

# Harris Kohn

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Howe: How we start is just a quick introduction. My name is Jerrod Howe and today is Thursday, July 31, 2014. We're here at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago, and we're here with Mr. Harris Kohn. So, we're here to do your story of service, and I just want to thank you for coming in today, taking the time.

Kohn: Well, it's a pleasure to come in...I tell everyone that I was in the Korean War, which is not only a forgotten war, it's the unknown war, and I tell people I made the world safe for Hyundai. [Laughs]. So, if you want a brief...in a nutshell, I graduated with the University of Michigan in 1951 and the Korean war was raging, and my draft board said, "You are going into the [US] Army," and I knew I was going into service, and I felt an obligation to this country...my last name's Kohn, I'm a Jew, and I obviously was well aware of what happened in World War II, and I felt a tremendous obligation to answer the call for this country and I still feel a tremendous gratitude for what this country stands for and what I am allowed to do. So I got an appointment to Navy OCS [Officer Candidate School], and I began in November, 1951...and Officers Candidate School was something that was a culture shock to me. I expected it to be very physical -- and it was physical -- but it was in Newport, Rhode Island but that was not the agony...the agony was academics. There were eight courses a day, and they were not snap courses...weapons, every gun from a .45 to a 16-inch cannon, engineering steam turbine, diesel navigation, operations...and we had eight tests a day, quizzes at the beginning of each course...and the quizzes were not based on the lectures of the day before, they were based on what we studied the night before. You'd go in at eight o'clock and have your first class, and there'd be a test on the 5"/38 caliber gun. You'd go into the next class and it was something about a steam turbine, the next was navigation. And there were forty tests a week. At the end of the week, if you were deficient in any course, you were put in a weekly tree. At the end of the month, if you were on a tree, you're kicked out of OCS and you went to Bainbridge, Maryland for boot camp. And people know nothing about Officers Candidate School, they assume...you know, Harris got an appointment, he's gonna come out an officer. It was an ego thing as well...I

wanted damn well to finish, and when I began...I would have absolutely settled that day for being the anchor man, the last man in the class, and I...there 500 something of us that graduated, and I was 150 above the anchor man, and I felt like a bloody genius. We had...there was a lot of drill, a lot of military activity, but then we had three hours a night to study, so everyone studied from seven to ten, and at ten taps was blown, and everyone had flashlights and we'd study and make notes 'til midnight and sweat out the next day. And I felt -- had I studied like that at the University of Michigan -- I would have been a Rhodes Scholar. [Laughs]. But I got through, and at that time, the Korean War was raging and the needs were for amphibious ships – LSTs, particularly -- because there were only three ports in Korea and one was in North Korean hands and their other was in Busan, and on the west coast at Incheon, so LSTs could run up on the beach near the lines. We dropped off everything from troops, to tanks, to toilet paper, to provisions, to...and we went back and forth constantly. When I first reported aboard I had another little shock, because all of the officers were recalled [United States Naval] Reserves from World War II. We had six officers, and it's customary -- when you board a ship and you're a new officer -- to be invited to the captain's house to meet the other officers. And I was invited...captain's house...and I looked at all the other officers, they had ribbons from their navel to their Adam's apple, and I absolutely felt naked. I mean, here, this inaudible [time stamp 13:20.1]<sup>1</sup>, and worth a shiny gold bar, comes into an environment where everyone's been through hell and been through war. And...but I got on board, and the commanding officer was probably one of the most interesting people I ever met in my life. He was a recalled reserve from World War II. He was a lieutenant senior grade who was skipper of the LST. His name was Swede Rogerson [time stamp 13:48.1], and he had a brand of leadership that was absolutely outstanding. He did everything right, he never screamed, he never shouted. Praise in public, censure in private, and encouraging. And with my background when I went to sea, the only sea duty I ever had was a canoe trip in Wisconsin. I want to tell you, I needed his help. [Laughs]. And going over to...crossing the Pacific the first time en route to Korea, I qualified for top watches and began to feel like I was beginning to be a naval officer. We got to Korea, and I was terrified of one thing. I was terrified of how I would behave as a division officer. It never occurred to me, you know...when you're in your 20s you're indestructible, and you don't think you're gonna get hit, or damaged, or wounded. And I just had no idea, and I was in charge of a division of men, who...a lot of 'em had been in World War II, and all of the sudden, this smartass twenty-one year-old is gonna lead them into battle, and I was terrified. And Rogerson took me aside, and he said, "You will do fine." He said, "The thing that's gonna save your butt is the fact that you're gonna be

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<sup>1</sup> Where a word or name was inaudible or unclear, a time stamp is added to the transcript.

very busy, and it's very noisy, and you're gonna concentrate on your job. And the \_\_\_\_\_ [15:18.6], always gets the dirty end of the stick." And when we went to Korea for the first time, we landed in Japan. We loaded up with troops and we were going to participate in an invasion north of Wonsan, and being \_\_\_\_\_ [uncertain, same word as 15:18.6, 15:35.7], and I was going to be detached to lead a wave ashore. And...which I really...in a way it was a relief, because I was gonna be off the ship. The only guy in the boat with me was a coxswain, I'd read *The Caine Mutiny*, and I was not gonna be Captain Queeg and leave a dye marker. And it was noisy, it was stinking, it was a chaotic type of situation, and we weren't...there were a lot of shots fired, but we weren't hit. And I came through, and as I looked back at the entire experience I...I was \_\_\_\_\_ [same word, 16:25.4], and we didn't rate a supply corps officer, so I...when I got on board, they gave me this huge volume and said, "Here, you read this book," and I said, "What is this?" Said, "That's the duties of a Supply Corps officer, which we don't rate." I said, "But I'm a line officer!" They said, "You're gonna be twins on this ship." And fortunately, I had a good chief who knew all about it, and I eased into it, and then I stayed on the same ship for three years. I went to deck and gunnery, I went to operations and communications, I got \_\_\_\_\_ [16:43.3]. And, if I had to...in this day and age where most kids go to college, begin their career, and don't think of service...I think most of the people today who go into service are people who are economically underprivileged, and they want either an opportunity to education or something else, and I honestly feel that it's wrong to have an Army and a Navy and an Air Force that is not part of the population. I don't think anyone in Congress has a son or a daughter in service, one or two...and I think the only reason why we went into Iraq and went into Afghanistan is because we don't have a draft. If we had a draft, they would have stormed the barricades, and not sent those kids into a needless, useless war, like Iraq, and like Afghanistan. I look back at my service experience, and I was pleased with the opportunity to serve the country. And, I think the difference between service and just going from college to work is it's an experience where you absolutely...what do they say, the sporting term, 'leave everything on the field.' You absolutely...in service, you are putting out everything you have. And you work as a team, I...the crew on that ship was dynamite. And it was a small ship, with six officers and 100 men. I had third class petty officers doing what two-strippers did on aircraft carriers. And it was, 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours,' we depended on one another. It was a total teamwork effort, and we had a terrible year in the combat zone, but we survived and no one was killed. And it was because of a unity of a team. And, it's funny, I...I look back at Rogerson. He only...he was on board during...for my first year, and I got into sales and marketing later, and I evaluate leadership, and I work with some pretty impressive people who were in charge of multi-million dollar operations, and I never, ever found anything of the

character, leadership, or the quality that Swede Rogerson showed when I got out into the world of business. I think that when you go in as a naval officer and serve, I think, you bleed Navy blue and gold for the rest of your life. And I -- a few years ago, I'm retired -- and I found out the secret of happy retirement. My time outside the condo is directly proportional to my marital happiness, so...and I'm very happy, because I do a lot of volunteer work. And one of the volunteer jobs I have, \_\_\_\_\_ [uncertain 20:11.2] at the Navy History Museum at Great Lakes, and have been for a little over a year. And the thing I enjoy most, when I get the families -- and Great Lakes is the last of the boot camps, and there are forty-eight different graduations a year -- and the parents come in, and after I take them through the museum, I tell them that the one benefit that they never should allow their son or daughter to let go of is that GI Bill. It's a life-changer and a game-changer. And I give my little GI Bill lecture, and the success I had pitching that thing a long time ago on my ship for kids who...most of the parents today are not college people, and I don't think they realize the importance of this, and I really...I push it like crazy. I think there were some terrible experiences during the combat, though, that I'm not even going to go into. I...every veteran who has been in combat knows what it means. But I think...one of the funniest things that happened, that was absolutely outrageous, was when a ship comes back from a combat zone, when we...we stopped at Pearl Harbor, and my God, they had hula girls and dances and the whole thing. And then we got back to San Diego, and a ship coming back from the combat zone at that time went alongside the Broadway pier, and I was deck officer when we came back, and...an LST is a terribly underpowered ship. It's the same size as a destroyer, but with two diesel engines. A destroyer has two steam turbines, they've got...each turbine has...they'd have 25,000 horses, so it was 50,000 horses. We had 900 horses on each shaft, and it was underpowered, but it was put together well and it held together. So, we...when you come into San Diego, if you went alongside the Broadway pier, you had to have a pilot take the ship alongside. The ship's captain could not. So we got this pilot and we're approaching the Broadway pier...I looked over, the band was playing, the relatives were there, and the heroes were coming back, and as we approached the pier, I realized that idiot pilot had never been on an LST before, because we are going to that dock at much too great a rate of speed. And I...the closer we got, the more I knew what's gonna happen. And I am screaming, trying to get a \_\_\_\_\_ [23:00.0] line over as quickly as I can. We bang into the deck, the band stops playing, the relatives are aghast, and we had to look like the keystone cops. And we bounced off the dock, and wiped out an admiral's barge. And we finally got secure, and I didn't know my parents were there, and my mother comes on board. I hadn't seen her a year and a half, I'd been in the combat zone, and she waved her finger at me, she said, "You always did drive too fast!" [Both laugh]. And I tried to explain that I'm the deck officer, that I'm just trying to get a line

ashore, and I think...my mother passed away, and I think she died thinking that I drove too fast. So, there...there's some pleasant memories, there's some unpleasant memories. I'm glad I served, I'm glad I'm here, and my prayer is that when the interests of the United States are threatened, you go to war yesterday. You do not go to war when some moron who is vice president...who decides to rearrange the Middle East...and when that great Vice President – Cheney -- was asked why he took five deferments in Vietnam, he said, "I had other priorities," but he had no qualms about sending...about sending people off to die. In Vietnam...we made the same mistake in Iraq, with looking for weapons of mass destruction. And Afghanistan has been the graveyard of armies since Alexander the Great. So, when the vital interests of the United States are threatened you go to war. Otherwise, you don't. So here I am, and that's my story, and I'm going to stick to it.

Howe: Fair enough. I know that was...that was a lot, but that was also only twenty minutes. I hope you don't mind, keeping all that in my head and trying not to retread too much ground.

Kohn: Okay.

Howe: Do you mind if we...let's talk about your early years, before you joined the military.

Kohn: Okay.

Howe: Maybe provide some context for your youth, growing up in Chicago, and...you know, what was life like? So, you were born...

Kohn: I was born in Chicago, and I came from...

Howe: What date?

Kohn: I was born September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1929. I was born on the North Side of Chicago, on Chase Avenue, and my parents moved further south, and we ended up on a street called Hampden Court, and I went to Louisa May Alcott Grammar School which, at that time, was almost a depressed area, and I get hysterical now that it's yuppie-ville. But it was rather depressed then. I went to Lakeview High School, and I must have had a Napoleonic Complex. I played football, I had a big mouth, and I...there's only one thing that stopped me from being a great athlete, and that was lack of talent. But I ended up breaking a leg, and...but I didn't have enough time on the field to get a letter, so...but I realized that my chances of excelling at athletics were slim to none. So then I began college at a veteran's branch of the University of Illinois in Galesburg, and I was

seventeen. If you got a minute, I think I had a very interesting experience in...at Galesburg. My first day, they were 85% veterans, this was in 1947 or '48.

Howe: You said Pennsylvania? Galesburg is where? I'm sorry.

Kohn: Galesburg, Illinois.

Howe: Illinois, Okay.

Kohn: That's where Knox College is. They took over a former Army General Hospital in World War II, and it was one story, and there were 85% veterans...or 90%. And I get in -- and I'm seventeen, and a big mouth hotshot here -- and I get in with these veterans, and the first day in class was really dynamite. We get in, and the instructor -- there were no professors -- the instructor was twenty-eight or twenty-nine, he'd been a major in infantry, and the reason he was a major is all the lieutenants got killed and he kept getting promoted, and...a very bright guy, and he said, "I want you to \_\_\_\_\_ [28:12.1]," in a rhetoric class, he said, "I want you to write your...on any phase of your experience, and we may read a few, but I'm not interested in content, I'm interested in the way you...your grammar, how you grammatically express yourself; it's a rhetoric class." So we start to write and the...he stops, and he asks somebody to read his theme. Well, the guy who read his theme the first time was a Navy Flyer who described his first practice landing on a carrier where he missed the deck and almost got drowned, and oh my God, and the next guy read his, and his was...he was an OSS officer -- that was the Office of Strategic Services, which was the precursor to the CIA -- it was a spy agency, and he was on a train from Rome to Trieste in occupied Italy during World War II, and he describes the Gestapo coming on board to check identities. And, of course, if they suspect he's a spy, they're going to shoot him. Then he called on me, and I said, "No way!" "What do you mean, no way?" I said, "If you think I'm going to read my theme about a canoe trip in Wisconsin, you're nuts!" And I was referred to, after that, as the miserable, f-ing teenager. So, anyhow, Galesburg did me wonders. It gave me a lot of humility. And I transferred to the University of Michigan and graduated from Michigan, and did well there.

Howe: When did you graduate?

Kohn: I graduated in '51.

Howe: Okay.

Kohn: And I got honors in economics. And I was kind of pleased with that, and I knew I was going in the service...so you got the story, and Navy OCS and the rest.

Howe: What did your parents do for a living?

Kohn: My...it was...my mother, basically, was a stay at home housewife, and my father was a lawyer, who was great, who left the law, and never should have left the law because he was happiest in the law, and went into business to help support the rest of his family who was having a problem. And he ended up...he did well later on, but he was a terribly frustrated man. But the interesting thing was, he...during World War I, he was a whitehead in the Navy in Washington, D.C., and he was kind of pleased that his son got a commission in the Navy. And I...basically, they were a good family, and, my mother had a great sense of humor. I...when I came home with my commission, I was so busting proud, and she took a look and she said, "What a wonderful country this is." "What are you talking about?" She said, "For twenty-one years, I tried and failed to make you a gentleman, and Congress, with one piece of paper, can make you an officer and a gentleman. I think that's wonderful." She...she was a good lady. And also, I gotta tell you about my Aunt Edna. My Aunt Edna was an old maid schoolteacher, who was really a nice lady, and when I went in the Navy, Aunt Edna was a wonderful baker. When I got to...after I graduated and got to Coronado, I went through two weeks of training and then went to my ship, and when I got on the ship, there was a package from Aunt Edna of cookies. And I gave it to a few sailors, and they were terrific. And wherever I would go in the Pacific, there would be a box of cookies, and the sailors started asking "Did Aunt Edna send cookies?" And they started sending letters to Aunt Edna, thanking her for the cookies. So Aunt Edna went nuts, and the more letters, the more cookies! And so she became the hero of the *LST 902*. So that's a story...I'm...I'm married, I have three kids, I have two sons, one daughter. I have five grandchildren who are absolutely dynamite. And I'm...I can't believe I'm 84. I absolutely am appalled. I didn't think I'd get out of Korea in my 20s, and so I guess it proves only the good die young, so I'm around, and I'm ticking and making noise, and that's my story.

Howe: Do you have any siblings?

Kohn: I have one brother, who...he is a lawyer and he was in the Air Force as a legal officer in the late '50s, so...we...I've got...during World War II, I had two cousins, one who was wounded at D-Day and the other who was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge, and a very good family friend who was killed on Okinawa. So I figure our family has...we served, and we're proud of our service.

Howe: Because of that history within your family, did you feel an obligation to serve?

Kohn: I felt an obligation to serve, more so than with the family, after what I heard...what Hitler did in Europe, and the rest, I...just, this country is magical. I...I've had every

opportunity, and in my life, I can look back. There have been, yeah, a few instances, but nothing serious, and the instances of anti-Semitism have been by morons that I discounted, and this country allows me to be me. And so, the serving is something that is just mandatory. I think we...we have to do it.

Howe: For...one last question about early years. I'm curious, what was it like growing up in Chicago during the '30s and '40s?

Kohn: It was...the war dominated everything. We...I remember the ration tickets for gasoline. My father had a C-card, and meat was rationed, and there were scrap drives, and every night we'd sit down and have down dinner, but the radio would be on, and we'd hear the news of the Pacific and the news of Europe, and we'd talk about our relatives who were over there, and offer a prayer that they're gonna get through, and it was just...it was like...I think today we're a nation of strangers. And there was just...you'd walk down the street and you would look at windows and you'd see the banner with a blue star, meaning he's on active duty, or the horrible gold star, which meant that he'd been killed in action. And it was like...absolutely like one nation, all striving together. It was a feeling...and of course, the tragedy of the deaths, but the feeling that we were in it together as a unit, and now we're a bunch of strangers. And we...people, they have their electronic devices, making sure that we stay strangers. And, nobody greets one another, there is no, "Hello, how are you?" You know? And...I'm retired, I was in sales and marketing and I...I think the thing I noticed most when I started out years and years ago, people were friendly, they'd tell jokes, and my God, everyone's afraid to tell a joke...that they'll offend somebody, or some inadvertently offend an ethnic group or...obviously I hated the war, but it was a unique experience, feeling the nation marching together as one.

Howe: Understood.

Kohn: So...one other thing, of course, this business...you'd leave your windows open, you'd...I mean, there was a...and if there were problems, you'd settle it with a fistfight, not with guns. And the thing that bothers me most is every Monday morning I look at the casualty list in Chicago, and I'm appalled...how many killed, how many wounded. It's...it's...I don't understand what's going on with that at all. And it's a war zone on the South and West Side.

Howe: Greater sense of community during that time.

Kohn: Oh, absolutely.

Howe: Yeah. So you said that you transferred and went to University of Michigan?



Kohn: For one reason: I had a high school English teacher, Ms. Remy, who absolutely was wonderful. And, she kept talking about Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, and I...Illinois was a wonderful school, but I...it never left me, because of Ms. Remy. And Ann Arbor is a beautiful town, it's an arbor town, and all types of trees. I graduated and I've stayed friendly with four couples over the years, and we get together twice a year. It...and there's still a soft spot, I...the only thing that's gone insane is the football weekends, and football and college has been prostituted, now it's insane. But the school itself is a wonderful school, and all big ten schools. You can throw darts at any big ten school and I think you can come with...in fact, I think that education today is a good education, depends on how badly a student wants it, because it's there wherever. They say the leaders of the world go to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, and that's true for one reason: because the sons and daughters of the leaders of the world go to Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. And, so...

Howe: Was...what'd you study while you were in Michigan?

Kohn: Economics.

Howe: Okay.

Kohn: And I...I really had thought I would go to law school, and when I came back I looked at the law and decided I don't want it, it's not for me. It's just...looking at what happened 500 years ago, and precedents and all that stuff, I didn't want it. And I never regretted the decision. My father was a lawyer, my brother's a lawyer. I have two sons...a son and a daughter who are lawyers. And, I...I never missed it, and I do not...you know, I looked back and, you know. I'm me!! I did what I was capable of doing, and I think you have to live in the now, and as long as I'm busy. And, I...I'm a tutor, I'm an avid reader, and I work at adult literacy, and it's kinda fun working with immigrants who want to learn the language. So I enjoy that very much, and I enjoy going up to Great Lakes once a week.

Howe: Did you work while you were going to school?

Kohn: Yeah. Not full time, but I worked. Course, you talk about a different world. Let me tell you what the tuition was at the University of Michigan, as an out-of-state student. It was outrageous, it was \$250 a semester. [Laughs]. Compared to...the University of Illinois was \$50 a semester for an in-state student. So...and that's one of the horrible problems, society today, the cost of education is obscene. I am an avid reader and I...I got involved in some lectures at Oakton College, which I enjoy based on...the rest. I got to know a little bit about the community college system, and people don't realize that they're wonderful educational institutions, and they're affordable.

Howe: People want big names.

Kohn: People are...you know, as far as an education, I'm absolutely...I look at Galesburg, I learned how to study at Galesburg. And I got one other story about Galesburg that I think is kinda neat. I...after I left, I...I got sales and marketing, and I...I didn't get back to Galesburg for, God, decades. And I got back there and I figured I was back there, I was a furniture rep, and I figured I'm gonna go back and see the old campus. So I go back and see a big sign that says state research hospital. They turned it into a loony bin, and this one-story hospital. So I walk in and there's some 18-year-old nurse, and I said, "I used to go to college here," she said, "Yeah, a lot of our patients come back." I said, "Hey, wait a minute! This used to be a veteran's branch a long time ago, with the University of Illinois!" And she looked at me and she said, "Some patients even bring their families back." So I realized: you can't go home again. [Laughs].

Howe: She was going along with it. [Both laugh]. So, were you at all involved with the military while you were going to the University of Michigan?

Kohn: Oh no, I decided that there's never gonna be another war, you know. World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars, well World War II was...impossible to have another war. So...

Howe: So it wasn't until after you graduated?

Kohn: Well, when Korea started and I graduated...I looked at what was going on in Korea, and although I wanted to serve, that was a meat grinder. They killed more in Korea than they did each year in Vietnam. There were 40,000 in three years, in Vietnam there were 58,000 in a lot more years, but the tragedy of Korea was, those talks started at Panmunjom in '51, and what could have ended in '51 at the same place -- because in '53, it ended at the same place that they were discussing in '51 -- that was the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. It was a meat grinder.

Howe: Do you mind describing your recruiting experience?

Kohn: Yeah, I went up to the Office...the naval office of procurement at Rush Street, and I met Commander Rye, and I met a whole bunch of wonderful people. And I got a big mouth, and I did magnificently in the interviews. And I gotta tell you what happened...and I, here I have honors in economics from the University of Michigan, and at that time, the OCS, the passing score was 65...I looked, and then I took the written test. The first part was vocabulary that was fine. The second part was math and some other things I didn't have a problem with. The third part, I almost had a heart attack, it was spatial relations, you had to match these shapes. And I guessed at every one. And I flunked that so flat,

that...and I get out, and they tell me, in shock, that I got a 51. I went home, my father looks at me, he said, "This is the college graduate? Passing goal is 65, you got 51?" So a month later, I get a telegram from the Navy, they've lowered the passing score to 60. My father says, "Take the test again!" I said, "Hell no, I won't get a 51." And the draft board is starting to tell me that it's getting close. Another month later, I get a wire from the Navy, the passing score is 55. My father says, "Take the test!" I said, "Absolutely not!" And I'm just about to be drafted and I get a wire from the Navy that the passing score is 50, and I have an appointment to Officers Candidate School at Newport, Rhode Island. By the time I got out, the passing score was 40. So I went from a 14-point idiot to an 11-point genius. [Laughs].

Howe: All you gotta do is wait it out.

Kohn: [Laughs]. So, anyhow...

Howe: So, what made you decide to go officer, as opposed to possibly enlisting?

Kohn: I decided...I was always a reader, and, I'd read Heggen's *Mister Roberts*, and I...I read *Caine Mutiny*, and I just absolutely got enamored with Navy blue and gold. And I...it's funny, I read *Caine Mutiny* before I went into the service and then I read it again after I got out to the fleet, and it influenced me because when I led that wave ashore, I remembered, in *Caine Mutiny*, Captain Queeg and his destroyer minesweeper left a dye-marker way before he should've, and they called him, 'Old Yellow Stain.' And I remember, at Kojo beach going in, and the coxswain is screaming at me, "Mister Kohn, we're going to get too close! Too close, too close!" And I almost beached the LCVP because I was going to make damn sure that I wasn't gonna be 'old yellow stain,' so...then I found...I found out that Wouk, who wrote that book, he had to be in the Navy. And he was on a destroyer-minesweeper during World War II, so he knew what...what he was writing about. And he also went through OCS, and it was a vivid description of OCS...so, yeah. I...I felt like Don Winslow [NY Times best-selling author], I tell ya, of the Navy.

Howe: So, reading about these experiences and having that in your mind...

Kohn: Yeah?

Howe: You knew this was an experience you wanted?

Kohn: Absolutely.

Howe: How long was training up in Rhode Island?

Kohn: It was sixteen weeks.

Howe: Okay. You talked...

Kohn: I...I, as a matter of fact, I came up here...the reason I came up here in the first place, I thought...I got a yearbook from OCS, and they did a marvelous job, and it shows you...really, the pictures are fantastic, showing what life at Newport and OCS...and so I left the book here. And that's when they said, "Would you like to do the oral history?" So...

Howe: You talked about culture shock, going to OCS.

Kohn: Well, basically, it was the shock of...I thought it'd be physical, you know, and I was in pretty good shape, and then, this idea...eight tests a day, you know. I went to University of Michigan, I did very well; I took wonderful notes at lectures. But here, there were no lectures, you studied the night before, then you were tested, and then they lectured you on what you were tested about. And it was a nightmare, each day. I mean, you get through another day, after eight tests, and then at the end of the week, if you're on a tree...there was one tree that I made, that was...this was obviously before computers, and they had what they called a 'maneuvering board.' The maneuvering board was a little template, where ships would steam in company, like the...an aircraft carrier and the plane guard destroyers and the rest. So, when the course change was made, you used the maneuvering board to find out your ships course and speed, to your...so you get back in the same relative position. I got on a weekly tree with the maneuvering board, and that's Saturday or Sunday, there was exercise off Newport where an aircraft carrier changed course at night, and the destroyer-minesweeper Hopson made the wrong course move, and was cut in half...and was cut in half, and more than half the sailors drowned. And it was a pretty good objective lesson, I better learn that stinking maneuvering board. And it...I think 2/3 of them drowned. Just, the carrier...they were a darkened ship, they made a course change, and it was the wrong course for the coxswain, and it was cut in half and it went down like a stone, right off Newport. So, I learned this is not just an academic exercise. But the shock of eight tests a day, and I was just thinking, my God, if I studied like that at Michigan...you know, it's pretty relaxed, you get a lecture, you take notes, and then you review your notes before the test, here, and these were not snap courses. So that was the shock. There was another interesting thing that I think...I think you have the book, because it was a different time. Out of the 500 and whatever graduates, there is not one black face. It's lily white, it's all white bread. And when I got on the ship in early '52, there were two blacks, and they were stewards-mates. So...in the Navy, I think, was the last in terms of changing and yet, the Navy today, the first four-star black female Admiral is in the Navy. There is no other

female four-star general, or anything of that character, so the Navy's caught up. The country's caught up, we got a black man who's superior to any admiral or general, he's the President. We're catching up.

Howe: Your time at Newport, was this the first time that you'd been away from home for so long?

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: How...how did that work? How was...

Kohn: I was fine with that. I...and you're so damn busy, that...you know, the...and they were all college kids, and you never stopped for a minute, so...you know, you didn't have time to sit and reflect, and I...in Newport, you were not...we had liberty from noon Sunday to seven o'clock Monday, if you didn't have the weekend duty, or seven o'clock Sunday night. Noon Saturday to seven o'clock Sunday night. So you were busier than hell. And the training, it was intense. The thing I remember most is the USS *Buttercup*. That was the ship that -- for damage control -- when they'd flood it, and you'd use mattresses and two-by-fours, so [laughs]...

Howe: This was a damage control exercise?

Kohn: Yeah. And it...I thought that, obviously a lot of it leaked out, but I thought the training was very good. And I...and Rogerson, the training I got when I got on that ship. We...we had 20 and 40 millimeter guns. So...and, you know, here I am the [redacted] [54:57.6], and I got to be gunnery officer. He put me as loader on the 20 and a loader on the 40, you did everything. And it...so the training, the constant training in the Navy. So it becomes second nature, you don't think, you just do.

Howe: I held a similar position as a junior officer on board ships, so if I can, I'd like to talk more about that. Just 'cause...similar experiences.

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: You received orders for *LST 902*.

Kohn: Originally, I received orders to USS *Talladega* transport, but the needs were so great that we all got modified to LSTs because there were no ports in Korea. And most of the men in the tanks and everything else moved from Japan to...to Korea by LST.

Howe: When did you receive those orders? What year?

Kohn: Well, I graduated in May of '52. And I got my orders for the *Talladega*. Then I got home, and they were modified to the 902, and then the Naval amphibious base was in Coronado, and you had two weeks of training at Coronado. And then I reported aboard. The ship had been commissioned in '44, and LSTs...it was interesting, they were built in inland ports...because they had a flat bottom, they didn't draw much water, they could float 'em down rivers to the ocean. And they were built...a lot of 'em were built in a...seventy-five miles from Chicago, in a little town called Seneca, Illinois on the Illinois River. My ship was built at the Dravo Shipyard in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and they built them at Evansville, and...and they built, I think, 1,500 LSTs during World War II.

Howe: So, when you go to Coronado...what did you learn while you were on Coronado?

Kohn: It was classroom...nothing. It was...basically, we partied. I'll be perfectly honest. Then we got on ship, and we...then we went through intensive training. And a lot of beaching activity, where you beach...and learn how to beach, and learn all the different jobs, where you drop the stern anchor, theoretically, a thousand yards, no...I don't know how many yards from the beach. But there was a...you line up the beach, the forward gun tub, and the rail of the con, and you drop it perfectly. And then when you got off the beach, you're winching the stern anchor, and you get underway. And it...we did a lot of beaching and retracting, because there were no ports in Korea, and...so...

Howe: So this part of your training, first couple of weeks while you're on board with the 902 **[landing craft tank]?**

Kohn: With the 902. Basically, it was all...it was a beaching exercise, because that's the mission of the ship. The only part that I didn't like...I got on board the ship, and because the ship's mission is to land on an enemy beachhead, it's...you were an expendable ship. And an expendable ship meant that you never got the latest equipment, and so we had a fire control system that was built for World War II, and was terrific with propeller-driven planes, but the Communists had MIGs in Korea, so when a MIG would come around, we could make a lot of noise, but we [laughs] wouldn't do a damn thing. But the thing was unbelievable. The design was such...it was underpowered, but we carried enough fuel to go one and a half times around the world at standard speed without refueling, so that was an advantage.

Howe: That's unique.

Kohn: Yes. And I think D-Day was delayed because there was a shortage of LSTs, and there's a quote from Winston Churchill that the whole future of the world is being delayed by some goddamn thing called an LST [laughs]. He wasn't too happy.

Howe: Gotta be able to get people there.

Kohn: Right!

Howe: So what was your first job after reporting on board?

Kohn: I...I was Stores Officer, where I'm a line officer with line duties, and then they give me this thing that looks like the Manhattan phonebook, where I've gotta learn about food storage and cooking and all types of things of that character. Well, the chief saved my ass, but my main duties were -- I had a lot of reports, as stores officer -- but my main duties were line officer duties, to stand top watches, and and my general quarter station was, after starting in the guts of the ship in case the hydraulic steering went out -- so I was in charge of the after-steering -- the manual steering. And we were in a typhoon after the Korean War, and the terror of -- the worst part of that typhoon, it was god-awful and we couldn't outrun it 'cause we didn't have the speed -- was keeping the wind a couple points off the bow, because if we ever allowed that wind to hit us...we're a floating boxcar, if it ever hit us broadside, that's...be like the Poseidon, and we... we survived the typhoon a lot better than I thought we would. That was just a terrible, terrible time, and everything got carried...the mast, the radar, the gyro-tumble, it was a very interesting experience. So...

Howe: I bet, on a flat bottomed ship, those don't take it too well!

Kohn: Oh God, no! But she held together, and those Military Sea Transport Service was a big effort during the Korean War, and during that typhoon, an LST that was given the MSTs?? went down, and the headlines and the paper in Chicago were: 'Navy LST sinks in Typhoon,' so my parents went nuts! They knew that I was on an LST, course communications...you know, there was no phone, there was no skype. There...it...in those days, we did something absolutely unique, we wrote letters! You know, there was no email, there was [laughs] none of that, so it took a while for them to find out I was not on that LST.

Howe: How often would you get mail call?

Kohn: Because we're an LST, it depends on where we were. We would go a couple months without getting mail. And then we'd go back to port and a big deluge would come in, so...

Howe: While you're...I'm kind of skipping around. While you're deployed, you go to the South China Sea, to be in an operational mode?

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: You say, 'coming back into port,' you're not coming all the way back to San Diego, do you stop somewhere mid-way?

Kohn: When we came from the Pacific, we would always -- from Yokosuka or wherever we'd be -- we always...we crossed the Pacific. We made three trips across. And we would always stop at Pearl [Harbour], and once we stopped at Midway on the way over. But basically, it was, we'd go to...from Yokosuka to Pearl, and then from Pearl to San Diego.

Howe: So Yokosuka was your...was kind of your base of operations?

Kohn: That was...Yokosuka was, that was the headquarters of the Japanese navy during World War II. And it was a huge naval facility. And, later on, I found out it was the school for kamikaze pilots, in Yokosuka...so it was a huge facility, and we just took it over at the end of World War II. One thing that shocked me when I got over there was it had been...I got there in '52, which was seven years after World War II ended, but the thing that surprised me was never...was there, I never heard an anti-American attitude, and we leveled Japan. I mean, we just bombed 'em back into the Stone Age. Besides the atomic attacks, we leveled with firebombs, we leveled Tokyo, we leveled everything. And in my reading and my conversation, they ended up blaming their leaders; they did not blame the Americans. And, course...and they hated their leaders, and they felt that they'd destroyed the country. Plus, MacArthur did...I couldn't stand MacArthur for what he was, but he brilliantly led Japan back from World War II. And there was no Marshall Plan for Japan, there was a Marshall Plan for Europe. And the only thing resurrected Japan was they became our job shop during the Korean War, and we let...and that's when the Japanese factories really got humming, was during the Korean War, because we had no Marshall Plan at all for the Orient.

Howe: That's the first time I've heard that, it's interesting.

Kohn: Yeah, it is interesting. And, as bad as MacArthur was, and what he pulled in Korea I can never forgive him for, because when they asked him...when he went north on his 'Home by Christmas' drive, they asked him -- he never spent a night in Korea, he was in Japan -- and they ask him, "How many Chinese volunteers are in North Korea?" He said, "30,000." There were 300,000 North Koreans waiting for us to...and they got slaughtered, and wiped out. And he wanted to go into China, and when he did that...I think he's a -- pardon me -- he's a war criminal. He absolutely...that thousands of our kids got butchered because he said there were 30,000 volunteers, there were 300,000. And that North Korean army, or Chinese army, was a blooded army. They knew what they were doing. They just had whipped the Chinese nationalists, and it was...and that



Chesty Puller, who led those Marines from the Yalu to the Chosin Reservoir, they fought through hell, and how in the hell they ever got through I don't know, but they did.

Howe: They're Marines.

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: Talking about your experiences as a division officer...I guess this is one kind of encompassing question. You said that you faced a lot of challenges. What challenges did you face in the first six months, and how did you eventually overcome those?

Kohn: The biggest challenge, as far as I was concerned, was...all the sudden, this smartass kid from the University of Michigan is the division officer in charge of people who had five, ten, fifteen, twenty years in the Navy, who had been through World War II. And I got ahold of my Chief, and I said, "You and I have to act as a team. I need your help, and I need your suggestions. You work with me; I'm going to work with you." And I worked, basically, through my chief, when I first reported aboard, and he was a World War II veteran. I had just...and I qualified to stand top watches from between San Diego and Yokosuka.

Howe: What are top watches?

Kohn: Officer of the deck underway.

Howe: Okay.

Kohn: So -- and I remember my last drill, the 'man-overboard' drill -- and we were so well trained that I can give you the Williamson turn now, where you put your helm over 70 degrees, go back the reciprocal of the course you were on, and -- same time -- throw the life ring in, and have somebody watch, and you'll come down, supposedly, the same track, because you do it over and over and over again. And the general quarters station, and the everything, because of the constant repetition. And we trained and we trained and we trained, and it was like a machine.

Howe: So, we had Breckenridge kiss-and-cross. They wanted us to try and do that little fancy maneuver.

Kohn: Oh yeah.

Howe: You go all the way around in a circle...

Kohn: Oh yeah? We did the Williamson turn. And on an LST, it's 70 degrees off your base course, and then come down the reciprocal. And I guess the Williamson turn, they

compute it for each type ship...for a destroyer, for a whatever. And ours was 70 degrees, and it worked out pretty damn well.

Howe: Hmm. Basically, making a huge U-turn.

Kohn: Yeah, that's it.

Howe: Was that common, to get along so well with your chief?

Kohn: Well, I was only on one ship. I cannot give you...every chief I had was good. The only problem I ever had...I worshipped the ground that Swede Rogerson walked on. He was a reserve, who, after World...after the Korean War, they gave him a chance to go USN, which he did. And they sent him to War College and then he went to destroyers, and he became a rear admiral. And he, unfortunately, retired, and went, you know. A rear admiral, retired in San Diego, is like a potentate, he's like a god. He got sick and he went to the Naval Hospital and ended up getting a staph infection and dying. Oh my God. And I went to his funeral, and it...just a wonderful guy. But, as much as I worshipped him, after the change of command, we got an Annapolis man who had never heard a shot fired in anger, and who was on an aircraft carrier. And he came aboard to square away the dungaree Navy, and...we never missed an operation. Our ship was absolutely an example of what a good ship should be. And he came on board and said he's gonna square us away, and no more of this dungaree Navy. And then I got to be his exec, and his first words to me were, "I'd hoped to have a regular Navy exec." That's all I had to hear. And...

Howe: What did he mean by that?

Kohn: That I was a reserve, I was some amateur! And he wanted a regular Navy exec. So he's looking at this amateur who'd been in the Korean War, who had fitness reports that were very good, who liked what he was doing. And I had a year of that. With that individual. It was the only problem I ever had. I never had a problem with anyone else on the ship, and I never had a problem with the chief. And it was a cooperative venture. We cared about that ship, and we cared about each other.

Howe: You said the officer's wardroom had about six to eight officers?

Kohn: Six officers.

Howe: How'd you get along with them?

Kohn: Fine. And we were always short-handed because one guy was being transferred. And so that meant you had a night watch every night. And we were constantly in motion, and

we...after Korea, we were in Vietnam, and then we worked with the Japanese self-defense force, which was very interesting because we're supposed to train these Japanese naval officers. And I remember being in the chart room, and I'm showing 'em you how get a course in speed. He takes the parallel \_\_\_\_\_ [5:41.8] and [Kohn makes a noise that represents the trainee's action] like, he didn't walk 'em across the chart, he ran 'em across the chart, and I'm looking, and...oh [makes sounds of Japanese language]. And I said, "My God, you must've been in the Japanese navy during World War II, he says, "Oh yeah, I swim three times because of you!" [Laughs]. He had three ships shot out from under him. So it...it was interesting. And Japan, compared to any other port, it just...it was like almost like coming back home, because it was clean, kids were going to school. And you go to Korea...Korea, of course, the country was destroyed. Armies went down the first time, up and down again. And it was absolutely destroyed. And the stench...I told...you know, you didn't have to navigate your way in, you could smell your way in. And Japan was an unbelievable country. The...they have half our population in a land space you could put into California, and have land left over, and they almost ruled the Pacific, it's amazing when you look at that little...and they have no raw materials, they import everything. Half the land is mountainous, where they've gotta have terrace farming and terrace living, and I got a proper respect for Japan.

Howe: What other jobs did you have while you were aboard?

Kohn: Stores, deck and gunnery, operations and communication, and then exec. And the only jobs I didn't have were skipper and engineering officer.

Howe: Were you at all qualified in the engineering plant?

Kohn: No. I...engineering was something that...those diesel engines were something that I had no desire to ever get involved in.

Howe: And that wasn't required?

Kohn: No.

Howe: Okay. So, you also said you were qualified as a top watch officer, an officer of the deck.

Kohn: Right.

Howe: What was that experience like? What was the process?

Kohn: The process was constant training. The...the rules of the road, the man overboard, the general quarters, the constant...and the ship handling, and the going-alongside, the beaching was a big deal. And because it was such an underpowered ship -- it was a

floating boxcar -- it was a very difficult ship to maneuver. So the getting underway, the casting off, the coming alongside, and then, of course, during the Korean War, we, for a while, carried the flag of the flotilla commander for the LSTs, and the commodore was reliving his days of World War II, and we would steam a darkened ship, fifty feet in front of us was another LST, a darkened ship, and we couldn't use radar, and there was little blue light, and we had to maintain a fifty foot, a darkened ship, and we had a sailor up in the forward gun tub, and up two turns and down two turns, and oh my God. [Laughs].

Howe: You had someone on the bow of the ship with a sound-powered phone?

Kohn: Yeah, that was it. And down two turns, and up two turns, and this is a lumbering cow that you're counting, this is not a ship. It's...it's this flat-bottomed thing that wallows. You blow on the side and it heels over twenty degrees.

Howe: What's her max speed?

Kohn: Supposedly eleven knots, which we never made. With a following sea, I think we once did ten knots...and you cross the Pacific, and you feel like Christopher Columbus.

Howe: That is...no offense, that's slow.

Kohn: We carried a...after the Korean War, we were back, we carried a Marine Corps flying group from Coronado to Hawaii. I thought, "These guys are gonna go nuts, they have to..." It was two weeks from San Diego to [laughs] Pearl Harbor. So...

Howe: All their gear's locked down, chained down, they can't go anywhere.

Kohn: No.

Howe: They're stuck for two weeks.

Kohn: Well, plus the fact, on that ship we had an eight second port, or ten, or whatever from port to upright, starboard to upright, you know...and it was because we had no keel, you know, and you got a flat bottom.

Howe: Every light wave...

Kohn: But that's the bad news. The good news was, you moved up and you did the same things they did. You know, swung the same sets that they did on a carrier, and I was a GIG [a boat used on naval ships as the captain's taxi?, 11:44.3], so...and I had third class doing absolutely officer work on that ship. And so...

Howe: How many people on a bridge team?

Kohn: The helmsman, the engine-order, the telegraph, the messenger...I don't know, there were about a half-a-dozen, so...

Howe: Any radar equipment?

Kohn: Yeah, the S01 radar, the first radar ever installed in World War II. And they kept that thing going a lot more than I ever thought they would.

Howe: So, you've got the pilot house, or bridge...

Kohn: The con [tower of a ship] was really open, there was...it was an open con. It was unheated, and I want to tell you, it got cold, and real...they had winters that were unbelievable.

Howe: The con was separate from the bridge house?

Kohn: The con is on top of the bridge...on top of the wheelhouse. And you're up there and you got a tube, giving commands, and it's an open...we had a canvas, and then they finally put some windows in, and a roof on top of it, but there was no heating up there. It was colder than hell, and hotter than hell in summer.

Howe: So, about eleven years ago when I'm standing bridge watches, there were at least two officers always on watch. If the navigator wasn't present, or if there wasn't somebody from combat systems on radar, there was a conning officer who was giving orders directly to the helmsman.

Kohn: That's what we did. Through a voice tube.

Howe: And then there was an officer of the deck, who was overall responsible, in charge of the whole team.

Kohn: No. You're at the? \_\_\_\_\_ [13:24.2], the officer of the deck's in charge, 'cause there were six officers, and we were always short...most of the time we were short a watch officer, so it was one in three, really. And when you were at sea, you're either the eight to twelve, the mid-watch, or the four to eight every night.

Howe: So, outside of standing watches, do you have other responsibilities once you're done?

Kohn: Oh yeah, your division responsibility, whatever your division was. So...and, during the Korean War, of course, when you were at general quarters you'd stay there. And it...and there were floating mines, and there were all kinds of things we had to worry about. And it...but again, it was...everybody did his job, mean there was no slacking off. [pause]

Howe: It sounds like such a pithy question, but I'm just curious...what'd it feel like to be out at sea?

Kohn: At times, it was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. On a quiet morning, when you see sunrise on that water, it's magnificent, or sunset. And in a typhoon, it was a living hell. So it was a whole range of different feelings. You get the beauty and the horror of the sea. I remember on the typhoon, there was a Japanese fishing boat that was a pretty big boat, and they were waving and we were...their...their flags or whatever, their...they wanted help, and there was no way in hell that we could lower our boat, and we couldn't maneuver, and we watched them go down, it was just...it was God-awful, there was nothing we could do. If we lowered our boat, we would have killed our sailors.

Howe: So you had smaller boats on board that you could...

Kohn: Two LCVPs -- the landing crafts, those things with the bow -- which you see in the newsreels, where the...they used for landings. We had two.

Howe: Would you -- aside from the landings -- would you use those out at sea at all?

Kohn: No, never out at sea. We used them in port, and if we had 'em, were out in the stream, they were our liberty boats.

Howe: Okay. What was the longest stretch of time you and your crew were out to sea?

Kohn: We would be...a month. We would be out a month. I think, in Indochina, we would drop off, but they never let us ashore. The stinking French would...didn't want us mingling, and so we went for two months without getting liberty. And we finally got liberty in Saigon. And we'd load up in Hai Phong, and the French...either to Da Nang or to Saigon and offload. Under the terms of the Geneva Accord, the people from the North who wanted to go south could go, and that people from the South who wanted to live under Ho Chi Minh, could go north. So we'd offload and then load up with civilians in Saigon who wanted to go north to live under Ho Chi Minh. There was one interesting part of that whole thing that I don't think America knows. During World War II, Indochina was...the French had been conquered by the Germans, so Indochina was a French colony which was allied with Germany and Japan, and the French did business with the Germans and the Japanese in Indochina during World War II. Ho Chi Minh was a guerrilla fighter, and he made a connection with our...the OSS office in Kunming, China, and when American flyers were downed in Indochina, he smuggled them back to the OSS, and their...a relationship developed between our OSS and Ho Chi Minh, and when he declared independence in 1946, he wanted the French out of Indochina. Our OSS was there at his ceremony in Hanoi, and there was a flyover of our American planes

supporting him, because he was our ally in World War II. And he made...he spoke five languages. I got involved in reading about him. And his declaration of independence was based on ours. And it's a document that you can find on the Internet that I think is interesting.

Howe: Hmm.

Kohn: So, anyhow...

Howe: Interesting, the ways of the world. So, what other ports...you said you spent some time in Pearl, in Yokosuka. What're the other ports?

Kohn: Well, we went all over Japan. We went to Hokkaido, we went to Kyushu, we were in Hong Kong, we went the Philippines, we're in Indochina, and we hit all kinds of these rocks like Midway, other islands. We had work with the Japanese Self-Defense Force, we...with the Foreign Legion...it was very interesting. Because when we pulled them out, they'd been clobbered at a fort called Dien Bien Phu. And it was very interesting, because the officers were French, and they were graduates of Saint-Cyr, their West Point. The enlisted men were German army veterans who couldn't get a job in Germany after World War II. And the enlisted men were Africans, that they recruited in Africa to join the Foreign Legion. It went from French, to German, to Swahili, or whatever. And these...these guys fought the Vietnamese for...the Vietnamese started fighting the French in '46, and they fought 'em 'til '54. Then there were supposed to be free elections, which there weren't, and the second Vietnam War went on from '56 to '75. And that little third world country kicked out France the superpower, and then they took on the world's greatest superpower and kicked our butt out, so it's interesting. And now they're our buddy, our trading partner. And we don't spend a nickel on their defense. Korea, where we didn't lose the war, is costing us a bloody fortune. We got how many thousands of our guys there, and it's a tripwire. So...

Howe: How did you guys find out that you were being sent to Indochina to help out the French Foreign Legion?

Kohn: The Korean War ended in '53, and then we came back to the States, and we went back to Japan and worked with the Japanese Self-Defense Force, and then we got crazy orders. Evidently, they were considering invading at that time, to save the French. And later on I read that Nixon and a whole bunch of people wanted Eisenhower to go in to save the French, who were being clobbered in Indochina, and Eisenhower said no. But we kept getting charts and stuff like that, and we knew that we were gonna go down there. I was scared to death that we were gonna go to war there. Which...one war's enough. [Laughs]. I don't need any more than one. So...but...and then, after we got

charts and everything else, then we were ordered...and the amphiporous? was ordered down there. And I didn't understand why until I read...Neil Sheehan wrote a book called *A Bright Shining Lie*, and it won the Pulitzer Prize. And in Neil Sheehan's book, he said that a spook named Lansdale had engineered...defeated the Communists in the Philippines, the Huks [Hukbalaop, Philippine resistance against Japan], and he decided -- this spook in the CIA -- that he's gonna put in an anticommunist premier in South Vietnam, but he needed to take a Catholic presence from the North and bring it down south to support Diem, who was a Catholic. So he engineered this whole thing, and I didn't know a thing about it 'til twenty years later...I read this book of moving a Catholic presence from North Vietnam to the South to support Diem, because Vietnam was a Buddhist country. So I think they got -- aside from the Foreign Legion we pulled out -- they pulled out 800,000 Catholics from the North to the South, to support Diem. And this was all this Lansdale's idea. And then, the Vietnamese ended up...the military didn't like Diem, so three weeks before Kennedy was shot, they assassinated Diem. And so, later I found out...and now you can go on the Internet -- and it's called Operation Passage to Freedom -- about this, Vietnamese evacuation of the French from the North to the South. And it's actually Passage to Freedom, it's...you should, pardon the expression, boloney, and I could use stronger words. It was a CIA plot to get the Catholics down South, and to prop up this Diem. And then, good God, they had Thiệu and they had Kỳ, and they had all these puppets down there. And eventually, it all...and of course, that was the time of the domino theory. If South Vietnam goes communist, all of Southeast Asia, Australia and Japan...well, South Vietnam went all communist, and guess what? Nothing happened. So that wonderful domino theory was like...and the thing that got us into Vietnam was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Do you know what that was? The Gulf of Tonkin...America just...Navy forces were operating with the South Vietnamese, off Tonkin Gulf, and they said that two destroyers, Maddox and Turner Joy, were attacked by the North Vietnamese navy. The only problem was, the North Vietnamese didn't have a navy. They had a couple of motorboats with machine guns. There was not one casualty or one bullet hole on either Maddox or Turner Joy. And that was the blank check that got us into Vietnam. And that was about as valid as the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Howe: At the time, what did you know about the operation? Where you were going, who were you picking up?

Kohn: We were ordered to go to Hai Phong to pick up Foreign Legionnaires and move them to either Da Nang or Saigon.

Howe: How long was that trip?



Kohn: The trip...we had this wait. And the French wouldn't let us ashore, and it was hotter than hell. We had to wait a week...two weeks, and we'd sit there and absolutely die in that heat. And then we'd load up and go to Da Nang...was a couple days, Saigon was...I don't know, couple...couple more. And going up that Saigon River that was a terrible trip. Long, winding river. And when we finally got liberty in Saigon, it was magnificent. The French -- this is before it was destroyed -- the French had built this...they built it on a circle, like Paris, with magnificent hotels and broad boulevards. It was a magnificent city.

Howe: So you got a chance to go visit?

Kohn: We...yeah, we had liberty in Saigon, finally. And, it was a lovely city, and that was before the war. But two years later there was supposed to be free elections, which there never were.

Howe: So, what do you remember about liberty in foreign ports?

Kohn: Liberty in foreign ports was...Japan was the most interesting, because there were a lot of places to see and temples to visit, and the rest. But in Korea, forget it. It was a devastated country. Hong Kong was interesting, but the other ports we hit, really...you know, Midway's a coral hunk. And you drink or that's it. And so, it...in the Philippines, we only got to Olongapo, which is not much of a city. We never got to Manila. And basically, we were always either...there were short visits, and there was an awful lot to do in port...to refurbish, and get supplies, get arms, and stuff like that. The best lib...the best, we had shipyard overhaul, and...Alameda, which is across the bay from San Francisco. And I have to use the john a minute, Commander.

Howe: Yeah, do you want to stop here?

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: Great, we'll come back and we'll talk about Alameda.

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: Gimme just one second. Oh oop...let me get the curtain, I'll come with you...it's only been a half-an-hour. My time went back to zero after the hour was over, so it looks to me like we've only been here for a half-an-hour. [Kohn laughs]. Here...with this, we had it right about there, here you go.

Kohn: Okay.

Howe: And turn this guy back on. All right.

Kohn: Shipyard period was very important to me for one reason: we had liberty every night, which made it nice, and I...I told you that our crew was terrific. And I...they had the GI Bill coming, and most of these kids did not come from a college environment. So I called up the University of California at Berkeley and I said, "I've got a terrific bunch of kids, they've gone through hell and I want to show them what a University is like, because they have a GI Bill. I want tickets for a football game, and I'd like an open house at a women's residence afterwards." So they said, "You gotta wear your uniform!" I said, "Fine, we'll wear our uniform!" So, it was a wonderful...football game, and then we go to a women's residence, and the sailors are here and the girls are here, and I saw a ukulele, and I knew one of the sailors played the ukulele...I grabbed it, slapped his gut, I said, "If you stop playing sing-along songs, you'll never get liberty again!" So, he started playing sing-along songs, and they got together, and these guys were perfect gentlemen. And they began dating these girls, and the end result was an awful lot of 'em took advantage of the GI Bill. I would get calls for years after that, when they'd come through Chicago. One guy would...he was an absolute menace ashore, but he was terrific on the ship, and he was from Tennessee. He ended up going to Ag school at the University of Tennessee, became one of the biggest livestock holders in the South. Another guy went to engineering school at the University of Missouri, became chief engineer at Bendix. And I can't tell you the success stories. The best work I did in the Navy was at the tab shipyards when I set up this football game and residence hall, and I'm so pleased that it worked out the way it did. So...

Howe: Nice.

Kohn: That was important, and, I was really considering going to law school. I applied for...at Berkeley, and was accepted, and then came back home and decided that I didn't want to be a lawyer.

Howe: Gotcha.

Kohn: But I did something. Illinois has a weird GI Bill. It didn't expire. And when I moved out to Buffalo Grove twelve years ago, I decided to retire. And I...I've always been a history buff, and I went up to UIC and said, "I want a Master's degree in history." He says, "What are you, nuts?" He says, "When did you go to school, fifty years ago?" I said, "I want to tell you something. I still read, I still have all my faculties. Don't tell me I can't go." "Well, you can't." I said, "Boloney." And so they accepted me as a graduate student without a major, but I could take two graduate history courses. And I want to tell ya...this was in 2003 or '04, I don't remember. And I took two graduate history courses, and I almost had a heart attack when I went up there. They gave you...there were seven texts, and they told me there was a research paper and another paper, and so I started

taking notes. Everyone's got their laptops, and I've got my three ring binder, and grandpa's taking notes! [Laughs]. And then I decided I'm just gonna take notes and do it. And...but I worked, I mean...I worked my butt off. And I ended up with an A- and a B+, but I was working seven days a week. So they called me in after I got my grades, and "My God, now you can take a full load!" [Laughs]. I said, "Thanks, but I think I'm gonna do a few other things. But I...I was pleased that I did it; grandpa and the teeny-boppers. And then I do a lot of...I do the volunteer work now, but it's...it was a fun experience, and...but the best experience was the tab shipyard thing. Where I feel I really did some good, so...so that's where I am, and..."

Howe: As a junior officer, you...you're supposed to get qualified at a job on the ship. You know, for us, we could get qualified in the engineering plant. We had a combat systems environment. There was a room, we could get qualified there. But we were all supposed to qualify on the bridge, plus we have all of our divisional duties, and we're supposed to stand watch. So how did you balance all these responsibilities?

Kohn: You just did it. Well...also, I went to different schools when, like...when we were in Pearl. I would go to school in Pearl Harbor, I went to some schools in San Diego, and...you just did what you could do, that was it. And there was a lot of work. I...as a junior officer on a small ship where you got six officers, the collateral duties are absolutely insane. And of course when I got to be exec, one of the collateral duties is 'lay religious leader'. Which, all of the sudden, I became the Catholic-Protestant-Jewish chaplain. And I made one horrendous mistake. On LST Division 14, there were six ships, each with six officers and 100 men. I'm the showcase Jew. But the stinking religious activities report for every religion took an hour. So, like an idiot, I send a dispatch to the bureau, saying that I'm the only Jewish officer on the ship. I don't want to submit that report. Some hungover idiot gets that thing, and dispatches me back: "It's noted you're the only Jewish officer in LST Division 14. You can now submit the report for all six ships." [Laughs]. So I finally got that squared away, but I find out you don't write to the bureau. At any rate, it was an experience that you can't really describe to people...unless people like you, who have a thorough understanding. They have no knowledge, it's foreign to them. And the only people you can really relate to and talk about it were...are people who've been there. And it...when I got back, you know they talk about this 'post-traumatic stress'. This is not something new. In World War I it was shell shock. In World War II it was battle fatigue. And now it's post-traumatic stress disorder. And it...any time you take a normal kid and send him into a killing field, he's going to come out damaged. And to me, the most amazing thing about the...the Viet...the Iraq and Afghanistan thing is when I was in that combat zone...it was worse on the ground, I know, but it was hell out there, and every day was a day in hell. And I read about these kids who went through two and three and

four and five deployments out there! It's unthinkable, absolute...and I've done a lot of reading about that, and these kids are so damaged, they can't be fixed. And maybe we'll learn that once the vital interests are threatened, you go to war, otherwise you stay the hell out.

Howe: Understood. What...in your time as a junior officer...I mean, you've got all these responsibilities. People's lives depend on you, and you're trying to do the best you can with everything. What's the craziest thing you saw while you were trying to get all this stuff done?

Kohn: The one thing that upset me most, that I'll never forget...we got a replacement for a gunnery petty officer. He was a first class gunner, and he was a good guy, and he was black. And we only had two blacks on the ship that were steward's mates. And we had a Seaman Duce, from South Carolina, who told the first class that he's not taking orders...taking orders from the nigger. So he comes to me, and I said fine. And we were in port in Yokosuka. And there was a Marine brig, and under a captain's mast, you can send them to the brig for six days. And the Marine brig was very efficient. They beat the hell out of him without leaving marks. So I called up the Marine brig and found out if they had room, and I made a reservation, and then we had the captain's mast. And he was obviously found guilty. And on his way off the ship, he looks at me and screams, and he said, "I knew all Jews are nigger-lovers!" And I looked at that...that was the most blatant, example of racism I ever saw in my life. And of course I never saw him again, because the Marines took care of him and then he was transferred. But as far as my trying, the craziest things that try to...you just did what you could do. And you were always tired, because you were always working, but you just had to do it. I think the neatest thing I ever did -- as stores officer -- we got back off the combat cruise, and we got back onto Yokosuka. And obviously, Christmas is not my holiday, but one of my duties is -- as stores officer -- to make a Christmas dinner. Well, I got ahold of that small boat, and I went to every ship in the bay, because LSTs at that time...the food service, you got frozen chicken, and that was it. And I begged, and I borrowed, and I stole, and I cajoled. And I put together a Christmas dinner that...hams and turkeys and yams and mashed potatoes. And I...then I went ashore and found a Japanese print shop who printed English, and I printed up a Christmas menu with a Christmas tree on it - was four color, and it...and that Christmas dinner was absolutely the best holiday dinner I ever had in my life! And everybody...these...everyone kinda...and they all took the menu and sent it home. And I still have the menu and I love it.

Howe: What effect did that have on morale?

Kohn: A lot. An awful lot. And we had a little Christmas tree in the...in the mess hall. And it...and just there was a spirit! And I got chocolate candy, and I got all kinds of candy, and I...it just...and I...I absolutely decided that that was going to be a meal they'd never forget. And we all...God! We sang Christmas carols, we did it up proud. And it was just...there was a feeling, and I think it all emanated from Rogerson, from the top down. So it was a good feeling.

Howe: Sorry about that.

Kohn: It's okay.

Howe: Still hopping around, but they're just coming to me. What was it like, having Marines on board? You said you pulled them out from...

Kohn: Well, we had Marines. There was quite a difference between Navy...between Army and Marines. The draft...had a bunch...got together bitter people who didn't want any part of Korea, and they were drafted. And the...they would come on board. We would get these Army troops and they were...they'd left the ship like...just was a cesspool when they left. And they were undisciplined. They drank, their officers left a lot to be desired. And we were constantly transporting troops from Japan to Korea. When we worked with Marines, it was a whole different attitude. They were a disciplined fighting force, and well-led. And a tremendous difference between a draftee Army. We had one interesting experience that I have had nightmares about ever since, and not...they're going away now, but we...when...towards...in '53 -- the armistice came in July -- and everybody knew that they were getting close at Panmunjom, and the hill campaign was going on at that time. Where they...we were absolutely...they were trying to adjust the lines, and the casualties were horrendous. They were killing 'em like flies. And we had picked up troops in Hokkaido, and we're bringing 'em near the lines, and we beach near the lines. And we didn't have tanks, we have trucks and Army people. And so we beached, and they didn't get off the ship, and they didn't start the truck engines. We call our captain, who was some reserve officer who didn't know his butt from a hole in the ground. He said, "There's nothing I can do. They're in mutiny." So the captain tells me to get the deck force, and ring the tank deck -- there was a catwalk all the way around -- and break out the small arms. And he gets on the bull horn and said, "What you're doing..." and all these Army troops were there, they also were drinking, and they're sitting in their trucks. And he said, "This is a mutiny, and this is wartime." And he said, "I'm gonna count down from ten, and if you're not starting off this ship by the time I get to one or zero, I'm gonna tell my deck officer to open fire." He gets on that bull horn, it's a hot day. And I am sweating, I mean, I absolutely...the sweat is pouring down. He counts down: ten...nine...then I think I'm gonna have a heart attack! He's gonna tell me

to tell my sailors to open fire, and we've got carbines and rifles and small arms, and we're all aiming at these trucks. He gets down to two, and the first truck engine starts, and they get off the ship. Then we secure from the beach, we get out to sea, and we're busy at sea detail. Finally, get out to sea, and I go up to the bridge, and say, "I want to ask you a question: suppose you got to zero, what would you have done?" He looks at me, says, "I don't know." [Laughs]. And I would wake up months after I got out of the Navy, and he'd count down to zero, he'd tell me to open fire. [Laughs]. And...I mean...and no one wants to be the last one killed in a war. And these were draftees who knew damn well they're going into the lines, and they didn't want to go into the lines. And it was like World War I, where you had...I don't know if you ever heard of this movie, *Pork Chop Hill*, but it's a pretty good portrayal of going up into the face of these machine guns and the rest. And...yeah, that was an experience I won't forget. But the difference between the draftee Army and the Marine Corps was night and day. The Marine Corps were a well-disciplined machine. The draftee Army, they were badly led, and especially toward the end, when you knew the end was right around the corner.

Howe: So you felt better about the Marines. How well did you guys get along, were they...?

Kohn: There was no problem, because we would only...they weren't based on...they weren't based on our ship. We were transporting them. So, and I always...it was a joy when they left the ship. It wasn't a cesspool. And the Army -- the draftee Army -- had bigtime discipline problems. Bigtime, in Korea.

Howe: How many troops could you load on board?

Kohn: It would vary depending on the equipment. But we had...there was so much space in this boxcar, and so many bunks that we could carry a couple hundred.

Howe: Depending on cargo and supplies?

Kohn: Yeah. So...

Howe: Gotcha. Do you ever...did you ever coordinate operations with either the Marines or the Army? Or was it just, "We're here, get off?"

Kohn: The only time there was ever coordination was in an invasion. Otherwise it was transport.

Howe: Okay. Can you describe the process that you'd go...go through for a foreign invasion?

Kohn: Well, you'd have an op order. Looks like a phonebook. And everything, supposedly, is gonna go like clockwork, and nothing goes like clockwork. It depends on wind and sea,

and I remember the shock of a pre-invasion bombardment. We...when we went into Kojo beach and I led that wave ashore, you had battleships...the whole idea was to put the troops ashore for a short time. And flush out the communist armies north of Wonsan. And then the aircraft carriers would come in and clobber 'em. But the pre-invasion bombardment was something that I could not believe. You had...we had the battleship aisle, we had cruisers, and you could...these sixteen-inch shells are like busses...whoosh, whoosh...and the concussion, you can feel when it hits the beach. And you can feel that, out...2,000 yards out at sea. And you've got the aircraft bombing and dropping napalm. You've got destroyers lobbing five-inch shells, battleships 16-inch shells. And then, at the end of the pre-invasion bombardment, they had what they called these rocket ships, landing ships with these rockets on them. And they'd go in, and it took a couple minutes to get rid of all the rockets. And you'd look at all of this, these explosions. And you'd think, "There couldn't be anything alive on that beach." And then we found out, they had guns in caves, and they came out after all of that! The shock of seeing splashes of shellfire from the beach, we...the noise, you can't hear a damn thing for I don't know how long after...the stench, the flames, the explosions, and you'd think nothing was alive on that beach. But everything was covered in terms of on that op order, and the LSTs went in after a certain time. First, the waves went ashore. Then you secured the beach, the landing. Ships beached, and the rest, so...it was supposedly a totally coordinated operation, but it never was coordinated. Mistakes are made, and it just...it's...but our business was invasion so landing ship tank--

Howe: Can you describe your experience at Kojo beach?

Kohn: The...going in, I...we...our job was, there were all these LCVPs behind us loaded with Marines. And my job is to guide 'em to the beach. And I'm supposed to, 1,000 yards from the beach, turn around and go back. And I kept going further \_\_\_\_\_ [uncertain 53:01.5] 'cause I was nuts! And I, in terms of fear...the fear came afterwards, you really start to shake. Because boats were hit going in. But you never think it's gonna be you, you think you're bulletproof. And then, when it's all over and you get back to the ship, and...I didn't get back to ship for a long time, because after...we bobbed around in the water, because they went in and landed and offloaded their tanks, and when I finally got back to the ship, you start to shake a little bit. And you figure, "Well, I did dodge a bullet." [Laughs].

Howe: Several!

Kohn: Yes, right! But it's...you know. The main...it was also a feeling of relief, because I was scared to death of one thing: showing cowardice. You know, how am I gonna react? Am I gonna cringe, or what am I gonna do? And if I do that -- I'm an officer -- I'm through.

[Laughs]. As far as leadership, but...and then, I think the thing that really made the whole thing doable is the fact that you're gaining a confidence in that you did it. You know, I passed that test, and now I'll go on to the next test. And you're part of the process, and you...there's kind of a recognition of something that you did well, as far as you could do it. And the biggest question that I had, especially reporting aboard with war veterans -- both enlisted and officer, you know -- and I'm...plus the fact, the image of the Jew was the guy who let somebody else do the dirty work. And this was before...and with the name Kohn. You know, and I'm proud of the fact that I'm me! And...but it...there was an image. And maybe I felt, I'm carrying too much of it on my back, but I'm gonna show 'em. And...whether it's a Jewish inferior...whatever the hell it is, I never bothered to...I don't think about it.

Howe: Was there ever any expression of doubt, or anything that caused you to believe those internal demons, if you were...in relations with fellow officers or enlisted, did they ever...

Kohn: Not really, not really.

Howe: ...voice any opinion about that...?

Kohn: Now, I gotta tell you one thing. We sat in the wardroom, and...you know, you're not supposed to discuss politics, sex, and religion, you know they're the three hottest topics, so I tried to portray...none of these guys...these guys were some small town \_\_\_\_\_ [56:28.5] officers, and most of 'em...and they'd never really had contact with the Jews. So I tried to portray the Jew as basically concerned with education, success, and things of that character. And...basically, they were not drinkers. And so...where are you gonna find Jewish communities in the Pacific? You don't, until we got to Hong Kong! And we're taking a tour of the island, and I see this gorgeous building, and it says 'Jewish Community Center,' way up on the bluff overlooking the harbor, and so...and they had tennis courts there. So we stop, and I say, "Now, you're gonna see." And so we go into this community center, there's a bar the length of the community center, and these guys are there, they're British traders, and their tennis tags are on their wrists. So I go up to one, he says, "Oh, are you Jewish?" And I say, "Yes." And he says, "Bring your friends and have a scotch!" And we proceeded to get blind. [Laughs heartily]. So this whole idea...and they says, "You're full of you know what." So...but...you know, in the Pacific you see a lot of Catholic churches and Buddhist monasteries and all that kind of stuff, so it was interesting.

Howe: Not having that community...not having that resource to you during that time, how else would you fill that void?

Kohn: Are you talking about a spiritual void, or what?



Howe: Whether it's spiritual, or just having a community of people who you identify with on that level. Was that something that you...you felt you were missing?

Kohn: No.

Howe: Okay.

Kohn: My identity was with the people who I worked with me, and saved my butt, and made me a good naval officer. They made me a good naval officer because of their performance. So I really...the thing that was very strange was, you know, when you're on a ship, it's different than being, I think, a soldier, or something like that. Because you're there on that ship, and the vocabulary, you know: it's not a floor, it's a deck, it's an overhead, it's a bulkhead...and you're part of this different life, and you walk differently because of the motion of the ship, and when I left that ship after three years in that environment -- after I'd been stores, deck, operations, exec, you know -- it was my identity! And all of the sudden, I see this thing, as I'm taking the boat, the ship gets smaller. I come home, and I could talk about \_\_\_\_\_ [59:33.6] and this and that, and the people I met were interested in talking about who they were dating and how their career was going at the Merchandise Mart, and you talk about feeling lost. And I remember, I bumped into somebody I hadn't seen in, I don't know, many years. "Where were you?" I said, "Korea." So that jackass says, "Why?" You know, "Why did you go to Korea?" You know, and I...it's just, there was a...I think now, hopefully, they give you a little advice about readjusting to civilian life, but then it was...in Korea, nobody gave a damn about Korea. Because World War II was too close, and...you know. And you didn't get...Vietnam was a television war. Korea wasn't. And it was somewhere way out in the middle of nowhere.

Howe: Right.

Kohn: And it was interesting.

Howe: It was called a police action in the media.

Kohn: Yeah, the next guy that says that... [Laughs]. Police action, you know. I'm not a cop. I was in a war where people got killed. Police action. Actually, it was a civil war. Because, you know, they decided...who was it? Dean Rusk, I think, was the guy who wrote a paper deciding that they should separate at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. And Korea was a colony of Japan since the turn of the century, when, after the Russo-Japanese War...one of the terms of settlement was Japan got Korea as a colony. And it was a colony 'til 1945. And it...and when they...when World War II ended, we put Syngman Rhee in there, who was a bureaucrat. His one qualification was he hated communists. And they put in this Kim

Il...whoever was the first one, who was a fighter with the Chinese forces who fought Chiang Kai-shek. And they hated one another. And they had incursions, starting in '48, where the one side would go in and blow up the other side. And then, when the war started, the first thing Syngman Rhee did was send his death squads down, and they took 100,000...they...they keep uncovering these graves, where he slaughtered 100,000 communists without...because they were communists, and because the invasion. Just lined 'em up and shot 'em. And they kept...they keep uncovering these mass graves, so the people that...so in terms of...you know, I tell everyone: I made the world safe for Hyundai. I don't think we ever should have gone in there, period. You know, as far as freedom goes, this guy was a bureaucrat who hated communists. Same end result. You look at Iraq, did you read what happened today? I read in today's **Tribune**, they took 15 Sunnis and killed 'em in this town, and strung them up on poles, and wouldn't let 'em take the bodies down...so a lesson to other Sunnis to...I mean, this is what we did for that wonderful country. So anyhow, when the vital interests of the United States are threatened, we go in. Otherwise we don't.

Howe: Yeah...so, the ship comes back, and '54 you helped bring refugees out...or rather, the Foreign Legion out. And then you come home to San Diego?

Kohn: Then, we...yeah, after Indochina we stopped in Hong Kong for R&R, and then we came back for shipyard overhaul, and then we...when '55 came around, yeah. Then I was released, I think, in April or May of '55. And then the ship was decommissioned and mothballed, and then recommissioned for Vietnam. And I think it's...they were there for five or six years or something like that.

Howe: So long as you were there, it was always 902 [landing ship tank]?

Kohn: Then after I got off, they named LSTs for counties. And they named mine the *Luzerne County*. But it was just a number when I was there.

Howe: Gotcha. So you left active duty service in spring/summer '55?

Kohn: Yeah.

Howe: Where did you go?

Kohn: I came back here and went to work. And I had an eight-year Reserve obligation after I got out. And I went down the foot of Randolph Street, where they had a destroyer escort. And I thought, it's really gonna be neat, going out on that on weekends. And the commanding officer, I think, had three or four stripes, and he had two ribbons. A World War II Victory and a Good Conduct Medal. And I looked at him, and I...and he said, "Oh,

we can use you. You had good sea duty?" I said, "Can I ask you, Sir, what has your career been like?" And his career was he graduated V-12 in 1945, and because the war was over he never went on active duty, but he stayed in the Reserves. And he made JG, and he made lieutenant, and he made lieutenant commander, and he made commander, and I don't recall if he was a captain or not, but he never had active duty. And I said, "What do you do in the Reserves?" "We have a lot of luncheons." We... "Thanks, but no thanks." He says, "Oh, wait a minute. You have a reserve obligation." I said, "I fulfilled my obligation." He said, "You're in trouble." I said, "Fine, sue me." And I...I decided I'd fulfilled my duty and I don't have to go, and I didn't go. And then I got a letter in 1963 when my reserve obligation was up, and said...they were a little nasty, and said, "We noticed that you have not fulfilled your obligation, you have not joined a reserve. But, if you want to, and will join the Reserves, we'll promote you to lieutenant commander," and my ego got stoked. I would like to see lieutenant commander. They made me a lieutenant senior grade after I got out. So then, I figured, Vietnam's heating up, and I better not. Thanks, but no thanks. And some of my classmates took it and were recalled for Vietnam, which...and they ended up in terrible duty. Saigon River patrol and crap like that, so...I did not miss...and...but I'm pleased with what happened, I'm pleased with what I did, and it was an experience that I think, overall, was very worthwhile.

Howe: You said coming home, folks didn't understand.

Kohn: No.

Howe: So what was...what was it like, being received by your friends, your family, your community?

Kohn: It was very difficult, because it was...I couldn't communicate with 'em. And they had no understanding of where I'd been or what I'd done, and I could no more explain to them...I told somebody...you know, trying to explain to you what it was like is trying...like a woman trying to explain to a man what it's like to give birth to a child. You just can't do it. There is no way, and I'm not even going to try. It was...it took a while to get back to being normal. And it...I felt very alone, and I...I ended up in sales and marketing, and it was an undisciplined time in the country, when that series about the advertising guy...there was a lot of drinking, and...it took me quite a while to get my feet back on the ground. And, fortunately, I found a gal who was a good gal. Who was patient, and understood. And I think that if situations were reversed, and I behaved...she behaved the way I did, I would have kicked her out of the house. And she just was an amazing woman, and we've been married over fifty years, and I got lucky. And the marriage lasted, because she made it last. And I...I went through some difficult adjustments, and I drank a little too much, and I...and she was just...was and is an

amazing woman. So...and I've got good kids. And...so I am pleased to be here. Most of the people my age are infirm, or have big problems. I'm mean, and still navigating, so it's working.

Howe: So, sales, marketing. What companies have you worked for?

Kohn: Well, I was in three industries, I was in a company that started off on automotive replacement parts, and I worked a territory that...I expanded it and became a regional manager, and all of the sudden they were sold. And they gave me sixty days severance pay and a nice letter of recommendation. Then I ended up in the furniture business as a furniture rep. And I got tired of travelling, and ended up in the graphics business. And I enjoyed that, I put together...I...the graphics business is a terrible business. Because you've got super talented people who are always floating around. If an advertising agency loses an account, they fire the account executives, they fire artists and copywriters, and there are always a bunch of talented people floating around. I put together a group of people...I found a great copywriter, terrific photographer, and, I put together a group of independents who functioned like an ad agency, and we could offer great service at less money, and I did that until I got out of the business about ten years ago. And so...I now enjoy the volunteer work, and as long as I keep busy, I'm fine.

Howe: How do you think your time in service prepared you for your civilian career, your civilian life?

Kohn: [Exhales deeply]. I think what the service gave me was the ability to find a way to get things done. To have the knowledge that if I applied myself, and I put everything I had into it, I could make it work. And I think that's the one...I think, in the service, you find out what you're capable of, because you push yourself. Where most people, I don't think, really push themselves at anything. And in the service, in a wartime situation, you're on a small ship. You have to put out, and you have to put out the maximum if you're gonna make it work. And I think that's the main lesson that...that I have.

Howe: What's been the greatest challenge to you, in adjusting to civilian life?

Kohn: It was a long time ago, but I finally realized that you gotta live in the now. That was it. I -- for a while -- I felt that society owed me something, frankly. And I lost it a little bit, and that...I would...I didn't adjust well to living your life one day at a time, and living in the now, and that's the key. And I would look back at the fact that, you know, honor graduate, this 'qualified for command ex-naval officer,' you know, the guy who put out in all this boloney, and that's not where it's at. And if you're gonna...and what success is...I had a difficult time, I was chasing the wrong dream. I was chasing the material dream, and I...I heard a definition that I kinda like now, and that's: success is the

progressive realization of a worthy goal. And you set different goals. I...I want to be of some service, and I enjoy the literacy thing. I really do. I...working with these immigrants who really are wanting to improve their English and improve their reading. And when I had this Korean kid last semester, and she'd been here, I think eight months, and she had some college at University of Seoul and came here, and is living with Koreans, and she's twenty-three, cute as a bug's ear. I mean, this is really...and evidently, her family in Korea must have some money, they send her money and she...she has a sense of fashion, and she's just \_\_\_\_\_ [8:44.3], and she's got her little electronic dictionary, which I said, we're not gonna use that. We're gonna look it up in a regular English dictionary, we're gonna mark it down in the journal, and then we're gonna use it in a sentence. And that way it won't come in one ear and out the other. And when she would get it, the eyes would light... "I get it!" You know? And you're really...it's just fun to work with these people...she really wanted to learn, and I...I made her an honorary crewmember of my ship...I, of course, I'm out of Great Lakes, I bought a t-shirt with USN and gave it to her. It...it's just fun to do that, and to see the progress. And stay involved in life. And so, my goals...you know, I got a bunch of different goals. And I'm constantly reading and learning. And so I am relatively pleased with what's going on in my life.

Howe: Talk a little bit more about the groups that you associate with...veterans, or non-veterans organizations? You mentioned this...this learning center, so about that, too.

Kohn: Yeah. Well, I...I'm involved with a literacy group, I...I go out to Great Lakes, and a good friend of mine is a West Point graduate. And he was in Vietnam, and he was in a free-fire zone for over twenty months, and finally left the Army...he went back to college, got a PhD and became a college professor. And I...I met him at a veterans group meeting that I no longer go to, but he now is in charge of a coalition of veterans groups, and through him I have access to other veterans groups. And he now is in the process of thoroughly hating my guts, because he's a West Point graduate and I'm a naval officer. So we bet on every Army-Navy game, and this poor guy's going broke! [Laughs]. He...Bruce Perry is his name, and we're really good friends, and I have a few other friends who are veterans. That's it...I -- in terms of going to veterans groups meetings -- I just attend with Bruce occasionally, these different groups. And I belong to the LST organization, but they had no local meetings, and I do it to get the newspaper, and that's it. And...

Howe: Where's the...the learning center? What's it called?

Kohn: It's headquartered at Oakton College, so...so that's it, and I...I spend a lot of time with my family, with my grandkids. And one of 'em is gonna start at Indiana, and the other one is going east, and some are in high school, and some are in grammar school. So

I...that's it. My wife has some health issues and problems, and I...I have to sometimes be a caregiver, but I owe her big time. I could never repay the debts. So...she stood by me when I was going through some problems and adjusting, and so...she also had a liver transplant, and she's doing rather well for what she's been through, so that's it. So here I am. And I'm delighted to have met a Naval Academy graduate, I'm gonna get to Annapolis soon, and I want to go. John Paul Jones is there, isn't he?

Howe: He's got his tomb, just below the chapel.

Kohn: Yeah, right. So I'm gonna go say hello to John.

Howe: Should go sometime early in the summer.

Kohn: Yeah?

Howe: When the freshmen climb the monument.

Kohn: Oh, yeah?

Howe: It's called the Mount Herndon. It's their last day as freshmen, they're...they change from being 'plebes', which in Greek, is...you know, it's akin to the white stuff that accumulates at the side of your mouth when you get thirsty. [Kohn laughs]. So they get to get rid of that definition in their training, and they become sophomores...

Kohn: Oh.

Howe: ...by climbing this mount...this monument, and replacing the hat that's on top. They replace this Dixie cup with the officer's...the officer's cup, so...but of course, the...the monument's greased up, so it makes it more difficult to climb.

Kohn: [Laughs].

Howe: It's a sight to see.

Kohn: Well, I've enjoyed my...my afternoon with you.

Howe: I appreciate it! Of course, I've got other...other questions, if you...but I understand if you're...

Kohn: All right, we'll go for a little while longer, then I'll climb back on the train. What other questions you got?

Howe: I'll give you just two.

Kohn: Okay.

Howe: How do you feel you and other veterans from your era have been recognized for your service?

Kohn: I've never really given it any thought. I...in terms of recognition for my service, I...I don't look for that anymore. I know what I did, and in terms of...it's never been an issue, you know. It's something that I had to do, let's put it that way, so...it's self-recognition. I did it.

Howe: Understood.

Kohn: I...I think it's an obligation of citizenship, really. So it's not a concern, and it never has been.

Howe: Last one is, what moment from your time in service are you most proud of?

Kohn: Probably shipyard overhaul, when I took those kids to see what the GI Bill's all about. Yeah, that. Absolutely, because I changed some lives with that. Taking them to the University of California at Berkeley and exposing them. I'm proudest of that.

Howe: Do you stay in contact with anyone?

Kohn: A few of 'em. And God, they're...they're all just about gone now, at...and there's one in Texas that I communicate with, and that's about it. 'Cause, that's...yeah, they're all gone the way of the dodo bird.

Howe: Understood. Well, are there things that you thought I would ask, or questions that...things you might like to add?

Kohn: Not really, I think we've covered the waterfront. You should pardon the nautical... [Laughs].

Howe: Yeah!

Kohn: ...expression! [Laughs].

Howe: Yeah? Appreciate it.

Kohn: Oh, I appreciate your...I appreciate your being here.

Howe: Yeah.

Kohn: I...I think the museum's lucky to have you.

Howe: Thank you. I consider it a really unique opportunity. Something that I will always carry it with me. Because it's not often that you get to come and be a part of this kind of a program. And it's different from just picking up a book.

Kohn: Oh yeah.

Howe: I'm actually able to reach out and connect with veterans who were there...who have human...real human stories. There's no opportunity like it.

Kohn: Well, good.

Howe: So, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Library, and on my...myself, thank you for your time today, and thank you for your service.

Kohn: Oh, ha! Well, thank you for your service!

Howe: Yeah, that's a challenge coin. So this is something that has recently...in recent years, become popular within the military. Every command has a...every military command has an emblem and they put it on a coin, and they shake each other's hand, and they congratulate each other, and...

Kohn: Good.

Howe: Try and sneak it.

Kohn: Okay.

Howe: Yeah.

Kohn: Well, it was...

Howe: I'm gonna go ahead and grab that from you...your microphone.

Kohn: Oh!

Howe: You're like, what are you trying to poke at me for?

Kohn: No, I thought you were taking my coin back!

Howe: No! No. Now that I've...