't have a certain grade-point [average], you could be drafted. So there was a lot of pressure on some students. It kind of depended on what neighborhood you were from, how much that pressure was. But you had to stay in school.

HARRIS: So were you worried about the draft?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, because I was in ROTC.

HARRIS: Right. Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It didn't matter. By the time I was a senior, I had friends that went to Canada, you know, so you go in the Army or you go to Canada or Mexico, and that was real—and then

friends of mine—their older siblings were drafted. I remember my roommate reading his older brother's letter about boot camp and the fact that for the whole time, the only privacy was the latrine stall, and that's where he wrote letters and tried to think. And just sort of how useless—is that the right word?—how pointless it felt.

HARRIS: The training camp. Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, to be in the service.

HARRIS: Yeah. So why do you think there were so few Air Force ROTC students? Like, why do you think it dwindled?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [Pause.] I'm trying to think now versus at the time. It gets a little hard to—you watch *FRONTLINE*, and they remind you how Vietnam was on the news every day, and it was, and how the discrepancies were there every day. The—you know, "We're winning the war," and the next thing is the Tet Offensive, and you see that's clearly just—

HARRIS: A huge loss.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —a lie.

HARRIS: A huge American loss, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And so, you know, it wasn't mandatory. I don't think there were too many of us who thought, *Well, among my choices, ROTC is the thing to do,* but it made sense to me. I respected the parents of my friends from high school, and officers or—and the COs [commanding officers], and there was that element that they were serving—there was an element that there was sacrifice. They weren't going to get rich. They might spend 20 years in the service and move from place to place and they'd be done and not have a house, not have spent—you know, not have spent a dollar on a mortgage. Great, I guess, except that they're in their 40s, and you're trying to buy your first house or whatever. So however you describe sacrifice. And the families being separated. Different things.

HARRIS: So did you kind of always know you would go into the Army—or the military for, like, a limited period and then you planned to have a career after?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: What were you studying?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Economics, which was more of a social science. I started in psych, and my interest in econ was the department fought it out. There were Marxist socialists. There were a Nixon adviser. There were labor union economists. And they literally had it out in the campus paper every day, you know.

HARRIS: Wow. Mm-hm.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: The disagreements. And that was interesting. And then after take-—so before very long, what was interesting to me was that behind the economic theory was some concept about human nature, and that was the real disagreement, not the economic theory. So are people basically greedy? Are people basically good? Which is it, and why? And that those concepts—and those concepts were never mentioned. So I was—I was a still a behaviorist, and econ was just intellectually stimulating because there was no right answer, and you could use the stats and everything else, and the disagreement was more than about the economic theory.

HARRIS: Did you come to some of your own personal conclusions about those debates?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Um. [Pause.] Wow! Later, as a psychologist, I kept coming back to my belief that people are basically good, and bad things happen to them, and that the environment and so on—as an economist—you know, I started to say, yeah, people are basically good, but then I thought—I've always believed you needed government or legislation to prevent economic excesses and to protect most people economically.

HARRIS: That makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So I guess that was a contradiction, but that was what I thought.

HARRIS: So just kind of transitioning into your time in the Air Force, how did that process go? How did you end up where you did after college? And was it that same year?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was in pilot training, so that was in '71, in Indiana, and—huh!—random thoughts—the shah of Iran's son was in training there.

HARRIS: At the same time?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And there were—there were not any Vietnam—Vietnamese pilots. I encountered them later. But—

HARRIS: So what Air Force base was that?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Grissom Air Force Base in Indiana [now Grissom Air Reserve Base, Indiana]. And it was—most of the bases were in the South, and actually that got much reinforced by LBJ. When he became president, Texas got, like 14 new bases. They closed bases in the North and so on.

But it was the best base to fly at because there was weather. So Arizona was, like, sunny every day. But Oklahoma—there were lots of storms and everything else, so it was a better place to learn.

HARRIS: Wait, sorry. Oklahoma or Indiana?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I'm sorry, yeah.

HARRIS: No worries.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Grissom—sorry. I went to Grissom Air Force Base for my basic training—

HARRIS: Okay, right out of—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —between my sophomore and junior year.

HARRIS: Okay, in college. No, worries—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And that was in Indianola. That was in Kokomo, Indiana. When I was commissioned, then, 1971, it was Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma.

HARRIS: Got it.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So Oklahoma was where you had tornadoes, and we were supposed to put the bed mattresses over us every time the alarm went off. There were— there were just a lot of tornadoes there, but weather. And so '71, in some ways, things were winding down. The numbers of troops—

HARRIS: In Vietnam.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —might have been half or something from the peak.

HARRIS: Yeah, definitely.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: They were trying to transition to the South Vietnamese Army taking over, and the base had geared up, and there was sort of like this contest. They had figured out a way to train more pilots per—at a time, because two years before they needed them, but at that moment, they didn't need them. but they had geared up, and we had Guard and Reserve pilots, too. And so there was this strange dichotomy. They had sort of won this contest to turn out more pilots per year, but they weren't needed. And my later roommate—but he was in my class—had some hypoglycemia or something, and they told him, "You better not fly." And if it had been two years before, they would have said, "No sweat." So there was this strange—

HARRIS: Yeah, transition.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —kind of thing. And I—I had to deal with airsickness, particularly when we started doing acrobatics and stuff, and I got past that. And I—personally, I identified with the instructors. Like, I really liked what they were doing. And I had—the first instructor I had was, like, so-so, and I did good in the academics, and I had done well in the first, the little prop test flight, and I scored high. And I wasn't doing as well in the first jet. And my instructor was kind of [an] easy-going

guy, so they gave me to another instructor, and he was sort of like a spitfire. And I just was—you know, thought about their approach and what they were trying to do and so on and so forth, and I just—I liked that they were teachers and that they got a sense of pride about that.

And at the same time—what were they called? Well, doesn't matter. But the—jocks? Shit-hot jocks. So there were, you know, all war kind of guys, and the—

HARRIS: The instructors?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah—yes. And so the assistant or the deputy in charge of our class gave us a lecture one day, and some of my classmates were—their whole thing was they were going to fly commercial. They were in there six years. You had to take on two extra years if you went through pilot training. So they were going to be commercial pilots. So this deputy was talking about, "We're not training you for American Airlines. What we're training you for is to make Crispy Critters out of people." I'm not sure anybody liked him, but that sort of crystalized it for me. *Wow, yeah.*

And so when we weren't flying, there were always conversations, and they were, you know, combination of learning but also war stories and this and that, at your table with your instructor. And there were two or three per instructor, so there would only be—the instructor would be gone with one. And so the instructors talked about Vietnam, and they said stuff like the intelligence was lousy. They went on missions. They had a primary target, secondary target, tertiary target. They never—they didn't have confidence that the primary target was a target, and if the weather was bad or whatever, then it was secondary target, and then it was tertiary target. And different pilots readily said, "We just dropped them anywhere. We weren't allowed to land with them, so we just dropped them anywhere."

HARRIS: Wow.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So, you know, between—and that talk the guy gave was about the fact they didn't really need pilots anymore. So they—you know, so they—

HARRIS: In Vietnam, you mean, they didn't need pilots anymore?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In the Air Force. So the end of that talk was, you know, "If you're here for—to fly for American Airlines, you know, you should leave now. And if you're not prepared to burn people up, then you should leave now." And I don't know how long—how long after that, but the combination of that and hearing—hearing people I respected say, "This is what we did. This is what it was." So I left. It was called self-initiated elimination. And it was—that's when some of the paranoia started [chuckles], so they said, "Okay, yep, fine, you can leave."

And actually, my friend left, because they had convinced him he'd go into shock with his hypoglycemia if he was doing something, so—

HARRIS: So just—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: —like, on that base, were you with your classmates from Ohio State—I mean, sorry, Michigan State?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No.

HARRIS: Okay, you were just with ROTC from all over.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, yeah, and some Guard and Reserve folks who were getting their um training.

HARRIS: And was training—you said you had motion sickness. Generally, you enjoyed training? Or mixed feelings?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. The fun stuff is, you know, you're flying upside down or you're doing all this stuff, and you're doing things—I guess anytime you're doing something that you didn't think you could do, there was—that was a strong element. You know, and the goal was to be a fighter jock. That was the epitome. So there was that.

HARRIS: So when you decided to leave, your thought—what was your thought process?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: *I don't have any confidence in what we're doing in Vietnam, that I know we're lied to all the time. The military is right in the middle of lying to the public and the press and everyone else. And I'm not gonna—I some range of choice, and I'm not gonna be in a position where I'm dropping the bombs wherever.*

And I had a friend who—a classmate who was enlisted in intelligence, and then he went through Officer Candidate School and ended up in pilot training, and between what the pilots are saying and what he was saying—

HARRIS: Yeah, you had little faith.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARIS: So yeah could you—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So I feel like I'm telling stories now, but—so I had eliminated myself. I went before this colonel, and I really appreciated it. He said, "Find something you really want to do and do your best at it." And you know I thought he was going to bawl me out or whatever. I had to go see the flight surgeon, and the flight surgeon said, "Because you had airsickness, we have to determine whether that was the reason you're leaving." So he said, you know, "Were there any—did it have anything to do with your decision?" And I said, "No." And he says—and the doctors were drafted. Sometimes the doctors, like they had illegal moustaches, and they didn't wear their uniform right, and they were sort of anti-military right in the military—and he sort of looked like that, and he says, "Well, let's just rap for a while." So he was talking and whatever.

Later on, because I was stationed where I could go see—actually see my records—he had written a psychiatric evaluation.

HARRIS: Of you.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Any flight surgeon could be a psychiatrist. And he basically wrote that I shouldn't be around anything that was important or sensitive or whatever, you know, so that was in

my record. That helped with my paranoia later. But leaving, then, it was, like, *Well, what are they gonna do to me?*

HARRIS: Yeah, so that was when the paranoia—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: —was developing.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, I'm in the Air Force, and I told them to keep their planes.

HARRIS: Yeah!

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So how's this going to turn out? And the friend that—and it's interesting—the friend went to Auburn [University], and nothing about the way he socialized or fraternity or anything else resonated with me. But in any case, he said, "Sign up for—get into some school where the longer the school is, they'll at least expect you to know something when you get out, and you'll get to do something."

HARRIS: Which friend was this?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: He was the one with hypoglycemia.

HARRIS: Okay, okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And he wanted to fly, but they really convinced him he could—

HARRIS: Unsafe.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —die, yeah, and so he took that to heart. And he kept flying. He got his private license and kept on flying, on the side, but—so he said, you know, "Do something"—

So I got—because I had had calculus—and that's another story—I think I got a—I got a D in calculus, but because I had taken calculus, then I qualified for electronics school, which is a nine month school, so I got sent to Keesler [Air Force Base] in Mississippi.

HARRIS: Sorry. One minute before we go to that air base. Why do you think—why was your psych evaluation like that from your conversation with the surgeon? That he just made some judgment because you were questioning—Vietnam War?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: We talked politics, and most of the doctors in the Air Force were not career—they were drafted, and they were a little bit like the doctors in *M*A*S*H*. Honestly. They were always on the edge of—I remember [chuckles] my guy had shoes with buckles, gold buckles. You know, I'm sure he got Article 15s and things, reprimanded and stuff. But, you know, we talked politics, I guess. And so, that's all I remember of that conversation.

HARRIS: And he made those judgments, yeah. So, yeah, what was Keesler like?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So that was six to noon, electronic school, and—sorry—and pilot training Friday afternoons we were ordered to the officers' club to drink, and the drinks were, like, two for a dollar and whatever.

At Keesler, I lived off base with the friend from pilot training, and—wow, a lot of things. [Chuckles.] A very racist place.

HARRIS: Yeah, I'm sure Mississippi is different.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And a very formal social view. You weren't supposed to talk to young women if you weren't introduced. And if you did, then women of a certain class presumed your—had no upbringing or whatever.

So the officers'—we didn't get ordered to the officers' club, and we were done at noon with class every day, and so people went whatever directions. But once in a while, we did end up over there. And they trained Vietnamese pilots there. And so this was—this was '72, so they were training pilots left and right at Keesler and flying props, and they were going into the bay and the back bay. It was obvious the instructor-pilots were alcoholic, depressed, in fear for their lives. It was just—

HARRIS: The Vietnamese?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, the American instructor-pilots, you had to be in the plane with—so—that wasn't too impressive. And I guess I was more—I was more influenced just by experiencing Mississippi. So I'm not sure what else—

HARRIS: Was there a lot of segregation at that time?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Oh, yeah. And my—Roscoe Richmond [Archivist Note: spelling uncertain], my best friend from that class, came over to our—I went over to his place a lot, but he came over a couple of times, and he said, "They don't allow blacks here, do they?" And I thought, *No, I guess they don't because we sure don't have any.* And his girlfriend was from—

HARRIS: So he was African-American.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, and his girlfriend was at Dillard [University] in New Orleans, in nursing school. And from time to time we went to New Orleans, and it felt like sort of this—the future or something, because white and black neighborhoods blended into each other, and people knew each other from youth. And we went to a friend of a friend—Hoyt and I went down, a friend of a friend—we went out to a bar, and it was just a mixed group of black and white folks. And just thought, *Wow, this is pretty cool!*

I had my first experience of being the only white somewhere. I went to—I was staying at Tulane [University], and I went to Dillard to meet with Roscoe, and we were going to go out that night, and so I walk onto this all-black campus, and I ask for directions, and it seemed like—then I wondered, *Did they really give me the right directions?* But they did. And I went in the residence hall, and they kind of looked at me, like, "What are you doin' here?" And I said the name of his girlfriend, and they said they'd call; you could just wait over there. And I waited what seemed like too long, and I realized I had all these paranoid thoughts. At the same time, it was, like, *Wow, this is what it must be like to be black.*

And we went out that night. My date was white, and his girlfriend is African-American, and we could go to whatever kind of places we wanted to and whatever, and my date ordered a banana banshee, and the waiter kind of looked at her, like, you know, "What's wrong?" But in a tolerant kind of

way. And so New Orleans was kind of this—I don't know, neverland is not the right word, but it seems like they had race relations down, and it's such a contrast from Mississippi and a contrast from the military.

HARRIS: Did you have any interactions with the South Vietnamese soldiers?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No, they barely spoke English. They were—

HARRIS: Did people—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I don't remember whether they drank—I certainly remember the pilots, the instructor-pilots being very drunk.

HARRIS: Did you hear, like, comments about them? Did people have, like, set perceptions of the Vietnamese people?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In college, when I worked in the mill, Yeah, there were—there were vets, you know, on the job, and it was all about killing gooks, and gooks this and gooks that.

HARRIS: Lots of racial perceptions, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. Yeah, you would have thought it was just a racial war, to hear—to hear them.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Do you think that was a perception, like, within the Air Force, like, on your bases? Was that the perception of them?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Maybe. There certainly wasn't any feeling of respect for the Vietnamese trainees. I mean, I focused on just the fear of the instructor-pilots, but—but I don't think there was any—I remember in Oklahoma, the shah's son who was like,—he had to do well, and so the instructors were in sort of an awkward spot.

HARRIS: Did you ever interact with the shah's son?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [No audible reply.]

HARRIS: No. He was just there.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: In the time I was there, it was your class. I think there were 60 of us, and there were two groups of 30, and people who know someone in another class typically was because they were in ROTC together, so now there was just that—and part of it was the clock. When we did mornings, we hit the flight line at 4:30. And when we did afternoons, we got there at one or something, and so that group of 60 would end up eating at the same time or whatever.

HARRIS: Yeah. So what did you think of electronics school? Did you like that? Did you still have paranoia about quitting pilot training?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I was much more just disgusted with Mississippi than paranoia at that point or whatever. And when we got towards the end, it became clear that what our career field was was radar, and the radars were remote assignments, so it meant you were going to be at the end of the Aleutian Islands or you were going to be in Thule, Greenland, or you were going to be in Alaska or you were going to be in northern Maine or—where the Russians would be coming.

And so thought, *Well, yeah, that sort of makes sense.* And we all got lucky. There were six of us in the class, something like that, six or eight, and Roscoe got assigned to Oklahoma City, and I got assigned to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and it was, like, "Wow! There's gonna be people! We're not gonna be out"—you know.

HARRIS: Yeah. In Alaska.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And my classmate was—studied geology, and my assignment was the geodetic—which is Defense Mapping Agency [now the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency], and his assignment was weather radar in San Antonio. So we thought—so we called Personnel, and they just switched us. That's where I sort of realized there's no—you know, it's such a big organization, they're not—they're not—they're not keeping track of stuff. This other guy was perfect for this other job.

HARRIS: Do you feel like you kind of consistently lost some faith in the system—like, with that incident or—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, a tiny piece, and then it got more relevant later, but—so that was—so we got—the eye-opener in Mississippi was my roommate studied, and we'd get back from class, and because he was studying, I would, and we'd be done by two or something, and then we'd have the rest of the day. It as, like, *Wow, if you just study right after, you know*—I'd never been that organized before, so that was a revelation.

So I got to San Antonio, and it's a little unit, and they take care of weather radar and weather equipment.

HARRIS: What year was that?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Seventy-two—seventy-two, October '72. They took care of weather radar in Texas and Mississippi. They would drive a truck out and maintain all the weather equipment for all these bases, so that unit of 40 people or something—they had a captain and a first lieutenant and me, and they didn't need me. They had two officer slots for that commander and the second in command, and so they had sent me there as an overage. It was kind of another example of they have more people than they knew what to do.

So then I went to—the inspector general was a tiny bit like an ombudsperson, and I went to the inspector general and said, "Can I get out of the service? I'm in a position that doesn't exist." And so he said, "No." And that's when I was—that's when I was—

HARRIS: How did you feel—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —feeling some more paranoia and stuff about, *Well, yeah, they <u>are</u> getting even.* Because my job—it was—the most senior NCO [non-commissioned officer] was the maintenance NCO. And I was the maintenance officer. It just mean he knew everything and did everything, and once in a while I might make a personnel decision or something. And I was on every committee on cam- —on the base, including the doughnut committee for this and that—just totally—and I

had to collect urine samples for drug testing and just— You know, it was, like,—

HARRIS: How did you feel?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So it was, like,—yeah, you know, *Yeah, they got even with me*.

HARRIS: Because of—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Leaving.

HARRIS: Because of leaving pilot training.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. Here I am, and so I got involved in—what did they used to call it?—hotline counseling center. And I got trained. As a volunteer, you'd go and work from midnight to eight, and it was a suicide hotline and drug hotline and stuff, and I went through—the Air Force was good about forcing you to have, like, race relations training and human relations training and drug abuse training and stuff, and I was interested in all that. And I remember the discussions. There was another lieutenant, and he was berating the guys for how much they drank, and they would say, "Yeah, but you use marijuana. You know, how's that?"

And I was just interested in all the discussions. When they got done, they said, "We've got an opening for a social actions officer, and the way we operate is somebody has a drug problem, we get them off base into treatment and we avoid the command structure." They said, "You're already working this off-base thing, and, you know, you'd be sort of what we're looking for."

And so I said, "Great!" So they put the paperwork in, and by that time, I had—in San Antonio, the personnel center for the whole Air Force is at another base in San Antonio, and you can go over and look at your records. And that's where I saw there was a psychiatric report that said that I shouldn't be near anything strategic or sensitive or whatever. It said, "He doesn't know his own mind." So that—you know, that led to a whole paranoia because that's my record. And I thought, *Well, yeah, so they assigned me Texas, where there wasn't really a job. That makes sense.*

So the social actions office applied, and Personnel said, "Well, oh yeah, you're an overage. You aren't needed where you are. There's a person in California who is getting transferred to be with their dying father. Humanitarian reassignment. And so you need to be in California at the end of the month to take his place.

So that's when I really knew the left hand and the right hand—like, they were going to—and it was a satellite tracking station, spy satellites. So they're going to send me to the most sensitive—and my personnel file says I'm not to be trusted with—you know, I don't know my own mind.

HARRIS: Wow. So you just felt like, *The system seemed clueless.*

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: *So this is pretty crazy.* And the lieutenant at the unit had a Yossarian name tag [John Yossarian is a fictional character in the book *Catch-22*.], which he gave me, which I put on my Levi [Straus & Co.] jacket. From *Catch-22*. You know, if you don't want to go—if you don't want to go on the bombing raids, you can't be insane, but the only way you cannot go on the bombing raids is if you're insane, and that was the Catch-22. And that was a very popular book and movie among half the Air Force. [Chuckles.] The other half, not so much.

HARRIS: Yeah. So just going back a little to that suicide hotline and the drug—social—that you were talking about, what was, like, the psychological, I guess, like, climate on these Air Forces bases? I know that, like, drug use did increase during the Vietnam War era a lot within veterans or within soldiers on bases, so, like, did you have any experiences with that?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Well, we were ordered to drink, and the drinks were all but free.

HARRIS: Like, ordered, like, not one person did not drink.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: When we left the flight line, we were ordered to the officers' club every Friday.

HARRIS: Right, and you have to drink, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So you had to report and at least start with your two drinks.

HARRIS: Wow. Mm-hm. Why do you think that was?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Well, it was a drinking culture. It was—there was—In Vietnam that's *all* they did. Well, drink and drugs besides whatever—the drinking.

HARRIS: Yeah, I guess just, like, drug use.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Well, in the Air Force, there were other pilots that were against the war. There were certainly people who enlisted in the Air Force to not be drafted into the Army or the Marines, clearly. And—it's a funny—maybe I compartmentalized it, but on the job at the weather radar site, the dynamic—there's officers and enlisted, and that's the fact of life, but the dynamic was the career sergeants versus those who were doing their four-year enlistment. And there was some tension. But in the unit—I don't know, maybe it wasn't even—maybe it wasn't safe at work to talk about any of that.

HARRIS: Any—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Your political opinions or whatever, because I don't remember conversations.

[Pause]

HARRIS: Did it seem like—like, with the suicide hotline, did it seem like there was, like, a lot of psychological instability, like, within the military?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I don't—I don't know. The senior NCO—we shared this little office. You know, he knew everything. He was—the enlisted rank goes from E-1 to E-9, and he was n E-9. And he was an alcoholic, and he would—he would get some kind of symptoms, and the base hospital would just dispense Valium.

HARRIS: Jesus.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So he was on Valium a lot. And I know other people that regularly that was—and if you—I guess. I don't know.

I'm trying to think. They didn't give it for alcohol poisoning, but it seemed like in the ER, people knew if you went in hyperventilating or whatever, they would give you Valium. So I don't know what that means.

And there was drug use everywhere. My knowledge about drug use in the military was more my college friends, whose friends were in the service, just like my friend Steve was in the service, and he talked about smoking, but they came back hooked on heroin. They came back from Vietnam addicted.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Did you have any good friends that—besides Steve—that were in Vietnam and had those experiences?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I don't know. I can't picture Steve not doing pot with the African-American—and he was charismatic, so I think he could manage whatever dynamics. Later, here, I was in a veterans reading group, with *The Odyssey* with Roberta [L.] Stewart. And the guys were talking about how the black and white soldiers shot each other at times, and the one guy was talking about where he was at an outpost and it felt like it was close to—he saw the soldiers shooting each other, and it felt to him like it was close to the blacks taking over and killing all the whites. That's what he thought was going to happen next.

HARRIS: Jesus. This was in a veterans reading group at Dartmouth?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: [No audible reply.]

HARRIS: Okay. Okay.

Yeah, so I guess now just talk about your time in California. What was the name of that air base?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Vandenberg [Air Force Base, California], and so—

HARRIS: And what years were you there?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Seventy-three to '77. And by getting to Vandenberg—my next move would have been the remote, from Texas. I would have been on the top of the list to be in Alaska or Greenland or Thailand, wherever. But in California, it took a

year to get fully trained to do all the satellite stuff, and once you were trained, you weren't going to be moved because they needed to take advantage of the training. And so—so I had a three-year freeze once I was through the year of training. So it was, like, *Wow, this is great. I'm gonna be here.*

The job was fun. We were—

HARRIS: What was the name of the job?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Satellite operations controller, and my position was crew chief, so I had, after a year and a half or so—then I had a half dozen officers and enlisted and civilians that were my crew, and there were minimum four or us on—per shift, and we rotated shifts because the satellites were just out there all the time, and so we worked a month of first shift and a month of second and a month of third.

I loved doing that. I could make decisions and do things that would positively affect that small group that I was in charge of. And then at work, I was in charge of the whole station. And so that is sort of amazing thing about the military—there it was. They put me in charge of million and millions of dollars' worth of equipment.

HARRIS: Yeah. Could you explain a little about the satellite and what you were doing?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, you can—for ten years after, I wasn't supposed to say anything, so you can read all this in *Aerospace Technology* magazine, but the ones closest to the Earth were just on the edge of coming back into the atmosphere all the time, so—and we could only see them for about 80 seconds. So we set up the station, and the radar would pick it up and track it, and we would configure and get the data from it, and then the data went up to Sunnyvale, California.

And we didn't know what the data was, and we also knew that those satellites took pictures, that they literally dropped pods and airplanes caught the pods from the satellites. And we knew the pictures were—they could pick this up in space, because they could designa- —they could see the rank of somebody.

And when there were NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] missions, we were supporting the weather satellites that were much further out. And then there were communications satellites that three of them covered the Earth, so they were out, far enough out to be able to do that. And we knew that basically those satellites in the '70s were listening to phone conversations and stuff. We didn't—

HARRIS: Wow. Like, enemy nations?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Well, whoever. [Chuckles.] Whatever. So we didn't have top-secret clearances. That was for people who knew what the data was. We just made sure that we got the data. And we were directed by a station in California, and they would send out the orders, and we had to type in orders and send them at a certain second. And those orders were for dumping the data or adjusting the orbit and those kind of things.

And then when—so that was just fun. And then, when—at some point, you would be assigned to a launch, and then you—and then you got briefings, so I got to go up to the Bay Area, and the launch I was on, there were two spy systems competing, and there was a—and then two university experiments, so this professor talked and he'd waited, like, seven years to get his thing on the satellite.

And one of the experiments was about aerosols in space and the deteriorating ozone layer, and the other was the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was doing something, monitoring from space. And somebody told us what they were actually doing, and that was pretty neat.

But we went back to Vandenberg. When that one launched, it blew up. So I—we'd have known something about what one satellite was doing, except that it didn't make it. But the irony was, this was spy satellites, and CI-—the station was very nice, and if they needed something, there was CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] money that paid for it. So I was pretty cynical about that. [Chuckles.]

HARRIS: What was life like on that air base? Air Force base.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Very nice. California weather, and you could be off the base, and—there wasn't much bias against the military—Oklahoma, I'd say there was resentment. In Mississippi,—

HARRIS: Do you mean when you were off the base?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, when I was off the base, yeah. In Mississippi, there was anti-military—I don't know if it was a club or something, but I—I took it as we're in Mississippi and we hadn't been introduced. You know, and I'm a Yankee. And that was not good in Mississippi.

So California—I had this great job. The only thing was sleep deprivation sometimes, with always being on a different shift. And I found another hotline, drop-in center, and I did that on the side, and then I got virtually all of a master's in counseling.

HARRIS: During—while you were working—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, and the classes were on base. And the young guys I was working with, who were enlisted—they had had the aptitude to go to electronics school in Colorado, and they were working the computers, and they were working state-of-the-art equipment, and microwave and all this stuff. And they were going to class, either lunch hour or evenings or whatever, getting engineering degrees and things. And it was—it was—and we had civilians. And I had civilians on the crew, and so that was very unlike the military. And we were—we were—the work environment was not Air Force; it was this other thing.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Going back just for a second to how, like, anti-veterans sentiment during your time in the military—so was that—did you have any, like, specific experiences you remember when, I guess, civilians were critical of your role? Or was it just like a general sentiment that you felt?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I just—I either wasn't aware or didn't have to—it doesn't feel like I had to deal with it. It was more my own misgivings about things than somebody telling me—

HARRIS: But you remember in Oklahoma?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And I wasn't ever condemned by anybody I knew. When I left pilot training, my best friend, who was well read, was disappointed, and he ended up flying in Texas, in the same city, so we got back together there. I don't know if it answers the question or not, but I just—remember there were so many times thinking, *How crazy is all this?*

When I was in Kelly [Air Force Base Texas, now Kelly Field Annex], for weather radar—Kelly is a big supply base, so the Air Force had one in New Jersey and California, Alaska and in Texas. And they were—this was '73, and the war was coming to the end, and they were loading the huge transports with, like, folded-up planes, 24/7. It was like they were just throwing—

And all I could think was, *This is just totally insane.* We had politicians who said we're going to turn things over, which was a total disaster, and we're just throwing stuff at the country. And I'm sitting there, watching it.

And I do remember we were in a national election, and I was the only person, I felt like, in the Air Force who was voting for [Walter F.] Mondale. And being in Texas, Nixon was relatively popular—

HARRIS: Popular, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And so I certainly felt disaffected from most Air Force people and a lot of the civilians in Texas.

HARRIS: Was that isolating?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, although I enjoyed Texas because I got to know people off the base, between the hotline that was actually people of all ages—and then I hung out in San Antonio, down at the river, and that two guys that ran the bar had been there, in the service and stayed, and one had gotten a master's in social work. And I was—I took some counseling classes in San Antonio, but it didn't—it didn't work with my schedule.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Do you remember when American forces left Vietnam in 1973? Or like, what—was there like a celebratory—?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No. My experience—my experience of it was to see—

HARRIS: Yeah, the planes being sent— yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —all these supplies—and the planes and stuff that were being shipped at exactly that time.

HARRIS: Right when Americans were being told it was over.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: You asked the question on too influenced by *FRONTLINE* and other things I've seen since, to quite remember, other than to just say, *What was all this for?* I didn't have the feeling I had later in life, that we've alienated a certain part of the world or that we've made things worse; it was just, *What was this for?*

And—and another example of American hubris. We can go over there and—

HARRIS: Fix it, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —take it—fix it and—I was trying to think. In the Air Force, there—you know, there was still the Russian threat, but in the Air Force, the people who were—who did that were even out of the mainstream from the Air Force. They were sort of considered too rabid or something the stra- — to what's called the Strategic Air Command. You know, Russian's going to come at any time. almost the *Dr. Strangelove* [*or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*] kind of thing. And they sort of didn't even blend that well with other Air Force—

HARRIS: Interesting. Was there a—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I don't know the Air Force called—I mean, a lot of—when I was in pilot training, maybe a third or a fourth were just similar to me. They had chosen ROTC over being drafted and over going to Canada or Mexico. And, and among that group, some were very interested in flying, and others were less.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. That makes sense. Was there, like, an idea of threat of Russia—when you were in—when you were at Vandenberg, working on, I guess—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Oh, yeah.

HARRIS: —satellites, nuclear stuff?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: The tracking station was up at a decent elevation, 1,000 feet or something, and you could see straight to the ocean, and every time we launched, there were Russian trawlers in the water there, and it was 12 miles out. and so—but that was kind of insane, too. You know, there's all this security around the launch, but every contractor in the area, you know, is telling their wives or people, "There's a launch coming." And everybody would be outside, waiting—you know, the town, knowing it was—and it's a very physically impressive thing. But, yeah, the Russians are right out there. They know we're launching. They're monitoring.

The folks who would come in and test could pick up signals from the barbed wire around the perimeter of the tracking station, so it was, like, "They kinda know everything we're doin'," but then when you think about our satellites, we're taking pictures of everything *they're* doing.

HARRIS: Yeah, so it's just this two-sided—[Chuckles.]

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And, but the discussion over the national policy—somehow, it didn't acknowledge that or something.

HARRIS: Yeah. Was it common knowledge that there were satellites taking pictures of everything? Did you know—you knew at the time.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, you could literally read about it in *Aerospace Tech-* —it was a longer title, but there was *Aerospace Technology* magazine, and as lo- — and it wasn't classified until the Air Force said, "Oh, yeah, we do that." And that's classified information. That the technology existed was not classified. And there was—what was strange about—when I got to do the launch, Rockwell [International Corp., now Rockwell Collins, Inc.] and Lockheed [Martin] were competing systems, with—it was basically visual, you know,

and they're giving these briefings. So none of that information is classified. And until the Air Force bought one or the other, then suddenly all that's classified, about what it could do and everything. So there was this strange dichotomy. And the rule was—you're in the Air Force but you can't say, because then that would be acknowledging—I don't know.

In my cynicism—they were spending—I mean, this stuff's expensive. And it was all outside the budget, so it was, like, you know, taxpayers wouldn't know. Literally, a lot of the stuff was CIA money.

HARRIS: Wow. I just want to pause quickly for a bathroom break—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Okay.

HARRIS: —and then talk a little bit about just, like, how you got into counseling and what do you do at Dartmouth now with veterans and stuff. Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Bathroom sounds good. I saw a sign. It's downstairs?

HARRIS: Yeah.

[Recording interruption.]

HARRIS: So this is Sara Harris again in Rauner [Special Collections] Library with Dean Yrchik-Shoemaker [against pronouncing it SHOE-mah-ker, not SHOE-may-ker]. Now it's 5 p.m., and we're just continuing this interview.

So now I just want to talk a little bit about—you said you got your master's in counseling. Was that something you had always considered after college, or did that hotline—the suicide hotline thing you did in Texas—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It started as a senior in college. A couple of different things. One thing was a friend got depressed. He got arrested, I think, for being drunk, and when he got out—and this was over, like, winter interim—and I don't even know what he did. But he ended up talking to a counselor on call.

Well, and actually, as a senior I had friends that used the counseling center, to their benefit. And four of us lived in an apartment, and three of us went to the counseling center and said, "We're scared of our fourth roommate. And we don't know if he's—we don't know if he's gonna hurt himself or us." And they helped us decide we should ask him to move, which we came back and did. And that was sometime in the fall, sometime after Thanksgiving.

So around New Year's Day, this friend—I don't know what they did, but they saw a counselor at night at the campus counseling center, and they—they let him go home, with the promise that he would come back to the counseling center, like, on Monday. So two of us went with him, and—

HARRIS: You went back with him.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: We went to the counseling center on Monday, and he came out, and he said he agreed to go to the mental health unit at the state hospital in Lansing. And we said, "We'll go with you." So we went with him, and when they came down and got him, we said, "Can we go up?" And the guy said, "Yeah." So we were with him—we went into the unit, and it was, like, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*: people obviously mentally ill, so not like anything I'd seen before.

And were kind of, like, "Well, how's this gonna be good for our friend?" And so they interviewed him, and he didn't agree to stay. And there weren't grounds for him to be kept. So the social worker, the intake worker came down and talked to us and said, "You know, well, you keep an eye on him." So we—we did that, and we were convinced—and he had broken up with his girlfriend, some other things. We were convinced that was just kind of all part of it. So that was one thing that happened.

And another thing that happened is that one of the ROTC—one of the instructors was getting a Ph.D. in psychology, and at the end of the year he had—he arranged, like, an all-day retreat for the juniors to plan the senior year, knowing it was really much more about trying to strengthen connections amongst the 20 of us than anything else, and he was using his psychology training and stuff. And it worked, and it was interesting.

And one of my classmates, who was in ROTC, who was going to go into the chaplaincy—I don't know how he ended up in our apartment, but anyhow, he just unloaded all this stuff that was troubling him, and I just discovered that by listening, that could be helpful. And I just sort of got hooked on that and what was going on with the friend and my closest friends, who were in two of the apartments. There was always sort of something going on.

So once I got to San Antonio, I went to work for—and there were suicide hotlines all over the place at the time, and part of it was suicide, and part of it was that people would call in on bad drug trips, and you were supposed to get them through.

HARRIS: And that wasn't just—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Bad LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide] and whatever.

HARRIS: —soldiers; that was anyone in the community.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: Okay.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And so I did that, and I liked the training, and we got good training from the University of Texas San Antonio Medical School [sic; University of Texas School of Medicine in San Antonio] staff. They were our backup. And I found I can do it, and I—that was part of the community instead of the base. It was all that, too. And we were located at a small college in San Antonio, physically located. So I liked that part.

And St. Mary's College—I took a psych course, which was in the evening, but it turned out they really didn't have too many evening courses. But anyhow this—and the instructor had been one of the first Air Force psychologists. And it was an experimental course. And I enjoyed that, too. They would do an experiment, and we'd have to figure out what the experiment was and write it up and—I enjoyed that.

So when I got to California, then I found a walk-in center, which was also suicide—and they had Sunday night sort of group, and I really liked that. And then I enrolled in a master's program. And the other students were at least half or in their 30s, 40s, 50s; some of them had just retired from the service. And so that was a whole 'nother community besides the Air Force that I was part of.

There were group classes, and we did retreats, and it was California, and—I liked all of it. And I got all the classes done. And all the instructors were doing what they were teaching, so the school psychologist taught testing, and the director of the counseling center at Cal Poly [sic; California Polytechnic State University], San Luis Obispo, was my favorite instructor. I had him for two or three courses. Loved him.

And his wife was a case manager at the hospital for the criminally insane in Atascadero, and we buil- —field trips and—it was a very good—and other members of the counseling center from Cal Poly were there, and it was, like, *Wow, I'd like to be able to do that.*

So over four years I was there, I was taking sort of a half time or something, but I could always—if I worked weekends, I could always have time off for the class, so I'd trade with somebody. It worked. And I had to do practicum. So the first practicum—when they closed the huge mental hospitals, then they had community day treatment centers, and I got to work there, and it was—there were people who had been institutionalized 30, 40 years, and they spent all day—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday—at day treatment center.

And there was some different kinds of therapies and stuff, and I wasn't—I was okay with chronic—and everybody there was in need to that much support.

HARRIS: Yeah. Wow. Did you—oh sorry.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Go ahead.

HARRIS: Did you work with veterans specifically?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: No. Not—not at the day treatment center. There was one—he might have been about 19. He had gone to basic training, and when they were using explosives, he went into a catatonic state. And he was in that state until his parents got to Kentucky, and he started to respond. And he was at the day treatment center, and I did spend more time with him, but I never—I don't think I understood—I don't know if his diagnosis was paranoid schizophrenia or another kind of psychosis or something. But that was just incidental, that he happened to have been in the service.

So I was doing that the whole time I was in the service—I mean, when I was in California. And then what happened is when it got close to that four-year point, which also—I stayed in two extra years. I had finished the satellite training, I had become a crew chief, and I was going to classes, and I was enjoying—and my roommate's on the base were, like, dentists and stuff, and they were not so much Air Force.

But—and I had this freeze from being moved, so I just stayed two more years to work on my master's degree and save money and whatever else, and so when it got to the end of that three-year freeze, they were going to put in another freeze, and somehow they didn't do it, so I got orders to be at a tiny radar in northern—on the Canadian border.

So I said, *That's all right*, so I put in my papers, and I finished—I think it was—stop and think. I was almost done with the second practicum at the federal prison. And I was really lucky there. The head psychologist had been a professor, but he'd had a stroke at 39, and he couldn't keep up with the grad students, and so he ended up at the prison.

HARRIS: So how did you end up after Vandenberg? I know it was definitely, like, some time before coming to Dartmouth, and working in—working as a dean here, but—yeah, did you know that you wanted to do counseling at college, or how did it kind of end up?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: That experience at Michigan State was that, *Wow, there's some real power in being a careful listener,* and—

HARRIS: Like, did you know you wanted to work—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —so I was drawn to that.

HARRIS: —at universities?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Well, the professor who was the director of [the] counseling center at Cal Poly was a real influence around that, and then when I did the prison internship, the director there was an adjunct professor at UC Santa Barbara [University of California, Santa Barbara]. And the professor from [the] counseling program came up every Friday, and they did research together.

And the—when the practicum was over—well, in the practicum, I administered what are called MMPIs, Minnesota Multiphasic [Personality] Inventories, to the inmates and in theory evaluated them, and I did do some sentencing reports. So [if] someone was convicted of a federal crime but there was drug abuse or [a] question about mental health, and so the judge would say, "Before sentencing, we'll get a mental health report." So I did some of those.

HARRIS: Just for the sake of time, let's—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, sorry.

HARRIS: No, it's fine—but it's all so interesting. Let's fast forward to just, like, what you do at Dartmouth and how your, like, background as a veteran and counseling education, like, plays into that.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Okay. I worked as a college counselor at University of Maine at Presque Isle and University of Rhode Island and down at Brown University, and then at Brown I was 100 percent outreach, so I did groups all the time and workshops and stuff out in the residence halls and things. And then I was a mental health dean at Brown, so I did mental health withdrawals, medical withdrawals and, daily, arranged academic accommodations for students, almost entirely around mental health issues.

And the job here—and I also was a freshman adviser; they had kind of a different system, but—and the job here when I got here was very much more that kind of crisis and mental

health work, because there was one dean for 1,100 students, and so it was—

HARRIS: At Dartmouth or at Brown?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: At Dartmouth, so there wasn't really time for proactive—so most of my day was, when I first got here, was mental health issues. And I always had a broader interest in organizations and structures and how you could set things up better to work better for students.

So the question was, what I do here?

HARRIS: Yeah, I guess. Do you work specifically with veterans?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. When I got here in 2007, a couple of the—some of the veterans who President [James E.] Wright had visited at Walter Reed [National Military Medical Center] in Bethesda, naval hospital—and he said, you know, "Have you thought about going to college?" And some of them actually applied here and were accepted. And I arrived in August, and they said—

HARRIS: August of 2007.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Seven. They said, "There's two that's coming in as transfer students in the fall. Would you reach out to them?" And so I did, and the—I had almost nothing to do with the one student. He found the history department and lived there, and the two were close and supported each other. And the other student had a lot of medical stuff going on, and I was involved with him a lot around that.

And with 1,100 students, I barely had time—there were two or three or five more admitted each year, and [in] 2010, maybe in the fall, finally there was a second dean per class, and I finally had time to actually spend some time with the veterans. And so the one thing was to set up an orientation when they first came in and introduce them to different resources and the VA [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs] and then advise them around classes and then around different issues.

And then, maybe a couple of years after that, I was asked to be the adviser to their club. John [A.] Rassias had been the original one, and in some ways, before—he was so busy with so many other things, that was kind of just in name only.

And so I've had some of the vets as my advisees, and more often than not, the other vets, because of going through orientation and because of me going to most of the vet association meetings as the adviser and so on, pretty much relied on me for advising.

HARRIS: Have you found veterans that had positive experiences at Dartmouth, or has it been hard to adjust sometimes?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: All of that together. I think about one student. He sat at a panel. He got out of the service in the spring, late spring or early summer. He was here in the fall. He's in this gorgeous place. And his unit was already going back to Afghanistan, so he's here, and he's in this place, and every day he's worrying about those who he had closer bonds to than anyone else in the world, being in danger every day, and certainly not feeling like there's any way he could explain that to any 19-year-old on campus.

And there were different of the vets, at different times, who came almost directly from service to right here, and they took courses while they were in the service or wherever else— And they, with two exceptions, were all combat veterans through now. And actually this fall, I don't think that will change.

Actually, that's not unusual because even—the guy who I was just talking about was actually assigned to a personnel unit in Hawaii, but his job was to clear bombs in Afghanistan. So there's almost—I don't know how rare it is to actually not be in combat or combat situations. So they've all had that.

And they've had—I don't know what percentage. Most have had post-traumatic challenges, and there were things like moving into Sachem Village, where the grad students live. It turns out during hunting season, guns are going off right at the hill behind there. And housing moved a student into town. Most of the—most of the vets have lived in the residence halls and were proud about being a part of things.

They could live off campus if they wanted to, right from the beginning, and very few—basically, those who came with partners did that, and all the rest have lived on campus.

And they excel academically, where they were before here, but without nearly the same academic preparation as the usual Dartmouth student. So maturity and perseverance and some other things, in most cases, carried through. And we have some who haven't finished yet because of—who were on medical withdrawal, so—

HARRIS: Do you think your experience as a veteran has helped with, like, counseling veterans here?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Sometimes, but I was never in combat. I think I was help to someone who really—I didn't even see the movie, *The Hurt Locker*, but it talked about the adrenaline and how you're used to adrenaline, how difficult it is to not be in adrenaline-producing situations. And that was one of the vets—and I think he had a sense that I understood what a dilemma that was. I understand how the military is—the military *now* is such a teamwork setting and how disorienting it is coming to higher education, which is so independent, and that different vets at times have said to me, "You know, I came here, I thought you were going to tell me, 'Take this and this and this"—[Raps table several times.]—"and that people would just tell me exactly what to do." And that is not our culture or structure at all. And that's a clash of cultures. So, and I don't know that I can overstate that.

HARRIS: Wow. Do you think Dartmouth does a good job of reaching out to veterans? I know—I hear-— learned a little bit about the Po-—is it Posse Veterans Program?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Posse's coming. Yeah. And it's all President Wright: (1) because he became part of the whole national effort to get vets to go to school and in that process encouraged lots and lots of vets to come here, and others. I remember four or five years ago asking, you know, "Why'd you come to Dartmouth?" The Marine said, "I was on shipboard. It was boring. I was reading the *Navy Times*, and it talked about President Wright saying you should go to school. So I thought, *Where is he?*" That's now a lawyer in the Bay Area. And he had a hard time, in a lot of ways.

Dartmouth is 18 to 22. There's almost no—almost no—well, we're probably in the top quarter percent in terms of the lack of age range. There's just—it's so unusual in that regard. And two of the vets have been in their 50s. But even 27 is four standard deviations [chuckles] above the—if there is such a thing, you know.

And that—as a team, they were totally dependent on each other, life and death, and as a team, in some ways, they could operate totally independent of anyone else.

HARRIS: The veterans.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. And so the veterans here are asked to function pretty independent of each other, which is what they do, and it's a fine line between that and feeling isolated and disaffected. And—I could say this because I worked at Brown and other palaces—we're the most—the D-Plan [Dartmouth's flexible study plan] creates all these rules and the needs for petition, and it feels like over and over again they're being told, "You don't really belong here, structurally." War stories, but—war stories. So married vet—you have to live in the residence hall; first years live in the residence hall. That's what he was told. He said, "What? So where's my wife's room?" You know.

HARRIS: Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: This gets into politics and stuff, but President Wright knew that if he tried to create or have [an] administrative decision about what a veterans program would be, we'd still be waiting, so he just encouraged folks to come. And all the administrative stuff has been decision by decision and ad hoc, so it can certainly feel to them like they're invited, but are they welcome? And so it's issues like the lawyer wanted to go straight through, but the registrar says, "You can't do that. No, you gotta take an off term." "Excuse me? I'm 27." "You have to take an off"—you know. So we got an exception for that. They're independent of what happens between terms.

HARRIS: Yeah, Where do they go?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: There not going—you know? They have financial aid, but that's a little different if you're in—and if you have a family, financial aid is not—if you have kids—we've had vets with kids, and that's been a real huge challenge financially. So my gripe is there wasn't a program. And what informs that gripe is at Brown they had a program called Resumed [Undergraduate] Education [Program]. If you had been in college and then left and were now going to start over and finish, that was the pool, and you could take one class for as long as you wanted to or you could transition in whatever—you know, they created logical things.

HARRIS: Yeah. That makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Dartmouth is still 18 to 22 in terms—and D-Plan structure—

HARRIS: System, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —that makes no sense to somebody 25.

HARRIS: Yeah. Have veterans had difficult experiences socially at Dartmouth?

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: On the one hand, they've been very proud about being part of things. They've joined fraternities, and they've done this, and they've done that. A lot of them have written op-ed pieces on a variety of things. What was the question? Are they—

HARRIS: I guess just their experiences socially at Dartmouth, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: You know, the next person they run into is complaining about something. How important can it be compared to anything they've—you know. So they're pretty forgiving. [Chuckles.]

HARRIS: Yeah, that makes sense.

Have you had any interactions with, like, the Dartmouth veteran alumni community? I know it's pretty strong.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It's very strong. They—well, Class of '56 has been real active, and, you know, when we were talking about service,

that's their culture and that Dartmouth students don't even think about service. They can't comprehend. But they know it's true for the whole country. Nobody talks about serving the country in any shape or form. They at least, maybe when they left in the '60s, people were maybe going into the State Department or some Peace Corps or AmeriCorps or something. And so that's really hard.

It's also the vast majority of our veteran alums were either in ROTC here, World War II era, even Vietnam, or they went to OTS [Officer Training School], for the most part. So their military experience is as officers. And every one of our undergraduate vets is not an officer. And they don't hold it against me, from what I can tell, but I know the difference. But, but—

HARRIS: There's a divide, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And alumni loved to be involved in things with the vets, and they don't grasp that disconnect, and they come from a culture of service and where every- —they served, and their relatives did.

HARRIS: Mm-hm. Their peers, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And these vets or these students now don't know anybody. How many—how many servicemen do you know right now?

HARRIS: Only a few.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah. And how many in your family?

HARRIS: My dad was in the Israeli army.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Okay.

HARRIS: But that's it, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And now?

HARRIS: Only—None.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: Yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And they—they—they don't have a way to integrate that with their own experience.

HARRIS: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: The '70s kind of class, [Phillip C.] "Phil" Schaefer—they did a great thing. [Chuckles.] They asked—well, you know this, probably—they asked the alums to write about their Vietnam experience, and from the '70s, among the administrations you're disaffected from are—is the college administration, or the college, itself, as an institution. Dartmouth probably much less so than anywhere else in the country, but—but they got some replies back saying, "I haven't had anything to do with Dartmouth since I left, but this is an interesting invitation, so I'm going to write my experience when I left Dartmouth and went into the service."

So, you know—and our vets are trying to be students. And the dilemma for me is to—that alums want to do all sorts of stuff, and I want them to be able to study and stay here. And that's a conflict. And the alums have come to understand that. But the Alumni Association—it's Navy officers and—

HARRIS: Right, so there is that divide—

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: And even with the service, the Navy is the aristocratic service. They eat off of china and silver in the stateroom on ship, et cetera, et cetera. And even more than—much more than any of those services. That's sort of the Dartmouth tradition. Generations of naval service.

HARRIS: Interesting. Yeah, yeah. So there's a divide. Yeah, yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So the alums. Well, an example, the—I guess he's maybe nine or ten years out—he thought it would be great for alums who were serving around the world to be in touch, and so he initiated the Dartmouth Uniformed Service [Alumni] association—Dartmouth—DUSA—Dartmouth Uniformed Service Alumni. So that was the idea, which made perfect sense. You know? They are in different part of the world—those who were still serving, all as officers, and

the older the vet alumni went, “Yeah, great organization,” and, you know, made a different thing out of it. And they had to figure out—

HARRIS: Oh, God, yeah! That generational divide.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —what it is we’re doing, yeah. And so there’s just all those challenge[s], but the alumni really—they just—bless their hearts, they just want to do so much.

HARRIS: Special.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So Dartmouth does a lot around Veterans Day, and Veterans Day is recognizing service. Memorial Day is remembering our dead, and I’ve wanted the vets to have the chance to be together around Memorial Day, and the alums wanted to—you know they wanted—flag ceremony and so on, and they wanted the undergraduate vets to be the honor guard and to do this and do that and do that.

And for them, Memorial Day is they’re going to be in touch with somebody from their unit. They’re going to call the mother of their comrade that died. It’s not a group thing at all. It’s a mourning day, and it’s done—each one’s experience is different, and eventually some of the alums—but they were just really pissed that these undergrads wouldn’t do this.

And I—you know, it was the same thing for me. I arranged a Friday dinner one year, and actually I’m still doing Friday—now it’s—we call it end of year. It’s still Friday. But they can do whatever Monday or the rest of the weekend.

HARRIS: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: So there were those kinds of things, where, “What kind of veteran are you?” And the veterans—not that this even happened, but the veterans would go, “Well, I wasn’t an officer.” You know, just—

HARRIS: Mm-hm. That’s interesting, that divide.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: —um, challenges.

HARRIS: Yeah.

I guess just wrapping up—this has been fascinating; you had so many interesting experiences—I guess just you kind of hinted at your, like, reflections on the Vietnam War since, and just kind of, as a conclusion, what—how has your perception of the war changed since your time in the military, or the impact you think the war has had on American culture or on veterans? Because I know, like, the draft became optional pretty soon, as the war was closing down, so that definitely change the culture.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, that's just—what our vets go through now, it's just sad and unfair to be sent back again and again and again and again. And no other generation did that. Vietnam was 12 months. I guess somewhere out there, there were a few people who did a second tour who weren't lifers, but for the rest of the Army, it was, like, *I gotta get back there and improve my career.*

You know, we still think we can tell other people more what to do, so we're still making the same mistake all over the world, that American Manifest Destiny or whatever—has it really changed, that we can go and say, "Mission accomplished" and leave a disaster? That hasn't changed.

So when I was in the reading group, it was a Dartmouth professor, and we happened to do it at the Howe Library, but everybody in the group was Vietnam era, and most of them had never been thanked. They were reviled for their service. They came back, their best friends said, "Get that uniform off. People are gonna think you're a baby killer" or this or that.

So it's very nice to see that service is appreciated, and people do have a sense now, which I don't think existed before, that politics is a separate thing, and the vets often have to remind people of that. They'll present something here, and the audience will ask questions about military policy, and they'll say, "Well, I can tell you about the experience, and as vets, we all have different political views about this. And we've—and some of us love studying government, thinking about how policy evolves and how it

contradicts what we experienced or how it's consistent with what we experienced."

The feeling doesn't go away, that why did Americans think we can just tell the rest of the world what to do? Or act as if we can, and do it without being informed very much. You have those Vietnam era vets—just didn't—in that reading group, they haven't gotten home yet. They haven't gotten back to anything like what their life was before they went.

And I said teamwork. Our vets now have experienced such effective and powerful teamwork, and they know—they absolutely lived it and experienced it and valued it. In the Vietnam era, that—they experienced none of that. They were enlisted shooting officers. They were shooting each other. They were—you know, who could avoid the draft? People who could go to college. Who got drafted?

HARRIS: Yeah. So divisive.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Actually, who served? Who served in the combat units? African-Americans. You know, whatever the statistic is, 50, 60 percent versus 20 percent of population or whatever.

So those are some random thoughts. The question was how has the military informed my life?

HARRIS: No, I think you answered it, just your reflections on that era and—yeah.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah, it's—

HARRIS: I guess [chuckles] you could also answer how the military has informed—affected your life.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: I still think—I think it can be a great thing for—my experience was those young men and women that had some aptitude for electronics or whatever and went on, got degrees—that wouldn't have happened if they hadn't been in the military, and they wouldn't have had the experience of that, and that they put me in charge of all this equipment, and I got a record [chuckles] that says I don't know my own mind.

HARRIS: Yeah!

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: It says how much opportunity there was to have respon- —and I was, whatever, in my 20s, and I'm in charge of this group of folks, some of whom are 35 or so, with families. It was pretty gratifying and educational. So I try to understand current events. My experience isn't common, I can understand some of the things about being that age and having somewhat similar experiences. But that's—anyhow. That's probably it.

HARRIS: Okay. I think that's perfect for the conclusion. Thank you so much.

YRCHIK-SHOEMAKER: Yeah.

HARRIS: I'll stop the recording now.

[End of interview.]