Mary Arvidson

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COHEN: Okay, well, today is December 3rd, 2020. My name is Leah Cohen and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I am pleased to interview ISMC, Intelligence Specialist, Master Chief, retired, Mary Arvidson. Mary served in the US Signal Corps from 1972 to 1978. Later, she was part of the US Naval Reserves from 1988 to 2012, retiring in the rank of command master chief. As both a leader trailblazer for women in the military, both the [US] Army and the [US] Navy, we're looking forward to hearing your story.

ARVIDSON: Thank you.

COHEN: So we'll start off with the beginning with the background. When and where were you born?

ARVIDSON: I was born in Evanston. Illinois.

COHEN: What was it like growing up in Evanston?

ARVIDSON: Actually, that's where I was born, I grew up in Niles, Illinois, and it was... fun. I come from a large family. There are seven of us, seven kids. So there was always someone, as we put it, there was always someone there to fight with. You can play with anyone, but you always have to have someone to fight with. So, but... it was a good family, real good family. We're still very close.

COHEN: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

ARVIDSON: I've got two sisters and four brothers.

COHEN: Wow, where are you in the range?

ARVIDSON: I'm the oldest girl, I have two older brothers, two younger brothers, two younger sisters.

COHEN: Okay.

ARVIDSON: And we're all in the space of ten years. It's the difference between top and bottom.

COHEN: Oh, my goodness. So very close, very—

ARVIDSON: Yes.

COHEN: What were your parents' occupations?

ARVIDSON: My mom was a teacher, although she didn't do that until we got into a grade school—or got into kindergarten—was when she went back to teaching. Dad worked for Allstate Insurance; He was an underwriter and worked on major accounts that had like a million-dollar premium. So, he was kind of an interesting mathematician.

COHEN: Which languages did you speak growing up?

ARVIDSON: The only one that I actually spoke was when I was learning Spanish in high school, but we were English all the way. The only—any language that anyone in the family had was my grandfather had some Swedish, but it was mostly swear words, so we weren't allowed to speak them.

COHEN: [laughs] Okay, did you have any relatives who served in the military?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, my dad was in the Navy during World War II, although he came in late in the war, so he became a seaman, but then he went to the NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps] program over at Northwestern University, which, as a young kid from South Dakota, was really his only opportunity to be able to get a major education. And he did end up graduating with a degree in mathematics, and that's where he met my mother.

COHEN: Oh my goodness.

ARVIDSON: Other than that, I'm the only one of my generation that joined the military. My brothers, thank goodness, their numbers were not very high in the draft for Vietnam. And my grandparents, I only recently found out that my—one of my grandfathers was in the Army during World War I.

COHEN: Oh, is that serving for the U.S. or for Sweden or...

ARVIDSON: No, this was a—one who was here, so he was serving for the U.S. He was an engineer, so. And then as you go further back in my family, I'm a member also of the Daughters of the American Revolution. I have one of my ancestors fought in the revolution. One fought in the war of eighteen—several fought in the War of 1812, several in the Civil War.

COHEN: Wow.

ARVIDSON: So, there is a family history going back, but not a real whole lot of current family history up until me and it's like—like I said, I'm the only one of my generation, but I've got four nephews who are either in the [US] Marine Corps or the [US] Air Force, so.

COHEN: So maybe it [i.e., you] had an effect, the following generation?

ARVIDSON: I think I did, yeah. Yeah.

COHEN: Were there—like, women role models for you and also, growing up, it was the time of the, you know, increasingly active feminist movement. You know, did this have any effect on you? And if so, how?

ARVIDSON: I don't know that it was so much. I—we ended up with kind of an interesting set of role models. My mother passed away when I was only thirteen, so Dad was the adult in the house. So any female role models were the neighbors and things like that that would help us out. And the teachers, my teachers were—you know, I went to a Catholic school, so a lot of the teachers were nuns and women. So I think that they were quite a bit of a role model for me. And that was really pretty much it. The feminist-thing, I wasn't so much into the feminist part of it all. I was—that was also when the ecological movement started working and I was fairly well involved through high school with ecology clubs and things like that. So, clean ups at rivers and all that other good stuff, so.

COHEN: Well, I was about to ask you which school did you attend and which subjects interested you as well as which activities...

ARVIDSON: I uhm—grade school was St. John Brebeuf Grade School, so Catholic grade school. High school was Main East High School in Park Ridge and my—the ones that I liked were history—history were my favorite ones. The ones that I hated was math, although it turns out that I'm not bad at it. Uhm, and then when I went to college, I went to the University of Illinois Chicago, originally. And then flipped around to going in the military and then came back to college once I got

out. Went to Oakton Community College and then graduated from the University of Illinois Chicago.

COHEN: Did you also play a musical instrument when you were growing up?

ARVIDSON: I did. I played the trumpet. When I was in sixth grade they gave us an opportunity of learning an instrument if we'd like to, so I went to the night that they had that—you got to see all the different instruments. And I looked at the saxophone and it sounded so good, but I looked at how many keys it had and I thought, "I can never remember that." Then I looked at the trumpet and it only had three keys and I thought, "I can do that." So... so, yeah, I picked the trumpet up and started from sixth grade on, played the trumpet all the way through my time in college, first time around, dropped it a little bit and then picked it up again when I—probably mid-1980s.

COHEN: So you mentioned that—right now—that you had studied at the University of Illinois in Chicago, and I believe on the HerStory form, you said you felt you maybe lacked maturity. So how far along did you go? And, you know...

ARVIDSON: Well, first time around, I went two trimesters and once I hit the end of the second trimester, I was—I just wasn't ready for college. I think the independent study part was the part that I wasn't ready for and really wanted to do something else. At the time I was working at J.C. Penney's in the—the "toy and housewares department" and kind of thought that that was not something I wanted to do all my life. And by chance, I even remember when it was—in middle of December in '76... they uhm—'76?, Yeah, no, '72. '72, a card came across—a postcard came in the mail and it was a thing from the Army recruiters asking if we—I might be interested in joining the military, so I called them and I ended up joining, so.

COHEN: Were you concerned at all about being deployed to Vietnam while the war was going on?

ARVIDSON: Somewhat, but it—there weren't that many females that were deployed, and if they were, they were mostly in the medical area. Although in intelligence, some were deployed, mostly like to Laos and things like that or closer to Saigon But I wasn't really concerned about it. It was an interesting reaction from my friends because, of course, the war was not a popular thing at all. So going in the military was not popular at all. And it was a very strange time to be in the military because, you know, now people buy you dinners... people thank you for

your service, things like that. Then, it was totally different. It was not pleasant being in the military at the time. The lack of respect was incredible and you got into some interesting discussions with people that, like I said, were unpleasant. And even with my friends, my friends thought that I was absolutely crazy joining the military, so.

COHEN: Did your friends try to convince you to change your mind?

ARVIDSON: Oh, they knew better than that. Pretty much once I had decided on something I went forward with it. The only one I really surprised was my dad and he was the one who came in and he said that his only question was why I wasn't joining a decent service like the Navy, him having been in the Navy himself, so.

COHEN: That's right, that's right. So what was your answer?

ARVIDSON: Ah, I told him [laughs]—it's become a part of a joke that we used to have, when he was alive, was that I told him I joined the Army because I couldn't join the Navy because I get seasick. Can't join the Army [i.e. Air Force] because I get airsick. I can't join the Marines because I'm not a Marine. And so they left the Army. [Laughter]

COHEN: By process of elimination.

ARVIDSON: Yes. And it actually was that the Army—at the time the Army gave me more of a choice of jobs. There were real limited choices on both the Air Force and the Navy. Whereas, the Army had this little intelligence thing sitting off to the side. It sounded kind of cool. So, that was why I went with the Army.

COHEN: Ok, so while you're in the recruitment process, intelligence already seemed like it was a possibility for women? Is that...

ARVIDSON: Yeah, they actually they—well, there's a couple of different reasons is that—you take a test in the beginning called an ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] test, and it gives your—how well you can do on different subjects and people score high on the ASVAB test are possibilities for intelligence. They had quite a few females in the military at the time, and there was a particular reason for it was that they were required by law to have a certain amount of the military be high school graduates. If you were female, you were required to be a high school graduate, so the way that they met the quota was to have females.

COHEN: I see, I see.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: And you already had some college under your belt as well, so that was probably better.

ARVIDSON: Exactly.

COHEN: You also had written that you felt the anti-war movement was on the wrong path. Do you want to talk about your attitudes at the time?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, well and pretty much stays a lot the same way... that I always figure there's a reason for things like, say, for instance, now. I mean, we've got a war that we've been in longer than any other war. And there are a lot of people that are going, you know, this is just ridiculous and especially having been on the intel side of things, it's not ridiculous and I pretty much figured that if the country felt that it was necessary to be in Vietnam, there must be a reason for it and I was willing to follow them to that point, so. And the anti-war people, as quite often happens, got a little bit far on their methods, so that they were pretty obnoxious. And at the same time, quite honestly, to a certain extent, so was the law enforcement going against the protests. But, it just seemed like the right thing to do, that joining the military was the right thing and I had always been brought up— and our family was extremely patriotic. So it was just kind of a natural for me.

COHEN: Makes sense, yeah. So you've joined the Army and then you're sent to basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. So what was—what was that like? And did you go alone or did you go as part of a group?

ARVIDSON: Well, it was the group of people, but none of whom I knew. I did not know anyone at all in my basic training. Probably one of the dumbest decisions I ever made in my life was to go to basic training in July and August in Alabama.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: It's not the best time of year to do that, I'm afraid, especially since the—they were working on the barracks. So they were—our barracks were closed and they put us in an old World War II Quonset hut type thing.

COHEN: Oh my gosh...

ARVIDSON: It had no air conditioning, so it was fairly miserable throughout the entire thing. Uhm, no, the people that I went to basic training with, I actually met five of them

on the plane—my first ever plane ride going down to Alabama in order to get there. But ah—Columbia Dothan Regional Airport?? I think we went into—but, I didn't know anyone going in, at all. And it was one of the things that amazed me, though. When I went in, you were all of a sudden tossed into this huge bunch of people who all came from different places, had different backgrounds. Just a completely different from what—I mean, I grew up in a Chicago suburb, you know, not really a whole lot of experience with all sorts of different kinds of people. And you got it there and you were forced to work with them. And it was a—that was probably the most interesting part of the beginning of this, at least.

COHEN: So, did you find you enjoyed people—meeting people from very different environments and backgrounds?

ARVIDSON: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. We had a young girl that was from Georgia and lived out on a farm. She had never worn shoes seven days a week before joining the military. So her feet like—she was awful the first couple of weeks, getting used to shoes all the time. But her boyfriend would write her notes and she used to sit around and read them to us and it was hilarious. He'd say things like, "I love you like a pig loves mud." [in southern drawl] "I love you like a light bulb loves electricity." [in southern drawl] And it just— I mean, and inner city people that I had never met before. So you got the full gamut, you know, from people that are only raised on a farm to those who had never really seen a huge pile of grass all the time, so. It was real interesting and it's one of the parts I've enjoyed about the military all the way through is the variety of people that you get to meet.

COHEN: So, here you are in Alabama in the summer. Was the training physically rigorous, especially in the heat?

ARVIDSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was uhh... it was interesting. There were several days when it—during our basic training where they do what they call a "black flag," where the humidity and the temperature is just too high, and they're not allowed to do any training outdoors. So our drill instructors would do training indoors, which was pretty darn miserable too, but it was a lot more work than I had done in a long time, so—or probably ever, to tell you the truth. But it was—it was fun. I, you know, in hindsight it was fun. Probably right about then, I was probably homesick like crazy and not sure sometimes of what I was doing. But looking back on it, it was a good experience.

COHEN: Did you write letters home or send tapes home?

ARVIDSON: I did write letters home. They didn't usually send much of anything back to, I mean, I'd get letters back, but there were no care boxes or anything like that because you pretty much couldn't get that in basic training, so. But, yeah, I mean, I wrote letters and back in those days, you don't get the instant gratification like you got today, where, you know, your immediate responses. Then, it was, you know, two weeks later, you'd get a letter back from someone, maybe. Sometimes they would send an audio tape and I'd be able to listen to the cassette.

COHEN: Yeah... did you learn how to shoot, like where were they teaching the WACs [Women's Army Corps] at that point, how to use basic ammunition?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, at that point they did not, in basic training, teach women how to shoot. I did learn how to shoot afterwards when I was stationed in Germany. They had us qualify. And actually, it turns out, I'm a pretty good shot to tell you the truth. So I did learn by the time I got into Germany. So, by the time I got out of the Army, I knew how to shoot. And now the Navy has had me shoot lots of different weapons. And actually in the Army I got to shoot a bunch of different weapons, too, like machine guns and things like that.

COHEN: Okay, so while not at basic training, later on, certainly a lot, yeah.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: What was a typical day like in basic training?

ARVIDSON: Basic training was getting up at a ridiculous hour and having to share the bathroom with thirty people. Which was, excuse me, always interesting. Having—and having to get up really early because even though the call for early morning orders, or whatever they called it at that point, was fairly early. You had to have everything ready to go, so you had to be getting everything all together beforehand. And of course, you couldn't have the lights on because then the drill sergeant would know that you're awake. So you were doing all this in the dark. The entire platoon would be doing it in the dark. I don't even remember what time it was probably like six in the morning that we ended up having to be out there. And then the mess hall was right across from our barracks, which was very convenient. We'd go eat, come back and start physical training and then by the time you get to mid-morning or so and and during the afternoon it'd be classroom training.

COHEN: What type of things were you learning in the classroom training?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, a lot of basic stuff about, for instance, military ranks and things like that. And then you would learn things about the uniforms. I don't even remember all the good stuff you had in there, but I'm sure there was all sorts of neat things... how to march, there was a lot of marching. How to give answers and a little bit about how to lead, but not a whole lot.

COHEN: Did you also learn how to read maps and things like that?

ARVIDSON: We did. We learned how to—we learned how to do orienteering, so we learned how to take a compass and find our way from one place to another, that was part of our training.

COHEN: How did you feel about your uniform, did you like it and about the boots, and so on?

ARVIDSON: The—yeah, the uniform itself, at that time—the Army uniform was an interesting one. The summertime dress uniform was a seersucker material.

COHEN: Hhm.

ARVIDSON: It was a uniform that you moved, and it wrinkled, so you could never get that uniform looking good. That one drove me a little crazy. I liked my dress uniform. I liked the green uniform that we wore. Although women in those days pretty much all wore skirts. You didn't wear pants at all, which could make life really interesting if you're having to carry things around in a uniform, so. Even our standard old everyday uniform was—it was almost like a denim material, a light blue denim material for the skirt. And you would starch it and you knew you had the starch right if you could stand it up like a cone in the middle of the room.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: Yeah. And then we did have the—well it's not really camouflage, it was an OD [Olive Drab] green camouflage type uniform with the boots and things like that, that we wore when we were out running around the woods and things like that, which we spent a lot of time running around the woods of Alabama, so.

COHEN: Were the boots comfortable?

ARVIDSON: Eventually, they took a while to break in and the shoes themselves, even the regular shoes, took a while to break in. But once you got ‘em broken in they were okay. We would have our little polishing parties at night. We'd be sitting

outside and we'd be sitting there, all of us polishing our boots and polishing our shoes, so. You could see yourself in them.

COHEN: Did you like the fact that the WACs was a separate corps and, you know, rather than what was came later, the integration of women into the forces?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, I did, actually. While I was at Fort McClellan, we had the anniversary—hang on a second [coughs]—Anniversary of the Women's Army Corps, and that happened to be on a day that my platoon was responsible for the flag that would float—flew over Fort McClellan. And so we put up the biggest flag they have, what they call a post flag, which is huge. It's like ten feet by fourteen feet or something like that. It's ten feet by sixteen feet and it takes the entire platoon to put it up, but what it was—and we had a little party because it was the WAC birthday and that kind of stuff, so. But it was—it was kind of neat being separate. They did—the Women's Army Corps didn't go away until after I had gotten out of the military or out of the Army. And I was kind of sad when I heard it went away. But, you know, just like the WAVES in the Navy, the WACs in the Army—our own little group that—we consider ourselves special.

COHEN: No, it sounded like there was a nice esprit de corps in...

ARVIDSON: There was.

COHEN: Yeah. Well, so I think it was reading that Fort McClellan had established the first permanent training center for WACs back in 1952, so was there a sense of it being a strong tradition on that base?

ARVIDSON: There was—and where we were—where we were living at and where our mess hall was at was far away from the center section of the camp—the base. They actually bused us into the base center because we were far enough away because we were in those temporary barracks that were out in the middle of nowhere. But the—I mean, the buildings were the way you would think of the standard ones, the big red brick old buildings, all forming a quadrangle around. And you mark—that quadrangle, of course, was our field for marching, so.

COHEN: Yeah, in that it was such a large base, I think I was reading, it was the only base with the three major missions, including the WACs, the infantry and the Army Chemical School. Like were there opportunities to meet people, you know, of these different groups...

ARVIDSON: Not officially, let's put it that way. Not officially. They try to keep the recruits pretty much separated from everyone else. Just because it's much safer that way. Plus, you've got a bunch of girls, quite honestly, we were girls, not women, most of us just out of high school and first time away from home, so you don't want to have too much mixture of the different groups. But the—just out of a safety matter, the recruits pretty much kept separate.

COHEN: Okay, so after basic training, how was your assignment determined? Was it through the aptitude test that you mentioned earlier, did you have input in your choice of assignments? How did it work?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, when I actually—when I joined the military, before I went to basic training, I was already assigned to being a signals analyst. So, that was straight out of it, for that matter, when I came to the Military Entrance Processing center, the MEP center in Chicago, to leave, it was the first time I had got a hearing test. And with the hearing test, they decided that they really wanted me to be a Morse code interceptor, because I could hear pretty good and I decided that was not a good idea. I'm kind of glad I made that decision, to tell you the truth, I enjoyed what I ended up doing. But yeah, I mean, 'cause when I asked my recruiter, you know, "What's a signals analyst?" and he said, “Well," he said, "Well, the only thing I can tell you is that through radio waves and everything else... we intercept signals and you're a signals analyst." “Okay.” So, but being a signals analyst meant that I was going up to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to go to my—what they call an "MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] School" up there., to get my basic training as a signals analyst.

COHEN: So what was it like at the signal analysis school at Fort Devens? Like, how was it organized, what were you learning?

ARVIDSON: We had one barracks that was just the females. We went to, you know, normal class, although we marched to class every day and it was about, I would say, probably about a twenty-five minute march to get to class every day. And we would march with the guys, which got to be a bit of a pain because a woman's stride is a little bit shorter than a guy's... so you'd have to kind of like take these super long strides to keep up with them. But you got used to it after a little while. Fort Devens was kind of cool. I ended up there during the winter, which is not the greatest time of the year to be in Massachusetts. Fort Devens is about half an hour, forty-five minutes west of Boston and a beautiful area, but it was cold during the winter and I think I finally graduated in the spring.

COHEN: Were the men, like, accepting of women who are also, you know, taking the same course as them?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, the guys are pretty good on it. And for that matter, in my particular class, we had two women that took one and two in the class. I was coming in third and the person who was first froze on the last test, so I ended up being second in the class coming out. But yeah, it was a good integration. The guys, you know, lived in the barracks right across from us and everyone was friendly with each other. There wasn't any huge competition or anything like that except on the softball field, so.

COHEN: [laughs] So what type of things does one learn to become a signal analyst, like in general terms?

ARVIDSON: You learn, for instance, order of battle, which is how different countries organize their military. You learn—we learned a little bit about code breaking, very little because it wasn't something particularly that we were going to be doing, but we needed to be aware of it. We learned about geography in different countries, especially those that we might be having to deal with. And my two different countries that I ended up with, which was originally I worked on the stuff from Vietnam and then the Czech—Czechoslovakian stuff, but... so things like that.

COHEN: Did they talk to you about the Cold War in any way, like, you know, if you would be dealing with Warsaw Pact countries or etc.?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, not a whole lot, because at that point they were more concerned with Vietnam because Vietnam was really ramping up the—the big ramp up that happened before the end. So there was a lot of talk about Vietnam and many of the males that were in our classes were assigned to Vietnam, going out. So, but the females kind of went a little bit of everywhere.

COHEN: Was there like a general course that everybody had to take, let's say they were studying Morse or radio intelligence or signals, like, did they have any—let's call it—basic requirement course?

ARVIDSON: It was just that course that—the MOS course and then we had a few things that we tacked on to it, too, because we—the 10th Special Forces were up there. So we were able to go out and spend some time with them, learning about equipment, especially. Got to climb around their tanks and rappel off their rappelling tower and that kind of stuff.

COHEN: Oh, so was this like the on-hands experience, like...

ARVIDSON: Yes, it was.

COHEN: Well, it seems like you spent, like, the summer in Alabama and the winter in Massachusetts, as it turns out, but then I believe you're sent next to the Vint Hills Farm Station in Virginia?

ARVIDSON: Yep.

COHEN: So—

ARVIDSON: — Hills Farms is about a half an hour west of D.C., right near Manassas. And it was out in the middle of—in the middle of God's country, to be quite honest. That whole area around there is—they race horses, racing horses, and the ??? farm is very close to us and you could go by and see these racing horses running through the fields and it was kind of incredible. But it was out in the middle of nowhere because it had a huge antenna complex that was attached to it and they needed a great big area. It's still there. Now it's a—I think it's kind of a commune thing, to tell you the truth, that it's been—it's a residential area now. And I drove through it, oh, gosh, about ten years ago, I guess. And it was a kind of an interesting experience, found my old barracks and it's still a—just a building, it's not being used for anything right now, but... it was an old —Vint Hill Farms was an old plantation, so like the officer's club was the mansion from the plantation and at one point, there had been a nine hole golf course where we had our parade field that, and they left one of the holes and the sand traps around it. And it was unfortunately in a direct line in between our barracks and the enlisted club, so it was a result of several people who would get—fall into the sand trap and not be able to get out when they weren't quite sober, so.

COHEN: [laughs] One of the hazards.

ARVIDSON: One of the hazards of the place, yes.

COHEN: So, I was reading that this station was one of the first field stations to conduct signal intelligence operations and during the Cold War, intercepted Soviet communications, sent over FISH Teleprinters [i.e., a wireless teleprinter transmission system]. Were you, like, involved in this at this point? Or, I was reading also in 1973 the mission changed more to research and development, so?

ARVIDSON: Right, '73 was—at the end of '73, which... '73? Yeah, end of '73 was—or end of '74 was when it was closed down as an operation section. What I was involved with was interceptions had been made in Vietnam of radio traffic. They would put them on tapes, fly them here to the United States and then it was mostly Morse code interceptions. So our Morse code intercept people would sit and they would translate when translated from Morse code to letters, and then we would try and figure out what was going on and towards the end there, what my job was was keeping track of the reports of the trucks that were going down the Ho Chi Minh Trail from North Korea—North Vietnam to South Vietnam. And it got to be kind of interesting when you see how much material was coming down that highway, it was incredible.

COHEN: I just have to say on a personal note, it's very interesting, 'cause I interviewed somebody in the ASA [American Security Agency] in Vietnam that started off as the Morse intercept and he said specifically, "We would just collect it and send it on," so it's a very interesting talking to...

ARVIDSON: Yeah, we were the other side. We were the ones that did the analysis down there.

COHEN: So, doing the analysis at that level, was it enough to sort of gain an understanding of what was going on? Like, as you were saying, the order of battle of the different groups, from the different parts of Vietnam?

ARVIDSON: It was... and that was part of what we filled out was—was, you know, we would get information to try—and particular units—be able to get information on commanding officers, how many people they had, what kind of equipment they had, all that other stuff. And we couldn't get some of that, like I said, I was doing a lot of the transportation stuff. So I was—I was looking for manifests of what was coming down from the north to south.

COHEN: Excuse me, could you please explain what manifests are?

ARVIDSON: Manifest is the bill of lading that they have on a truck or a shipment that tells you what's in the shipment coming down.

COHEN: Is there something else you would like to add about your time at Vint Hills, or would you like to move on? I believe the next step would be the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, when they closed down operations at Vint Hill Farms, a lot of us didn't have much to do, but they had, right before that, come out with the request for people who were willing to go to language class. And so I put in for language class and put in my request. I wanted to speak Vietnamese, Japanese or Chinese. And then it came back and they told me that I was going to be getting Czechoslovakian. And I called my dad and told him I was going to the Language Institute, gonna be getting Czechoslovakian. And he said, "They got their own language?" I said, "Not only do they have their own language, Dad, but they've got two of them. Czech and Slovak... "So, yeah, I mean, it was totally unexpected that it was going to be Czechoslovakian, but that's all right. And we were there longer than the people that had done the operations. They'd shut it all down. So we were just doing barracks duty, so, for like about two months before class started up in Monterey.

COHEN: I forgot to ask you, but did you have opportunities to travel when you were at these three different stations or bases?ARVIDSON: In Fort McClellan, not at all. They kept you on base, but once we got out of out of basic training, we were allowed to travel if we wanted to, you know, go out to different places. So I did go into Boston a few times when we were in Massachusetts and did spend quite a bit of time in D.C., especially towards the end there, because we were working shifts and at any given time, of the three of us who were working the shifts, two of us would be off. So we would jump in the car and head to D.C. and see the sights.

COHEN: Oh, that sounds good. So what was the language training like in Czech and Slovak?

ARVIDSON: Fascinating. All the teachers were native teachers, the native speakers and we had two different sets of types of teachers. One of them being... people that had come prior to 1968 and, like my main teacher Pan Halasne??, so Mr. Halasne? was a—had been a Czech cavalry officer in World War I and then left just before World War II started up. So he had come to the United States, you know, many years before. But we also had this set of teachers who came in 1968 when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. And if you want to know an introduction to the Cold War, try talking to someone who is a refugee from their own country, who's had to leave because of persecution. They gave us more of a background on Cold War perspective, I think, than you could ever get in your entire life. The—ours wasn't too bad because with a year- long course, so they gradually brought us into learning the language and then, like on Fridays, it was a Czech-only day. So

you had to learn Czech enough to be able to get your point across and it was also—to learn about the history and learn about the culture of Czechoslovakia. So for us, it was easy. There were certain classes they taught, for instance, for the people who were going out to be working in the embassies and they would literally have a one month or two-month course where after the sixth day they got in the course, they spoke nothing but Czech so that they would be totally conversational and that would be a one on one situation. Thank goodness we weren't one on one, our class was about eight or ten people, I guess. But they would have a single instructor that would just take them and teach them the language and get them so that they were totally conversational. We were conversational, but we kind of drove the teachers crazy because we got kinda loose with the languages sometimes and we would take American idioms and turn them into the language—to Czech and my teacher would just shake his head. Silly, wacky kids.

COHEN: So, what were some of the lessons you learned about the Cold War from the refugees of the 1968 Prague Spring?

ARVIDSON: One is how adamant they were. You know, when you're sitting an ocean away, you kind of go, yeah, that is terrible. You know, it's really sad. But they would give you their personal experiences and especially things like the people in their family who weren't able to escape the country and what kind of political persecution they went through afterwards. And it was, like I said, just being able to talk to someone who saw it right up front and was actually part of it, made a huge difference in how we felt about it.

COHEN: Yeah, makes sense. So after the year is up, at what point were you assigned to Field Station Eckstein near Rimbach in Germany?

ARVIDSON: Could we stick in Monterey for a second? Because that was my first experience—

COHEN: Oh, sorry.

ARVIDSON: Yes, first experience on leadership actually ended up being in Monterey. In Monterey, they had one barracks, of course, that was female, and we had six platoons in that barracks. And when I came in, the first week I was there, I got called down to the captain's office and I'm sitting there thinking, you know, "What's going on here? I just got here. I didn't do anything wrong yet." But I walk in and the captain looked at me and he said, "I have a question." He says, "Are you a real E4?" An E4—you're E1, E2, E3, E4. So, in my case, I was what's called a

"Specialist 4." They don't have different levels of specialist now, but I was a Spec' 4, and I said, "Well, Sir, what do you mean by a "real E4?" He says, "Well, you've been a private and a private first class and now you're a specialist?" I said, "Oh, yeah, I've been in for a while and I've been at one duty station already." He said, "Okay, you're a barracks sergeant." So what they with—especially [Mary there was a word or two before Language something Language] students, they had kids that came in on the Advanced Paygrade program, so they were generally college graduates who would come in for a language specifically. And when they came in, they were automatically made E3s. So they already had rank right off the bat, and that was what he meant by a real E4, because a lot of times kids would come in with, you know, six months in the Army and they were E3s. But since I had been in for about a year at the time, they made me a barrack sergeant over one of the platoons and it started out kind of slow and then I guess they decided that I was doing okay and so I essentially, what I was doing was—I was doing the job of an E7, wearing E5 stripes and being paid as an E4, which was rather interesting along the way. Yeah, because what they did—was they did what's called "fracking." It's to give you the rank so that people would respect you for having the rank on your uniform, even though I was an E4, they fracked me up to E5. So I was wearing E5 stripes, being paid as an E4, doing the job of an E7.

COHEN: What was it like being in a position of leadership for the first time?

ARVIDSON: That was really interesting, especially with a situation like the language school, because obviously you get some very smart people there, but they're taking a lot of different languages, and especially the oriental languages are extremely, extremely difficult. And we would have people that sometimes couldn't quite handle doing the languages and the amount of study you had to do, because it was a lot of studying, and they would get stressed out trying to learn the language. And I had a couple have breakdowns while I was there. And it was interesting learning how to handle that. But you got good at it, and then eventually we ended up with the ones that have had the breakdowns, they were actually—became part of my responsibility. I have one whole wing of the barracks that we took care of them until they were either discharged or sent off to other other places. So those that weren't going to be staying in school.

COHEN: How would you deal with the ones who were having breakdowns?

ARVIDSON: You make sure you make sure they get off their medical appointments, so it was a lot of keeping track of them and it was a lot of—sometimes they were disgruntled because they wanted to do the language and they weren't going to be able to do it. And it was also my first time of dealing, by the way, with all the different services, because the Defense Language Institute, you get everyone. Now, I think they're split out a bit into the different services, they have different barracks. But then, it was totally integrated. So I had seamen and airmen in my barracks at the same time. But you deal with the ones that were having—were being kicked out of the school or having the breakdowns pretty much just by making sure they got some attention, that someone was keeping track of them. And we'd have one or two that people were actually assigned to go check on them occasionally to make sure they were okay and that kind of stuff. It was something that at the beginning of something that I learned much later that the proper name of it probably is what's called "EO leadership," which is Eyes On—Eyes On leadership, which means you people get to know you and get to see you and they know that they can come to you, so.

COHEN: Did any of them get to rehabilitated so that they could return to the language school, or, you know, like—

ARVIDSON: —no, usually by the time they came with me, that it was pretty much determined they weren't going to be able to continue. I mean, I did have some that would be put back several times in the school and things like that, that we kept—were able to keep around. But, by the time they were in my one little wing, I had an entire one third of the floor. And part of it was this one little wing. It was pretty obvious they weren't going to be going back to school. But like I said, sometimes they could be put into a different job. It was just the stress of the language situation that was causing them problems.

COHEN: Were a lot of the people under your command older than you, like, I think you mentioned many of them had been college graduates?

ARVIDSON: Almost all of them are older than me and I—even then, don't particularly look my age, I'm sixty-six, and even then I looked like a kid, so yeah, a lot of them were. Although, I didn't particularly take that into account, other than, you know, maybe being able to pull out of their experiences, but as a general rule, the difference in ages didn't make a difference.

COHEN: Did you like being in command?

ARVIDSON: I like—the best part about it is I got a room all to myself. I was on the third floor of the barracks overlooking Monterey Harbor. It was the second-best view I've ever had in the military, so.

COHEN: Oh my. So while you and the others were at language school, was there still, like, I don't know how to put it, like disciplinary things like marches and trainings...

ARVIDSON: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we had formations every week. We had—yeah, for that matter it was my first experience with the Navy occurred at Defense Language Institute, because, like I said, we had integrated platoons and we were out doing a gardening detail and I heard someone yelling and I turned around just in time to see one of my seamen punch one of my corporals. So, we ended up at the Naval Postgraduate School, what they call a "captain's mast," which is bringing the sailor up on charges for being undisciplined, and that sailor got kicked out of the language school. So.

COHEN: During this time, did you do any work at all with signals like was...?

ARVIDSON: No. No, nothing at all, other than learning military terminology and things like that. No, nothing at all.

COHEN: Is there something else that you would like to add about this time period or would you like to...?

ARVIDSON: Well, that was one of the first times I was on what's called an "open post." So Monterey, at that time, did not have any gates that were closed. So you get in and out and I had my own car at that point. So being in Monterey is about an hour south of San Francisco. So I did a lot of traveling there throughout the whole Napa Valley area, so that was fun. Oh, and then heading off to Germany. Actually, the Germany story is kind of interesting because I—no, I'm sorry, thinking of a different story. Actually, I was sent off to Germany not knowing where I was going to. I knew I was going to Augsburg because it's only one of the few places that they had field stations for intelligence. And I thought I was going to Augsburg and then they came back, and they said, "No, you're going to Eckstein." And I said, "Well, what's Eckstein?" And they said, "We'll tell you when you get there." And I got—when I got to Augsburg, originally, they said, "Don't unpack because you're only going to be here for four days to process in and then we're going to put you on a train." And they did, they took us down to Munich and put us on a Czech national train that went to the—went to the Czech—into Czechoslovakia. And they said, "Don't fall asleep because you get off the stop

before the border. If you fall asleep and you stop at the border, they will arrest you." And mind you, we were traveling in military uniform at the time, so it was pretty obvious who we were. Probably they were rather amused by us, because the one thing that we could do on the Czech train, my friend, was not that comfortable with it, but I was because when the lady came around asking if we wanted food, I spoke to her in Czech. And we got extra good treatment because we actually spoke their language, so. But yeah, then they put us on a train, you got off, they left us off in a town called Furth im Wald and there was supposed to be someone there waiting for us. There wasn't. Eventually we managed to—I had—before I had left Monterey, I had asked one of my friends, I said, "Can you teach me a few things in German?" I need to know how to count. I need to know how to tell time. I need to know directions. And I need to know how to ask how do you get to the bathroom? And that came in useful when we were in Furth im Wald. But then we were able, also, to get on the phone and call down to the base and it took them, well, probably about another hour to send someone up to get us to bring us back, so.

COHEN: Mary, who were you with at the time? Was it one person? A few people...?

ARVIDSON: Ah, It was one person, my friend Joanie Simmons or Joanie Fisher, now. Actually, it was Joanie Fisher at the time. She had gotten married at Defense Language Institute. But she was a—had been one of my roommates going through training in Fort Devens and then continued—was in my class—was a classmate over at Monterey.

COHEN: So they came to pick you up and they brought you to Eckstein?

ARVIDSON: They brought us out to a little town called Rimbach, which is at the base of the hill called Eckstein, which is actually a peak on a mountain called Hohenbogen. And the town itself is one of those ones that is small enough that we used to make a joke that the only road in town ended in a tree, but a very, very small town, but it had a decent amount of Americans in it because of the base up there. There were about one hundred of us, I guess, hundred-and-something. The company headquarters was run out of a storefront, which is kind of an interesting thing, and then back up behind the storefront, there was a kind of like a garage thing that was there, our snack bar, and that was all of the American in the entire place, pretty much, so. And it was in Rimbach itself, most of the people there did not speak English. By self-defense, those of us that do languages a little bit learned German pretty quickly. But the kids in Germany, at

that time, were either required to take French or English. So most of them took English. So the kids and us got into an agreement where we would speak German to them, and they would correct our German and they would speak English to us and we would correct their English. So, but being in a small town was neat because everyone was always, "Grüß Gott," [good day] so you're saying good morning to everyone and it was impolite to not say good morning and to greet people. So, you got to know the locals. We were—I was first in—staying in what they call "pensión," which is a little hotel, for just a short time until they figured out a place for three of us to rent an apartment. And I rented an apartment in a house that was a three bedroom, it was actually one floor of the house. The landlord had the basement. We had the first floor and the landlord was a German gentleman by the name of Herr Perlinger, Mr. Perlinger. And Mr. Prelinger was about ninety-five going on a Hundred and forty-three. Had fought Americans in both World Wars and thought we were terrific. He loved Americans. He could speak—could not speak a lick of English, at all, even though he had had American tenants forever. So, I learned things like—he couldn't understand how come Americans took so many showers. So in the middle of the shower, he'd turned the hot water off on us. And my roommate said, "Look at me," and I'd have to go down and say, you know, "Herr Perlinger, das Wasser ist kalt," and trying to see if I can get him to turn the water back on again, never worked. Never worked. But he was funny, he had us come down to his apartment to watch the Olympics in '76. And every time a German beat an American, he'd make sure that we knew it, so. He was an interesting old man. We had rations when we were there, so things were rationed like the alcohol, coffee, cigarettes. Those were three things that were favorites of Herr Perlinger. So when we left, I got a bunch of my friends to gather all their ration cards together, and we left him with like about twenty pounds of American coffee, some whiskey and a bunch of cigars.

COHEN: [laughs] Well-supplied.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, exactly.

COHEN: So how would you get from his home to Eckstein, you know, on a daily basis?

ARVIDSON: On a daily basis, the bus would go up the hill and in order to get down to the bus, we had to walk down a hill, as we lived above the town, so we would walk down the hill. It was about a ten-fifteen minute walk, walking down the hill and down into town. And then we'd get the bus in front of the company headquarters and

then that would take us up the hill to two Eckstein, up to the border site up there. And it was interesting. It wasn't so bad during the very short summer, but during the deep part of the winter, that was quite an interesting drive.

COHEN: It's true, like it must be very icy and...?

ARVIDSON: We used to have—some of the people used to—they would take their skis with them on a bus going up, bus or truck, depending on how many people we had going up there. They would take their skis with them and they'd ski back down in that way, when they got done with their shift.

COHEN: Oh, my goodness. It sounds like the conditions on Eckstein, as well, were very rough, you know, at some point there wasn't even running water or indoor plumbing.

ARVIDSON: It had just come in, just before I got there. They had actually put running water in and actually putting in the running water, when you read the the history on Eckstein, they talk about the "L'affaire Vite"—

COHEN: —yes...

ARVIDSON: Which originally and when I was there, all the production was done in a Quonset hut, so a metal hut in one of them round ones that had all the interception and the production was done in those in that hut. And then there was this kind of like German chalet off to one side— [I need to cough again.]

COHEN: Sure.

ARVIDSON: Sorry, a lot of talking—Like a little German chalet off to one side, which is where the maintenance guys for the microwave tower lived in, especially after we closed operations there. But the running water was in that that building. So in order to go to the bathroom, for instance, you had to go outside and go across to the building to go to the bathroom, so you made sure you didn't have to do that too often during the day. Because depending upon the time of year, it was either absolutely beautiful and lovely and green and birds and everything, like I said, that was really short. That would be like from April to maybe end of August, beginning of September, and then the snow would start because we were way up on top of the hill. And by the time you got to the middle of the winter, we had paths dug in between the different buildings and you would have eight to ten feet of snow piled on either side of these, so it was literally—not a tunnel because it wasn't a covering—and what really got to be fun is when it snowed

and you had to shovel, you would have to throw that snow up over the top, so it was quite interesting. When the weather was nice, it was great, there was a Czech border tower, guard tower right across from us, and we used to go out in middle of the day and we'd wave to the guys over there and then they wave back to us and then they look around to make sure their officers weren't watching them. So it was kinda fun.

COHEN: What was your MOS at the time? Were you a signals analyst working in the Quonset hut there? What was going on, in terms of your...?

ARVIDSON: I was a signals analyst, although what's really kind of strange and truly Army-type is that they pretty much never had me use the language again after having me spend a year out in Monterey. I only used it, you know, four or five times, quite honestly, afterwards, and that was to try and decipher a name or something like that. Or I used to go and sit in—and because, by then, we weren't—we were getting Morse code stuff, but not a lot of it. But we were actually getting actual voice transmissions because we were so close to the Czechs. So I would occasionally go in and sit down and put the headphones on and listen to the radio transmissions and be able to play with my Czech just a little bit.

COHEN: So this was, they were speaking directly in Czech, it wasn't encoded in any fashion?

ARVIDSON: Right, right. Yeah, and when they'd get into an exercise or something like that, it got to be quite an exciting time because you'd have a lot of people that would be talking out on the different radio frequencies and picking up a lot of stuff. And we'd have a lot of work to do when that happened.

COHEN: I think you also had written that you were involved in translating documents, so I was wondering how these documents were obtained and what was the nature of them?

ARVIDSON: Some of it was just something as simple as newspapers and things like that. I don't know how a lot of them were obtained, they would just give them to us and we would go with that.

COHEN: And what was it like—what was it like, like it sounds like there was a small group at Eckstein, so how many were you? Was it—how was it being a woman on the base and so on?

ARVIDSON: That one wasn't a big problem, and for that matter, the guys were very protective of us and tried to make sure that—now none of us had any cars there, you know, some of the guys had cars. But I don't think any of the females had cars, to tell you the truth, and so—but—and a lot of them lived out of town. They didn't necessarily live in the Rimbach, they might live in a town over from where we were at. So they, like I said, were very protective of us. I don't know that it really made a big difference, then. You would get an occasional guy who was a jerk, but the other guys would usually try and shut them down, because one of the reasons being is that, like I said, it was small. It was, like I said, about a hundred and twenty people, I want to say, working at the time when I was there and the shifts were only like fourteen people. So you go up the bus, you know, go up the hill with fourteen people, and it was you and the thirteen others up there and we'd stop before we went up to—one of us would usually run over to the local grocery store and get a big thing of brown bread and some fresh butter and some salami and bring it up the hill and we'd eat off of that all night long.

COHEN: Come to think of it, how was food organized or was that being taken care of at the place where you stayed?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, they had food provided it wasn't particularly good, we much preferred eating out in town. So once we got out—and that was only when we were up on the hill. But when we were down in town, you were on your own. Like I said, there was a snack bar there or several restaurants actually in town. It was one of the advantages and one of the reasons why they shut the thing down was that while we were out there, we were earning our basic pay plus overseas allowance, plus housing, housing, not available, rations, rations not available. So we were earning about double what we normally would have earned while we were on the border site, although, it was a bit—you were definitely cut off from things. If you wanted to get anything really American or even if you, let's say you wanted to get furniture for your apartment, you could get it, but you had to find someone with a truck and you had to convince them to drive the truck over to the Grafenwöhr to get some furniture out of the depot out there, so.

COHEN: So when you mention, like, you know, waving at the Czech soldiers, or they were waving furtively, but did you feel in any way concerned that you're so—that you're right at the border area?

ARVIDSON: Absolutely. The Cold War was... you know the Cold War, like I said, unless you were actually in it, you really didn't have a real appreciation for the amount of

tension that was caused by the Cold War. I mean, I have friends that were stationed in Berlin, which was really one of the worst places to be stationed. They had a thing called the "Berlin syndrome," where they would have people, again, have nervous breakdowns just from the amount of tension that they had in the area and even out in the border site that we were at, we always carried around this little card with us that had the Soviet military liaison information on it and how to spot their cars and things like that because they would come and drive around the area. And we were in a protected area, it was not supposed to have Soviet military liaisons in there, but they would drive around and we'd spot them and we'd let the command know that we had spotted them and that kind of stuff. But, yeah, it was a real concern, I mean, if you think about it, it was only five years past when they did the invasion and there was a concern that the—occasionally, that the Czechs might come over, although not—I don't think we worried as much about Czechs as others. Tito [Josip Broz Tito] kept trying to die on us and figuring that when he did pass that the whole area would probably get into a major conflict was a possibility, so. That was something we were always kind of aware of, for that matter, that kept us from going to the '76 Innsbruck [Winter] Olympics. We were all ready to go and then Tito did his, "Ah I think I'm going to die" routines and they canceled everyone's leave. We ended up staying.

COHEN: I think you'd mentioned earlier that this was the point where you certified to shoot. Was this—

ARVIDSON: Mm-hm, yeah. Yeah, they took us off to Grafenwöhr. Because you were on the border site, they said that you had to have—had to be weapons qualified. So they took us over to Grafenwöhr and they taught us how to shoot properly and I ended up getting a sharpshooter, which is kind of fun. And then we got an opportunity to go out and shoot with the German army. And I got a sharpshooter for the German army and actually —was actually able to wear that on my Army uniform, which is kind of a neat thing to do.

COHEN: That's impressive.

ARVIDSON: It's a big sucker, too. It's kind of cool, so.

COHEN: What did it look like?

ARVIDSON: It was a big oval-thing and it had an aiguillette that went around and attached to the back here. So it had a cord that went around. Yeah, it was a huge thing. It was kind of neat.

COHEN: Well, what was your winter uniform like when you were there?

ARVIDSON: It's one of the reasons why when we went out, I told you sometimes when we'd want—if we needed to go and get something big and go—or perhaps go to the post exchange, we would head off to Grafenwöhr. Well, in Grafenwöhr, we weren't allowed to wear our jackets into the—into the exchange because we had the winter uniforms. So we had the big puffy white uniforms, and we have what we refer to as "Mickey Mouse boots," that—the big white ones that, you know, the typical snow patrol uniforms, is essentially what we wore, heavy... and quite honestly, we wore the heavy stuff inside the Quonset hut because it wasn't that well-heated. The only time you got proper heat in that place was when you were the one that was lucky enough to be doing the burn detail, that you were burning all the day's paperwork, so.

COHEN: [laughs] Oh boy.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: So, do you want to talk about how they made the decision to more or less close the base and what happens to you..?

ARVIDSON: Yeah... what happened with the base was—and it's, you know, now—then it was like, "Ugh, what are you doing?" Now, it makes sense to me, as maybe more of an adult, that we really were very expensive. It was a very expensive operation that could be done otherwise because all we were doing was interception and we didn't really need to be on the border there to do the interception anymore, especially once they came up with microwaves and things like that. So they went in and they built a microwave tower up on top of Eckstein, and then the French and the German were also up there. They were in their own towers, too. And then what they did was they moved operations to Augsburg, like, which, like I said, was about a half an hour north of Munich. Beautiful town. Beautiful old, old, old German town and put us in a base called Grafenwöhr. And Grafenwöhr is an old airfield outside of Augsburg and it was—Augsburg had, during World War II, Augsburg had the airfield on one side of the town and on the other side of town, they had a Messerschmidt factory, and they had tunnels going up underneath so they would take pieces of the planes and then assemble them over in the airfield. But Grafenwöhr was the airfield that Rudolf Hess took off from when he flew to England. And they had left the runway there with radio towers right in the middle of it and big Xs across the runway, so no one tried to land on it, but... so even the bases that we were at had a lot of history. Sheridan

Kaserne, which was where I was berthed at, was an old SS—the barracks I was in was an old SS barracks and it—when you thought about the history of those barracks, it was kind of interesting. One of our people had said they couldn't understand how come one of the buildings had an elevator. So we were talking to some of the locals, and they said, "Oh, yeah that used to be a hospital." It had an elevator so they can move the patients around. But Germany was awesome, especially once we got into Augsburg because there was a lot more opportunity to go different places once we got into Augsburg. They do a neat thing in Germany called the Volksmarsch [people's march] and almost every weeks, in any area, you can find some place over the weekend where they're doing a—it can be run or a walk or whatever you feel like doing—and it's 5K, 10K, 20K, are the usually the three different ones they have. And the recreation department would sponsor busses to go after the Volks Marches and inevitably we would have tons of Americans out doing it. And you got to see the countryside and you got to see the different towns and it was just phenomenal. It was a great place to be stationed.

COHEN: It sounds beautiful.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: Were you living that whole time during—what had been the former SS barracks or were you living elsewhere?

ARVIDSON: Mm-hm, I was living in the barracks there, and for that matter, once again, shortly after I got there, I got called into the captain's office and he looked at me and he said, "I hear a rumor about you." I said, "What's the rumor?" He says, "You're—you've been a barracks sergeant." I said, "Yes." He says, "And you are again."

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: So, like I said, the one advantage of that is I got a room to myself. So that was a good thing, so.

COHEN: So what were your responsibilities as a barrack stationed [sergeant] in Augsburg, or nearby, versus the time when you were a barracks sergeant in Monterrey?

ARVIDSON: People who were stationed in Germany can get into a lot more trouble than the people who were stationed in Monterey. Uhm, I learned that pretty quickly, just because it was a lot more fun to go out and drink German beer and run around

towns and irritate the locals. But a lot of it was just making sure the barracks were maintained, making sure people got to their proper duty stations, taking care of any issues the people had. So it was—it wasn't that difficult, and like I said, it was kind of nice having my own room, so.

COHEN: So, you know—

ARVIDSON: —first time I'd ever had rooms to myself. I never—when I grew up, I never had my own room. So, the Army was the first one who gave me my own room.

COHEN: [laughs] Often a reversal of many people, right?

ARVIDSON: Yep.

COHEN: Uhm, you know, there are some questions that I meant to ask you about Eckstein, and I'd forgotten. So, I was wondering if you were there during the Yom Kippur War, because I understood that because it was so close to—

ARVIDSON: Right afterwards. Yeah, right afterwards and during the Yom Kippur War I was in Monterey.

COHEN: Okay.

ARVIDSON: But I mean, there were a lot of people who were there who had gone through that, and of course, all operations, once again, ramped up considerably when that was occurring, so

COHEN: Okay, that's right, because it's my understanding that the Soviets were sending equipment through—to Arab countries—

ARVIDSON: —through Prague.

COHEN: From Prague, yeah.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: And also, when you were, you know, collecting information from signals, like, to who would you communicate, or to which body would you report it upward?

ARVIDSON: We sent it on to wherever the Army wanted it to go, and they took care of it from there, so it went, you know, it went to the Army command in Germany, was one of the places we went to so that they could see what was going on. They had different offices that would take the raw analysis that we had done and

fit it into whatever puzzle pieces were out there and that's what I always equated intelligence to, is that it's like building a great big puzzle and you try to find as many pieces as you can until you can finally look at it and go, "Oh, that's a cat." And sometimes you get a puzzle piece, but hey, that puzzle doesn't belong to that puzzle. So it's got to go off to the side, but it takes you a while to figure out that that's—belongs to something different. So it's a—but it would go nationally. They would keep a—they kept track of a database of, like, the order of battle for the Czech units and we would feed into that. And then, uhm, any time that we'd get into like an exercise or something like that, we'd always have people from the Army that could be contacting us and, you know, okay, "What's going on here? What are they doing here?" "Did they just lose a tank?" "Yes, they just lost a tank."

COHEN: Okay, like sort of reporting or confirming the situation. So, I assume it was probably—I assume that if there was a database, there was a computer or computers at the station...?

ARVIDSON: Not so much with that... uhm, they had databases, not necessarily us. We were pretty much paper. The first time I ran into a computer with the military was when we went into Augsburg. And then, it was not so much the data collection, I mean I'm—and it's strangely enough, I'm still one of those people that keeps index cards about things, but not so much the data collection on the computer, but the messaging. Some messages went back and forth on computer.

COHEN: Oh, I see.

ARVIDSON: And it was a basic computer, believe me.

COHEN: Would this have been like the predecessor of the Internet, like the ARPANET or something like that?

ARVIDSON: Yeah. It is.

COHEN: Well, that's neat.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, we learned that you had to type all your messages in an IBM Selectric machine with the little ball.

COHEN: That's right, that's right. Uhm, did you find the work, like, intellectually challenging? Like you said, it was like a puzzle, like, did you enjoy it? Like, did you find it tedious? What were your thoughts about it?

ARVIDSON: No, I loved it, quite honestly, especially when something would happen that you were able to find a piece of that puzzle and stick it in where it needed to be. We would—in the shot that I was in, in Augsburg, it was not only the Czechs, but we had all the different countries, so we would have the Czechs and Poles and the Hungarians, that have a desk, and actually not even a desk, but a whole section. We each had a section of the room and especially when a joint operation, so joint exercises would go on, we'd do a lot of talking in between each other and getting things going back and forth there. Or sometimes, for instance, you would have one of the the Czech officers that would go over to Poland for a visit, and we'd, you know, tell the Poles about what—a little bit about the guy before he headed over there and then they'd report back to us on what he did...Uhm, so it was a lot of cooperation and it, once again, we were in a situation where it wasn't just Army. All services were represented there, and for that matter, different countries, too. We had Brits—were in our operation section too, which caused some rather nasty rugby games, but we won't talk about that.

COHEN: [laughs] So it all came out either in baseball or rugby.

ARVIDSON: You could always tell the day after a rugby game because you'd have a half the place come in with gym shoes on rather than their boots because they couldn't—they'd been kneed in the shins so often that they couldn't put boots on for that—for a couple days.

COHEN: [laughs] Were you an avid sports player yourself?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, uhm, I was in the what we referred to as the "combat softball league." It was kind of like a full-contact softball league. You guaranteed that someone was gonna get hurt during the game. You didn't so much stop at the base as that you ran right through the whoever was defending that base.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: It was a great league. We had a great time playing it, so.

COHEN: You know, that article that I'd sent you on Eckstein, they talked about the—what did he call it? The "German American Friendship Festival," basically a beer festival...

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: Were you there at the time or what was it like?

ARVIDSON: I don't actually remember attending it, and chances are good that I was one of the ones that got put on duty through that day because I didn't—well, I did drink, but I had decided not to, so I did—and I don't like beer. So, there's only one beer that I've ever found that I like. So those that didn't drink or something like that were the ones that ended up on duty during the festival. But, even now, quite honestly, there's a Facebook group of people who were assigned to Rimbach and we still keep in touch. Occasionally, I even see a name that I remember. They look a heck of a lot older than they did when they when I knew them. But there are some of them that still live out in the area and they'll keep us apprised as to any of the festivals going on or things like that, so. It's kinda neat.

COHEN: It's kinda neat that you still have contact, yeah.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: The other thing I was wondering before, as you mentioned, when you were in Augsburg, you were part of a joint group, both in terms of the different, you know, Warsaw Pact countries and also working with with the Brits. But I think you'd mentioned before that at Eckstein there was also a French tower and, I forget, another allied...

ARVIDSON: German. It was a French-German tower, both up there.

COHEN: Both there? So had there been cooperative work there as well? Or had you worked with the French and Germans when you were in Augsburg, in addition to the Brits?

ARVIDSON: Uhm, the French not in Augsburg. The Germans occasionally, but not very much, mostly it was with the Brits. And we didn't do a whole lot of work-type work with the Germans and the French in Rimbach, but we—they were always invited to our social affairs and they would occasionally bring us some really good food, that kind of stuff. So we were friendly with each other, all the way through. And if we ever ran into a huge German problem, usually one of the German guys would knew how to solve it, so.

COHEN: Yeah, [INAUDIBLE]. So I was reading that a prominent feature on Augsburg was the, so to speak, "the elephant cage," that was a circular array of antenna for

radio direction, finding high priority targets. Did you have any—like did you work at all with the direction finding as well?

ARVIDSON: I didn't work with that kind of—the actual interception or anything like that. That was out in Grafenwöhr. So that was out in the base where I was—we had our production area, where the old airfield used to be, was used as an antenna field and it was a similar antenna field to what we had at Vint Hill Farms in Virginia, when I was stationed there. But that would be used for some of the interception. We didn't usually get the interceptions from there. We got the interception from the microwave tower up on Hohenbogen.

COHEN: Okay. Were you part—were you still there when, if I understood correctly, the ASA, the American Security Agents got—Agency, got subsumed by INSCOM, the Intelligence Security Command?

ARVIDSON: No, they did that about six months after I left, which made me rather happy because I kind of like being in the ASA, something different. Whereas, when it went into INSCOM it just became part of military intelligence.

COHEN: I see. Yeah. Well, it's probably a silly question, but I'll ask you nonetheless, I mean, you'd mentioned that taking the train to Czechoslovakia in your uniform would mean you were arrested, but was there any occasion that you were permitted to go, like, was there any...?

ARVIDSON: Oh, could I go to Czechoslovakia?

COHEN: Yeah... like either diplomatic or otherwise?

ARVIDSON: Absolutely not. Because of the level of clearance that I had, I was completely forbidden from crossing the Czech border, and for that matter, even if I went out of Germany and the one time I went down to Austria and places like that, and when I went to England, we had to notify them ahead of time that we were leaving the country. They'd like to keep close track of us, so. Understandably.

COHEN: Did you have a chance to do a lot of travel around Europe?

ARVIDSON: A lot of travel around Germany. Now, one of the nice things about Europe is they have the world's most efficient train system, I mean the conductor—or the engineers are fined if they show up too early or too late. So they're always on time and they're very clean and then they go a little bit of everywhere. So I did a

lot of—a lot of traveling around the middle part of Germany, especially going out to different festivals and things like that, going to the Christkindlmarkt [Christmas market], that kind of stuff. Got down to the southern part of Germany and into the northern part of Austria, right before I left, and then took one trip up to England while I was there.

COHEN: Well, did you buy a lot of souvenirs for your friends?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, you remember me telling you that I was earning double pay when I was out on the border site? That got spent on souvenirs from my family.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: One of the best parts about being out on the border site is because we got free—essentially unlimited shipping of household goods back to our home for the next two moves. Well, my second move was when I got out of active duty and came home. So, when I came home, there were thirteen boxes of household goods that appeared on my dad's front room. And it probably took me about a month and a half to get through 'em all.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: I had a good time. [laughs]

COHEN: It was a good time... [laughs]

ARVIDSON: Yes.

COHEN: Yeah.

ARVIDSON: I was discharged off of active duty. I stayed on Army Reserves, but I was discharged from active duty.

COHEN: Oh, okay. So I don't think I realized you were in the Army Reserves as well, so you returned to Chicago...

ARVIDSON: They had a one-year "try it and see if you like it" Army Reserve Program, so you only had to sign up for one year. I tried it. I hated it. I got out.

COHEN: Why did you hate it?

ARVIDSON: Ah, the active duty, your two weeks active duty was done up in Camp Ripley, Minnesota in the middle of the summer, which was very hot, and the mosquitoes have landing lights.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: And there's a lot of poison ivy up there, which I found, unfortunately.

COHEN: [laughs] Was it also signals analyst...?

ARVIDSON: It was and it was the only time of the year that we actually got to do that work and that was the other thing that frustrated me. I was in what was called the 314th ASA [Army Security Agency] Battalion out at O'Hare Airport and we did not have a secure location to work in. And when you've got an intelligence person, having a secure location to work in is kind of important? So I spent most of my time learning how to drive a two-and-a-half-ton truck, cleaning M-16s and eventually being a clerk typist because they all of a sudden realized that you had to know how to type in order to be an intelligence specialist, so...

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: Just for typing, but it gave me something to do, so that was kind of nice, but because there wasn't any secure location, it was very frustrating to only be able to do your job two weeks out of the year.

COHEN: Yeah. Okay. So when you went back home, did you go back to school?

ARVIDSON: I did. I did, I went to Oakton Community College at that point, spent two years there and then did my last two years again at the University of Illinois at Chicago and graduated with a law enforcement degree. And that, and several dollars, will get you a buck of coffee—a cup of coffee at Starbucks. Uhm, it did come in useful later on in life, but not originally.

COHEN: What had you begun to study before you enlisted?

ARVIDSON: I was going to be an English teacher. That's what mom was, so I was going to be an English teacher.

COHEN: Yeah... What made you choose law enforcement?

ARVIDSON: Uhm, I wanted to be a police officer, didn't end up being a police officer, but I wanted to be one. Unfortunately, my vision is not good enough, at least at the

time. Now, it's pretty much, a lot more open than it was originally, but my vision would knock me out of about 80 percent of the department's requirements, so.

COHEN: So do you feel that having been in the Army, that it did indeed mature you?

ARVIDSON: Oh, yeah. Very much so. By the time I came back, I was much more confident with dealing with people, especially, and handling situations. I wouldn't freak out when a situation would occur and... You know, you sit back, you look at it, you figure out what's going on, and then you move forward with whatever the solution is.

COHEN: How did your family react to you coming home?

ARVIDSON: My dad was okay with it, thank God, because I ended up living with him for a while. By the time I got back, the majority of the family had moved out of the house, gotten married or whatever. It was no big difference other than the fact that—that I was back, and I had a roommate again. So, me and my sister shared a room.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: I drove her crazy, but, that's alright. She was used to that.

COHEN: So did you feel any, I don't know what to call it, any period of readjustment going back to the civilian life and being back in the States?

ARVIDSON: I think the biggest readjustment was having to decide what kind of clothes you wanted to wear every day. Uhm, not so much really anything else, because, I mean, I was going back in a totally different situation. Although I will admit that my view on things... For instance, when I first went into University of Illinois, I had to go down to sign up for classes and there was a line to sign up for classes that went literally all the way around the building. And I'm standing in the line and everyone around me who was considerably younger than me was like, "I can't believe this line, this is terrible. This is just all messed up." And I'm like, I've been standing in line for the last four years, I don't care. I just stand in line. I was a lot more patient than they were. Although I was impatient with them, sometimes, that when they would get—like they didn't give the attention to an assignment that I thought they ought to or something like that, I was more impatient with the younger ones, and you have to step back and go, "okay, it's all right. They're just getting there. They'll get there fine."

COHEN: Yeah, I guess especially the ones at Oakton, that would have been—that would have come right after high school and...

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: So would you like to talk about your career in public safety? Is that the first civilian job...?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, that was—that was where it started. I actually started when I was in college. I was looking for a job and I—just to be able to have a little bit of money on the side there—and because I didn't have to pay for college because I had the GI Bill to pay for college and my grandfather paid for my books, so I didn't have to worry about that. But I definitely still needed some money. So I went out looking for a job and eventually ended up at Sears up in Golf Mill and I was working in the automotive department. And the—I was cashier for the service portion of the automotive department and the manager of the security department came out one day and he said, "I hear that you might be a military veteran." I said, "Yeah. "How'd you like to be security?" I said, "Well that sounds kind of interesting..." So I ended up working for the security department at Sears for thirteen years, while I was going to college and then afterwards, so... And even when I got—actually got into law enforcement, because what happened was that through the security department, I got to know a lot of the police officers in the area and one of the captains from the police department came out and said, "hey, you know, we've got this job going up right now for a community service officer, why don't you put in for it?" So I did. And another one had said, "You know, we also have jobs out there for reserve police officers." So it's—to me that's one of the world's silliest volunteer jobs or any job that you run the risk of getting shot at and as a volunteer job, it's kind of crazy. But it sounded neat and I—so I did that, too. So I was doing both of those, I was working for the Park Ridge Police Department and the Niles Police Department, both. I was a community service officer for Park Ridge and then auxiliary police officer for the Niles.

COHEN: And I think you'd written that you were also a dispatch officer and an IT specialist for a 911 call center?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, well, eventually, the Des Plaines—I'm sorry, let's try this again. Eventually, the Park Ridge Police and Fire Dispatch combined with Des Plaines into what was called the Northwest Municipal Emergency Communications Center. Northwest Emergency Communications Center, and they needed some of the dispatchers to

move over. I had been a fill in dispatcher for Park Ridge and they needed someone that was willing to do twelve-hour shifts. And most of the dispatchers decided they didn't want to do that. So I went over as an extra person to help do the shifts. And then while I was there, they were putting in a computer-aided dispatch system and they needed someone to build the database. And I had a little bit of computer familiarity between the military stuff and what I learned in college and ended up building the database for the entire area to be able to dispatch police and fire calls, which kept me busy for the better part of two years, and then from there moved on to being a dispatcher. And I was a dispatcher throughout that whole time, too. I was kind of building the 911 system on the side and we had started up with the 911 system, I was just expanding it. So I was making sure all the streets were in correctly and putting in businesses and putting in new streets and putting in street ranges, number ranges and stuff. So I was doing that, and then eventually I got moved into doing the IT work for the 911 center because they needed someone that could actually just work on the computers. And it was pretty basic IT work, so it wasn't too bad. It got a lot more complicated towards the end, but in the beginning, it was pretty simple.

COHEN: Do you think that having been in the Army, it helped you with your civilian career?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, absolutely. It gives you the ability to sort things out a little bit, keep things in places they needed to be. Also, like in the dispatch area, I think because of the experience I had through the Army leadership opportunities that I got, I could talk to people better than some people can. And when I worked for—I eventually switched from the Nile Police to the Park Ridge Police and when I worked, especially on Saturday nights, quite often they'd send me over on a domestic call. Some people would be having problems, husband and wife or whatever, because I'm five foot five, female and non-threatening and I can talk pretty good. So I would be over there helping out. They needed it. I hate domestic calls.

COHEN: Yeah... How would you lower the tension?

ARVIDSON: One way, and we use the—we actually use the trick in 911 too, is that you talk softer. When you talk softer, people have to listen. So that was a trick that we learned that you never, never raise your voice, because if you raise your voice, they're going to raise their voice. So if you start talking softer, then people actually have to start listening to what you're saying. And for some reason, I

could usually manage to find the words that—I would either toss some humor into it or get them thinking about something else than what they were trying to fixate on, so.

COHEN: Oh. What would you try to get them to think about as a diversion?

ARVIDSON: It could be something as simple as talking to a woman who was all upset and beginning to get to the point where they're sputtering and they're—they're just not making any sense at all and looking over and going, "that's a really cool plant. What kind of plant is that?" And now their attention goes somewhere else and they can relax for just a little bit.

COHEN: Yeah. Well, I don't know how to proceed. Would you like to talk more about your non-military career or would you like to go ahead and look at your time in the Naval Reserves from 1988 to 2012?

ARVIDSON: I don't know if there's a whole lot to talk about on the civilian side.

COHEN: Okay.

ARVIDSON: And it all intermixes with the—with the Navy stuff, especially towards the end.

COHEN: Okay, well, I think, like a decade passes from the time you were discharged from the Army, and I think you explained now that you'd done the one year of the Army Reserves, but then about close to ten years later, you joined the US Naval Reserves. So I guess the question is—is why?

ARVIDSON: As part of being a community service officer, I was delivering the mail to one of the fire stations and one of the lieutenants in the fire station, who was also a lieutenant commander with the Navy Reserve Intelligence at Glenview Naval Air Station, and as I was delivering the mail, Bernie said, "You know, hey, didn't you used to be in the military?" I said, "Yeah." "You ever think about going back in again?" "Yeah. Yeah, I kind of miss it sometimes." 'What you'd do?" I said, "intelligence." And the next thing I knew, I was standing there with my hand in the air again. So, it was—I maintain that it's the third best solution—best decision I ever made. The first one I ever made was joining the Nav—joining the Army, originally. The second one was getting out of the Army when I did so that I could go back to school. And the third one was joining the Navy Reserves.

COHEN: Yeah... So, in the Navy Reserves, I think you were assigned for many years at Glenview Naval Air Station before they closed in '95, but you had—I think you

worked with two different groups. First, the Fleet Intelligence Reserve Support Team Atlantic, the "FIRST—" I don't know how to pronounce it, "—EURLANT?" [laughs] I don't...

ARVIDSON: It's "FIRST-EUR-LANT."

COHEN: FIRSTEURLANT...

ARVIDSON: FIRST. EUR. LANT. Yeah...

COHEN: FIRSTEURLANT... ahm—

ARVIDSON: —Those are—yeah... And then the Office of Naval Intelligence, those are the two that I dealt with were intelligence based there. And then I was also the intelligence specialist for VP-90, which is a P3 squadron, an airborne squadron that was stationed at Great Lakes—or stationed at Glenview.

COHEN: Was this a squadron of like Neptunes or Orions or—or...

ARVIDSON: Orions. Yeah, it was Orion. The P-3s are Orions.

COHEN: Oh, okay. Okay. Well, so I guess, what was the nature of your work when you were assigned to intelligence for these two different groups?

ARVIDSON: Uhm, with the FIRSTEURLANT, what we did there was—we did photo interpretation generally of either ports or—it's called "lines of communications—" supports, roads, airports, things like that. So we would look at pictures that were taken and try to figure out what kind of facilities they had within the whole operation there. When I was Office of Naval Intelligence, that was kind of a neat job because ah... Pictures are taken of every ship that goes through the Panama Canal, and they need to track who it is that's going through and if they've had any changes in their structure or if you can tell what's being carried in ships that are civilian type ships. So we would do all the identification on all the ships that would go through the Panama Canal.

COHEN: How did you learn photo analysis?

ARVIDSON: Part of that was from my original training camp at Fort Devens, but of course, that was a long time before. And so what you did, there was a lot of fun on the job training programs there. A lot of times they were looking for different things. Sometimes people were looking for, like I said, what kind of facilities they had, they might be looking for—trying to find a place near an embassy where you

could land a helicopter or something like that. And that was the kind of thing that we looked for.

COHEN: So would they show you visually, the thing to look out for when observing photos?

ARVIDSON: They'd—we'd have guides on different kind of equipment. For instance, let's say on a port. So what kind of cranes are set up on a port or the keys, the piers. What kind of facilities they had on the piers...? What the width of a particular pier was or if we could figure it out, how deep the depth was and that kind of stuff by telling by which ships came in, you'd figure out what depth it was.

COHEN: Were you doing this with both the FIRSTEURLANT as well as with the VP-90, the patrol squadron?

ARVIDSON: No, the VP-90 was being the intelligence person for the squadron. So, for instance, VP-90, their—talk about an improvement of your two-week active duty. Their active duty was done on Okinawa. So we went to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa.

COHEN: Oh...

ARVIDSON: As a VP squadron, what their primary job is to look for submarines. And in those days right before end of the Cold War, we were looking for Russian submarines, of course, and for that matter, on our last trip out there, we caught the last Foxtrot Russian submarine transiting from Russia down to Vietnam, which was kind of fun. They took pictures of it up on the surface and things like that. So it was kind of a neat thing to do. I was not—

COHEN: —Where was the submarine itself and where were you guys taking the picture?

ARVIDSON: They were flying around. I was not one of the ones in the plane at the time, but they were flying around, and they happened to catch the submarine on the surface as it transited from Russia to Vietnam, which is where the submarine eventually ended up at.

COHEN: Was it at this point of time that you took the—I forget the exactly name, but basically an anti-submarine warfare...

ARVIDSON: Anti-submarine warfare class, yeah.

COHEN: Where did you take it and how long—

ARVIDSON: That was out of Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, which is where they taught the course out there—they had a VP squadron out there. And what it was, pretty much, was learning about how submarines operate... how P-3s try and find the submarines, how sonobuoys work, and things like that—the equipment that they try and find the submarines with. So it was just a basic course to give us an understanding of what the guys of the P-3 were doing.

COHEN: Was there a concern that there might be Soviet submarines in Lake Michigan?

ARVIDSON: Not really, the majority of the things that that VP-90 did was, one, when we were over in Kadena, they did chasing around after the Russians and when they were here, they would do a lot of training flights, but they would occasionally go down to the Caribbean to help out with the drug operations down there.

COHEN: Okay, I see... I see...

ARVIDSON: More often they were actually just kind of transport aircraft that would help carry reservists from one place to another throughout the Midwest.

COHEN: Oh, okay. Okay. I think I was reading that Glenview Station had been at least after World War II, like a major place for signals or—or am I wrong about that? No, excuse me, a sophisticated radar center during the Cold War and that it was also the arrival point for prisoners of war returning home from Vietnam. So, I'm wondering, like, did any of these circumstances affect or influence your work at Glenview?

ARVIDSON: Not really, because I came in quite a bit after all that occurred. I didn't go to Glenview until 1988. So my big experience out in Glenview was of being in the middle of the United States was a stopping point for a lot of cross-country flights. So one of the fun part about Glenview was going in in the morning and the first thing you'd do is go down past the flight line, see what was sitting out there because you never knew what kind of plane you'd have out there. You may have a trainer plane sitting out there and you may have a B-1 bomber sitting out there. It was just astonishing what you'd be able to see. I miss Glenview.

COHEN: Yeah...One thing I wondered about is how did you juggle, like your day job with the duties of the Naval Reserve? Was there... Like set times that you would need to be at Glenview Air Station—Naval Air Station? Was it difficult getting permission to go even though I understand it's mandated by law? How did that work out?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, it is required by law. They have to give you—have to give you time off. They don't have to pay you, they have to give you time off. But being in a law enforcement situation, quite often I could work my way around it and there was actually a point right there where I was attending college, working at Sears, working for the police department and doing naval reserve all at the same time, which, you know, when you're young you can do that, you just don't sleep much, so.

COHEN: It's still pretty impressive at any age. [laughs]

ARVIDSON: [laughs]

COHEN: When you were at Glenview, were you promoted at this time?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, I was promoted when I was still at Glenview I... Was I promoted? Yes, I was promoted from—at the time what they call a Petty Officer Second Class, which is what I came in as, to a Petty Officer First Class. So I did get one promotion while I was there.

COHEN: Do you want to talk about the closure [of Glenview Air Station] and the rationale or was there any—

ARVIDSON: Yeah... I still personally don't understand why we live in one of the largest cities in the United States, and we don't have a military presence. And we even have a, you know, a huge airport and there's no military presence at that airport. I don't understand why the military has been pretty much shut out of the Chicago area, but it was difficult losing Glenview, quite honestly. I mean, a lot of history there... during World War II that was a major place for—to teach pilots how to fly. George Bush got his wings at Glenview and they used to fly on two oiler—two collier ships that had been turned into makeshift aircraft carriers out in Lake Michigan. So the base has got a huge history and they did manage to save something, I mean, they've still got Hangar One and they saved the chapel and it's where my nephew got married, for that matter, is in the chapel and interesting chapel because it has a—in the altar area you can actually spin the altar area around. And there's a Catholic—I think it's a Catholic, a Christian, and then a Jewish section as you spin it around.

COHEN: Oh my goodness.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, it's pretty neat. Moved it, but they saved it, so. It used to be right next to officer clubs, which I thought was really a pretty funny combination. They used to have to ask the officers club to be quiet during services.

COHEN: [laughs] I think they also saved a plane, I believe I saw it, like, suspended from the roof—

ARVIDSON: Yeah, they've got it hanging in Hangar One, actually in the retail area they've got a plane hanging. Yeah.

COHEN: Yeah.

ARVIDSON: And they actually saved one of the hangars and they're using it as a fire department training area because the—although the runway area in front of the hangar, it was large and it's big enough to be able to turn a great big fire trucks around in, so they use it as a training area and as a driving testing area.

COHEN: Oh, so that still exists.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: So with the closure of Glenview, did that lead to your assignment at the Joint Reserve Intelligence Support Element at Fort Sheridan?

ARVIDSON: Yes, yeah. We moved up to Fort Sheridan right afterwards. Originally, we were in some of the old barracks, which—[laughs] are they still up even? I don't even remember if they're still up, I think they are. But some of the old barracks that used to be cavalry barracks. Ah, three-four cavalry barracks out there. And then eventually we moved into a secure location further on the base there.

COHEN: What was the nature of your assignment at the Joint Reserves?

ARVIDSON: Pretty much the same as I have been doing at Glenview, not the the VP stuff, but the same thing I'd been doing with the with FIRSTEURLANT. It was order of battle, it was photo interpretation, things like that. Um, shortly after we moved there was when I was promoted to chief, which changed the job just a little bit, so.

COHEN: So as chief, how many men and women were under your command?

ARVIDSON: Well the unit itself was actually a pretty good size unit. It was—because it was a single unit—now that—actually I think it's still a single unit now, but not as many

people, but it was around two hundred people at one point. And not necessarily under my command, because I was definitely the most junior chief in the place, so it was a great place to learn because there was just so many different kinds of things going on. So if you were wanting to get into a leadership position, it was a good playground to learn how to do it.

COHEN: Without going into details, like, but what were the types of things you were learning being at this higher level?

ARVIDSON: Well, reservists are always a fun thing to kind of deal with to start out with because they, of course, had their own lives outside of the Navy. So you may have an officer who's sitting there working on something, doing the same thing as a junior enlisted guy, and—but you and your enlisted guys get paid a lot less, and the officer may have a college degree and literally my junior enlisted guy might have a doctorate. We didn't find that, that irregular, quite honestly. So you had to deal with the different personalities that would result because of that. And it usually wasn't a huge problem. I mean, we all came in knowing what we were doing, so. But also, reservists are—they're a little slippery on trying to make sure that they have all their requirements in and things are getting done and heir training is being done properly, so. Keeping track of them—essentially, it's the taking care of the sailors. I call it “the shepherd keeping" and trying to make sure that they're all on the straight path and that they've got all their stuff done.

COHEN: They had to have their courses and their training and their—

ARVIDSON: Yeah... Yeah and things not only within the intelligence side, but then the things that the Navy needs you to have done on getting your physical taken once a year and running your physical fitness tests and that kind of stuff.

COHEN: It sort of—it sounds as if there's a lot of administrative work involved in that as well.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, once you become a chief you become more on to the administrative side, police and intelligence, more on administrative side than you do on the actual production side.

COHEN: So after this was your next assignment at the—were you next an officer of Naval Intelligence?

ARVIDSON: Office of Naval Intelligence I actually worked for when I was in Glenview. I was—I'm sorry that when I originally worked for them. Then, when I went to to Fort Sheridan, shortly after I became a chief, all the other chiefs in the place retired, switched to being an officer or left the Navy, and I ended up being the only chief for the entire unit, which was a bit of a challenge because two hundred people is a lot to kind of sort out...

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: I did that for a few years and then there was a thing called the Reserve Intelligence Area, which covered—at the time it covered I think a couple of states, like three states and I was asked to be the command chief for the Reserve Intelligence Area and I think by then I had made senior chief. And then we were still—well, okay, in the senior chief time, that was when 9/11 occurred and when 9/11 occurred, I was one of those people they got a hold of shortly afterwards and said, "By the way, you've just been mobilized for a year." So I had to—

COHEN: Oh...

ARVIDSON: Yeah, so I had to leave the 911 center that I was working at, although I didn't really leave them, but I had to leave them, pick up, move out to Washington, D.C., and work at the Office of Naval Intelligence for a year. I was actually still doing a database work that I was talking about with the computer aided dispatch system.

COHEN: Yes.

ARVIDSON: I was from Washington, D.C. over a modem hooking into the computer here, so.

COHEN: Oh, my.

ARVIDSON: It's amazing how you could do things that way.

COHEN: Yeah.

ARVIDSON: It would have been even easier now. [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs] I know, but then, just really...that much harder.

ARVIDSON: So I was at the Office of Naval Intelligence and what we were working on was keeping track of shipping in the eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian Sea there, so, around the Horn of Africa. Well, at the Horn of Africa, but yeah, in the

Middle East. So we were keeping track of naval ship—or any kind of shipping out there.

COHEN: So monitoring the movements or how many or whether to—

ARVIDSON: —monitoring the movements, trying to identify anyone that did a pattern that may indicate that they were carrying weapons or distributing illicit material, so they weren't making common sense cargo transports and that kind of stuff. So I did that for a year. That was an interesting job, because if you ended up with the morning—the daytime job, if you did the daytime job, you were briefing the chief of naval intelligence—chief of naval operations. Over the video, but you were briefing him every morning.

COHEN: Who was the chief of naval operations at the time?

ARVIDSON: I'd have to think, but he was an interesting personality. I can't think of his name right now.

COHEN: That's okay. Just to go back a little bit, I think you'd written before that when you're in the Naval Reserve Intelligence Area, I see a capitalized NINE. Was that the just—

ARVIDSON: That's just the way they indicate which ones they are. They capital whatever area it is. It isn't an acronym or anything like that, it's just capitalized.

COHEN: So, okay, the area, it was nine.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: Okay. [laughs]

ARVIDSON: Which I think there were actually only six areas at that time and then eventually it's gone down to even less than that. And in the midst of all that, I ended up—well, at that time I was the command chief in... at Fort Sheridan, and then when I came back from the Office of Naval Intelligence, my tour was up as the command chief for Area NINE. I moved down to the Naval Reserve Intelligence Command at Fort Worth, Texas.

COHEN: Okay... okay, and so what was your role there?

ARVIDSON: I was the training coordinator for all the enlisted people in the Reserve Intelligence Command. So I was—at least on the enlisted side, so. So I was—one

fthing I was doing was keeping track of all the new kids that were coming and going through school, making sure that they got to their correct units. We found the Navy didn't always manage to get them in the right place, so we'd make sure they got to their correct units, that they had information on their units going in, too. We'd also try and find training programs for them to help them—help the different intelligence specialists throughout the Navy, have the information they need in order to be able to do their jobs.

COHEN: Did you like being in Washington, D.C. and later Texas after having been in Chicago area for many years?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, Washington, D.C. I was going back home again because that was where I started out my military career, was in Washington, D.C. I had a lot more freedom the second time around, although it was so much weirder the second time around.

COHEN: Oh?

ARVIDSON: Because, well, because it was right after 9/11. D.C, I mean, the planes didn't fly out of Reagan Airport for over three months after 9/11 occurred and literally, the first day a plane flew out, everyone in the place stopped and looked up at the sky where the plane was at. And it was a nervous place to be, a lot of tension, a lot of concern about security. I mean, we had police departments from all over the United States and contingents there. In the midst of it, the Fourth of July occurred, and they had like a three-level security to get onto the Mall to go watch the fireworks. So there weren't near as many people as I had seen prior years, but it was almost like a huge national picnic. Everyone was talking to everyone. We were all sitting down and pretty much the one thing everyone was saying is, “No terrorist is going to take away 4th of July from us.” So, it was—in that way it was a really good experience. And the work was—I felt very fulfilled. I mean, it was really good to be able to do that kind of thing, so. And yes, I ended up being the senior enlisted person for the reservist that the Office of Naval Intelligence too, so for the ones that were mobilized, so. We actually took in the officers, too, because they needed someone to help them out too.

COHEN: And what was it like being in Texas?

ARVIDSON: Texas was cool. Right after I got back from 9/11, from D.C, I was promoted to master chief and that's what they used on the national staff down there. So I went down there, I—the group of people I worked with at the Naval Reserve

Intelligence Command are probably the finest bunch of people I've ever worked with in my entire life. They came from all over the United States and their whole thing was to try and keep the program running and keep it running straight and making it the best contribution to the Navy and the United States as a whole as they could. It was a lot of fun. And we had really good barbecues on Saturday night.

COHEN: [laughs] So, very dedicated.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, yeah. And I enjoy Texas. Texas is a great place to be. It's out in Fort Worth, so. Fort Worth is a small town, it's a big town. So it's kind of a fun place to be and there's a lot of stuff to do around there. And a lot of them live down there so we'd end up over at their houses and things like that, too, so.

COHEN: Yeah. So after that, where were you? After that, you were at Fort Worth, Texas.

ARVIDSON: After Fort Worth, I came back to start work—to continue working in Chicago. And then I got a phone call from a prior commander of mine who I had known from Great Lakes and he asked whether—well, he at the time was the senior Navy officer out at the Office of Naval Intelligence. I think that's right? No, Defense Intelligence Agency. Here we go, I knew I had it wrong. The Defense Intelligence Agency at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in near D.C. He called me up and he said, my command master chief is just—is retiring... retiring and they don't have enough master chiefs to replace him. But they told me I can get a reservist. "Do you want to come and work for me?" And I said, "I'll certainly think about it." Yes, because this is a guy that I would have worked for any time.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: He was really an exceptional officer to work for. So, he said, "Well, okay, I need you for like four months." I said, "Okay, fine, I can do that." So I worked it out with the 911 center and got the work done there, you know, and so that I could work from my apartment in D.C. at the same time. And went out there, and once I got out there, he looked me and he said, "They're still not going to be able to fill it, can you stick around for another couple of months?" I said, "Sure." And then he said, "They're definitely not going to be able to fill it, can you stick around for a year?" I said, "You know what? I just figured out that I've got enough time with the civilian job to retire. Let me go back home for a couple of months, let me retire from the civilian job, then you got me for as long as you want me." So I did, I went home when I retired from the 911 center, went back to D.C. and I ended

up doing four years in D.C. total on active duty for my last final little bunch there and I did three years with the Defense Intelligence Agency. And that's where I was command master chief. Once I left there, I wasn't command master chief. But that was an interesting job because that was like 700 people, 700 enlisted people, because not only had the Defense Intelligence Agency in D.C, but there are several stations throughout the world and then there's intelligence contention at each one of the embassies, generally. So we were responsible for the embassy attachés also and their crew. So, that one—that job was actually the one where I got to do the most traveling. So that was kind of fun. The other ones I've been able to get to England, like I said, able to get to Japan, but I got to Japan again. I got to Thailand...

COHEN: Wow...

ARVIDSON: Do a little traveling around all over the place, so it was kind of fun.

COHEN: I think you also wrote about this job as master chief of the Defense Intelligence Agency that you learned the most, you worked with the greatest people and was able to help the greatest number of people.

ARVIDSON: Yeah...

COHEN: Do you want to elaborate...?

ARVIDSON: The big advantage I had there was that there was a really strong—what they call a chief's mess. So the chiefs themselves knew what they were doing and they knew how to take care of people. So now you've got a reservist coming in to be your command master chief who's never done active duty military chief-y stuffs or I've never had to do the—I've been on active duty as a chief, because—but I was doing production analysis, so I was actually working versus administrating. So coming in and having to administrate and it very quickly dawned on me that Navy instructions were going to be my lifeline, that it was strange, but I actually enjoyed reading instructions. So something would happen, and I'd go out and grab the instruction and read through the entire thing to try to figure out what to do. But my chiefs quite often knew what to do, so they would point me in the right direction, and they were very good about helping me along the way and at the same time, I tried to be the best I could at championing the things that they need to do or helping out their sailors. I have to say, the guy who I replaced, was a...desk keeper, so he pretty much sat at his desk quite a bit, and I don't think he wandered around a whole lot. Because when I went, I got there, I mean, I did

things, like, I called down to the radio room and I said, "So when can I come down and see you guys?" And so they gave me a time and I went down and I'm walking around and talking to people and one of the sailors looked at me and he said, "What are you here for?" I said, "Because I want to talk to you. Why?" He said, "Because master chiefs don't come down here." I said, "Well, this one does." So... Now, so that's more of the Eyes On leadership and that Eyes On leadership thing, by the way, comes from—I don't know if you've ever heard of her, but a command master chief, Beth Lambert, who was the first command master chief of a carrier.

COHEN: I think I know the name, yeah.

ARVIDSON: Yeah. Beth is an awesome, awesome, awesome lady, and at one point during a training session, I was doing an indoctrination thing on her carrier, in port, we had a bunch of junior people that were there learning about Navy stuff hands on, in Norfolk. And meeting her, she—you know, we were talking to her and she says, "I gotta get going." She says, "This is my EO time. And it was her Eyes On time. And she actually built into her schedule time during her day to go out and visit with people throughout the different places of the carrier. And it was just kind of a—it took what I had already been doing somewhat and gave it a title and gave it a real definition. And I pretty much take a lot of it from her...that—that just that one little comment on Eyes On leadership.So, that was my goal at that—the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] was to go around and try and make sure that I did Eyes On leadership, not only with my enlisted guys, but also with the officers, because I wanted them to know that we were all on the same side.

COHEN: I was just about to ask you, do you think that people began to trust you more, having more contact, that you were showing interest?

ARVIDSON: Absolutely. Absolutely. Uhm, and in all levels and quite honestly... I don't know if I'll take credit for it, but I think that after I got there, we made a couple of changes and I think that it caused... ah, a temperature change on the place that some of the senior enlisted guys got a little bit more involved with watching out after their people, not my fault at all. Like I said, it was that we had a switchover to different people, and I think that as a result, more people were going out talking to people. So it—it worked out well, altogether. And the senior enlisted there did—we were, like, really close, keeping an eye on everything together, so. That helped out too.

COHEN: Do you think the fact that you and Beth Lambert are women had something to do with this approach, intuitively, or was it more...?

ARVIDSON: You know, it could be. It could be, because I think that a lot of time, quite honestly, women have more of a... I'm going to say it, more of a need for the personal touch and this—it hadn't just started back at DIA. I mean, when I was at Fort Sheridan, we had a rule on the—my sailors, for instance, if their wives had a baby, the next time they showed up for drill and they didn't have pictures of that baby in their wallet...

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: They were in serious, serious trouble. And I tried to make sure that on all of my sailors, I knew a little bit about them, personally. So I can look at them when they came in and say, "How's your mom feeling? I know she wasn't feeling good last month." You know, so that—just something to—they knew that we cared about them and I did care about them, so.

COHEN: You see the human being in front of you.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, yeah, the being a woman part, I think, does a lot of it. And it was kind of strange, quite honestly, when we got to, for instance, when I, uhm... had a few jobs in the Navy that suddenly I realized that I was in a leadership job and I was in fact the first female, they actually had filled that. It was kind of a weird experience. I was—I tell the new chiefs that one of the coolest things that ever happened to me was being up at Great Lakes and going through the Navy exchange up there. And of course, Great Lakes has got a lot of students up there and so they're brand-new sailors, brand new sailors. And I was up a Great Lakes in uniform and about three young female sailors were watching me walk around the exchange and when I left, they came up to me and they said, "Can we talk to you for a little while?" And I said, "Sure, why?" They said, Because we've never seen a female master chief before." So, I mean, I probably spent an hour and a half talking to these young ladies, just listening to what they wanted to do with their career, telling them what I had done with mine, giviing them hints and feeling them out on where they wanted to go to and it was just a fascinating thing to have happen that someone looks to you and go, "You're the first one of that I've ever seen it." And it's happened a few times. It's kind of neat.

COHEN: It is neat. Because it's—it shows in a very concrete way how you were a trailblazer.

ARVIDSON: It's—you know, it's the timing. Now, there's female master chiefs like all over the place, but when I first became a master chief in 2002? It wasn't that common, so.

COHEN: At what point did you decide to, I think you said you were four years in Washington as a master chief for the Defense Intelligence Agency. But did you decide it was time to retire from the military or what...?

ARVIDSON: Well, eventually I called the—what they call a detailer, for the Navy. Which a detailer is the person who sets people into jobs.

COHEN: Oh, okay.

ARVIDSON: And I probably ended up calling him after the third year of them telling me that they couldn't fill the master chief position at DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]. I called them, I said, "You know, you're hurting this position. You're leaving a reservist in it. You can't do that. It needs to have an active duty guy in it." So after the third year, they finally coughed up a master chief who came kicking and screaming all the way, but he did a great job. They—so he came in to replace me and I was ready to go home at that point because my orders were going to be over. And the area commander got ahold of me and he said, "Do you object to staying around for another year?" And I said, "Why?" And they said, "Well, because our reserve liaison at the Pentagon for the Joint Chiefs of Staff Intelligence had just ended up retiring and we don't have anyone to replace her." So I said, "Well, you want to go over to work the Pentagon..." And I had always told—been told through my entire career, "Never work the Pentagon." Because it's just crazy place to work. So I waited until I was mas. chief, which was probably a good idea, to go work the Pentagon. And it was a great place to work. I had an awesome time, but I was, like I said, I was the reserve liaison officer. So I was the person in charge of making sure and taking care of the reservists who were coming into the Office of Naval—or coming into the joint—J-2, so the intelligence end of the Joint Chiefs production area in the Pentagon. So they were doing a lot of briefings and things like that, so they would take things other people had had, combined them into what needed to be told to the people with the stars on their shoulders and give the briefings and they man the watch centers for the Pentagon and things like that, so.

COHEN: And how long were you in this—was it really one year or did it last longer...?

ARVIDSON: One year. One year. And then, eventually, it came to the end of that time and I came back to Fort Sheridan for like six months on active duty because they needed to have someone come back and run a conference that they were having. So I came back and did that. And I had already gotten my notice that I was hitting my required retirement years, so that after thirty years you have to retire. Unless your a real command mas. chief, I wasn't a real command mas. chief, I was a fill in command mas. chief. So, they—I was what's called "a designated command mas. chief." But... they see you at the point that you have to retire, and it was pretty funny because I called down to the personnel section down in Millington, Tennessee, to work on the dates for my retirement. And the woman came back and she said... Now, I have to explain this... Reservists don't get their pay until they're sixty years old, their retirement pay, whereas if you're on active duty, you get it immediately. A reservist, you don't get it until you turn sixty. When I called down to Millington, the lady said "... master chief... You do know that you could have retired two and a half years ago on full pay, right?" I said, "Yeah, I know." She said, "Why are you still here?" I said, "Because I'm having too much fun."

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: And what I think was one of the coolest parts is that I have—I was having more fun when I hit the end of my career than I think at any point in my career, mostly because I was dealing with really good people, I was in a place that liked me, I knew I was needed and the job was fun.

COHEN: Yeah...

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: But, so you could not extend it past the thirty years?

ARVIDSON: I could've. I had an offer to extend it past, but I told the officer that gave me the option of extending it past that I was going to be hitting sixty soon. And at that point, you actually do have to retire, I would have ended up on a double waiver. And I told him no, it was time. And there was also the issue that coming back to Fort Sheridan at the very end, partially was to run the conference, but partially was because I—it gave me an opportunity to retire at home. Versus retiring out in D.C., where the family may not have been able to get out. One of the reasons that I came back and came back to this area, rather than staying in D.C, was that I had told—over the four years, I had told them—the great nieces and nephews,

that yeah, I was going to be gone for a little while, but I'd come back home, and I'd be able to spend a lot more time with you guys. And my grand-niece reminded me of that right before I retired, so. It's good, reminded me of that, so. That I had said that I would come home, so. I came home. It was a good thing to do.

COHEN: Yeah, yeah. Wow, so, well, I feel like, okay, after you retired from your civilian job, after you retired from the Naval Reserves, what was it like and what did you do?

ARVIDSON: Quite honestly, coming off of four years of active duty where you were—where I was in a really high tempo job the whole time—

COHEN: That's right...

ARVIDSON: —to retirement was like walking off a cliff and it pretty much took me about six months to figure out what I was doing—gonna do with my life and settle down to make a little bit of order here, so. I ended up picking that trumpet up again, which I hadn't actually put down, found that there was a need for someone to go out and play taps at military funerals. Made a connection with the naval funeral honors detail at Great Lakes and got it so they let me know when they have them around and I can volunteer for ones that they need to. Uhm, also working with Bugles Across America, which puts out requests for live buglers. Now they have a thing because there are so few live buglers. They have a thing called the ceremonial bugle, which—it looks like they're playing taps. But if you look in the bell of the horn, there's an insert in there and that's an MP3 player. And it's a great recording. It's an awesome recording. Master Sergeant Woody English did it, he's an excellent —was a lead trumpet player for the Army band and was just—it's an awesome recording, but it's a recording. It's, I think, a lot nicer if you actually have a person there playing it and putting a little bit of heart into it, so. So I do that. Since the COVID thing has hit, that got shut down for a while completely and it's now back up and running again, but it's limited. So, I get to them occasionally, but I haven't been able to do very many funerals at all. And in place of that, I made the mistake of answering the phone when my pastor called and said that they needed someone to be a lead for reopening the church, which is Saint Teresa Church in Palatine. And I've been one of the co-captains on the reopening team since, oh, gosh, March... That seems like a long time, probably closer, but I think it was a little while that we were in total shutdown there except for, you know, live stream stuff. But so I've been doing that, and it's

definitely been keeping—I'd say it keeps me out of trouble, but very little keeps me out of trouble. But it's been a wonderful experience, just absolutely wonderful. It's kind of neat because now I'm getting to know the people in the parish where it used to be everyone was faces and now everyone's friends. So it's kind of neat.

COHEN: So with questions, reflections, you know, you've mentioned you'd gone to a Catholic high school and now you're volunteering for the Saint Theresa Catholic Church in Palatine, but would you say that this—your personal spirituality played a role in your in your service, both active duty service and reserves, somewhat?

ARVIDSON: Not really, because I had—just about the time that I got out of active duty, pretty much stopped going to church. And when I was—when I came back to Washington, D.C. during that last four-year term, I just happened to—I was curious about the Naval Parish down at the Washington Navy Yard, which is a very small parish, and decided that I'd attend a service over there. Well, it was kinda neat, so I went to the next one. And then I got talking to the priest and ended up coming back into the church. And so, since then, so—I've really only been back in the church for fifteen years, now, so. But you know, the whole thing is based on how we were raised. My parents raised us with a huge amount of courtesy and respect. When you live in a family of seven kids, courtesy, respect, and patience are invaluable, so.

COHEN: [laughs] Great life lessons, great life lessons.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: Yeah... Uhm, do you think that you saw a lot of changes in the role of women in the forces, you know, over the thirty-year period that you were involved and do you also think that the military was attracting different women as time progressed?

ARVIDSON: The changes were astronomical. We went from being what I think the guys I'm sometimes considered to be a burden. I mean, I once had a sergeant when I was in Monterey, our first sergeant state that he couldn't understand why the women used up twice as much toilet paper as the men did, and then we just kind of looked at them, we said, “Well, think about it.”

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: There's a reason for that. We went from that kind of attitude and a 'Why are you here?' attitude to, pretty much, seamless integration now. And in the leadership side went from there being a rare person, rare female, being a leader and generally not sitting at any of the big tables to now, it almost being a requirement, which actually kind of irritates me just a little bit. That you have a female around, I prefer that people be taken on their qualifications rather than necessarily on their gender. You know, I don't want to be the token female. And in the beginning, I was the token female quite often.

COHEN: When you say at the beginning, at what point in time?

ARVIDSON: When I was in the Army, when I was in the Army. Quite often, you know, we would go to an all barracks meeting and I would be the lone female there for the, you know, for the sergeants that were running the barracks. There just weren't that many of us that were in leadership positions. And now it's much more—like I said, seeing a female master chief is not a rare thing now, it's not as common as it should be, but it isn't a rare thing anymore. And I've worked the advancement boards, too. And theoretically, we're not supposed to know whether or not the candidate is male or female. It's actually impossible for us not to know because of pronouns.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: If it says *she,* it's probably a female, so. But we were—but we're not supposed to take that into consideration at all, which I think is very important. Our opportunities are way wider than they used to be. I don't think there's much of anything that a female can't get into these days or hasn't at least tried to get into these days. Possible exception, the Navy SEALs, but that's got to be coming down the line. But we can pretty much do a little bit of everything. I mean, I've got a niece—a niece in-law—who is a Army artillery officer, just got back from a deployment, and when I looked at a picture of her artillery platoon, she is the only female and she is running this platoon of a bunch of guys, which I think is really kind of cool. And the guys like having her around. So it's, you know, it's neat. Females are able to get into combat zone, where they couldn't before, do jobs that were never even thought of. Just... the change has been incredible and very welcome.

COHEN: Well, it's a little um—it's a what if question, but would you have liked to have been in combat, had there been that option?

ARVIDSON: I volunteered several times when the—especially throughout Afghanistan, and every time I volunteered, they'd come back and say, "No, we got somewhere else we want you to go," and they'd send me stateside for something. So, I would have liked to, it just didn't work out that way, that makes my family happy. I think I would have been very nervous about it in the beginning. Going to Vietnam, I think, would have made me very nervous just because of the nature of Vietnam. But, I mean, my nephew was deployed to Afghanistan when I was a DIA and as a result, I could communicate with him better than the rest of the family could. So I would get in in the morning and there might be a note from my nephew saying, "Just call Mom and tell her I'm okay," and then I knew that something had happened in this area, that it was going to be on the news. So I'd wake my sister up at six thirty in the morning and say, "By the way, your kid's just fine," and that's all he told me, and she'd go, "Okay, that's all I need to know." And… So it was—I mean, I knew the nervous side of it, because I think I knew more about what was going on with him than his parents did and I didn't tell them what was going on, for obvious reasons. But I would have liked to have been out there if I could. It just didn't work out that way. Now at.

COHEN: No? Okay. Well, it's sort of a sensitive question to ask, but did you or did women under your leadership experience harassment, or sexual abuse, and if so, how was that handled?

ARVIDSON: Absolutely. It got better as it went along because there was more and more training especially for the recognition and the—how you took care of people who would—especially those who had been—had suffered sexual abuse. I myself can say that when I was in the Army, yeah, there were like two incidences that weren't very serious, but still shouldn't have happened. When I was in the Navy, I haven't had any problem other than being discounted or yelled at for being a female, as if I could make a change in that. But as—especially in my time in the Navy, there was much more concern on making sure that people could be taken care of, recognizing what was going on, giving them the help they needed, and not only with the the female harassment or the female assault, but the assault on the guys' side and much more attention to the possibility of suicide. Essentially, getting closer to the feelings of people, which some people say is soft. I think it's necessary... that you've got to know how people—again, that's another reason for Eyes On leadership. If someone suddenly changes the way they're acting, you need to gently be able to find out what's going on, and they also—people need to not be afraid to come and tell you that something went on. I've had some very difficult discussions with people on situations that have

happened to them. But it's something that you learn to do, and you learn that it has to be done. You can't shy away, and you can't let other people get away with harassing people, assaulting people, making people feel like they aren't worth anything. So it hits not only the person who is affected by it, but the person who's causing it.

COHEN: Did you come across incidents of racism between Blacks and Whites or other forms of racism?

ARVIDSON: When I was in the Army back in the '70s, yeah, for sure. It got better by the time I got into the Navy. Nothing overt, whereas when I was in the Army originally, there was some overt discrimination going on there or people were treated different or given different opportunities because of their color. But when I was in the Navy, it wasn't totally overt. Sometimes you'd really have to watch for it when something would happen, but especially towards the end, it really wasn't to me an issue. Although I will admit it, that I'm a little handicapped on that because I'm on the wrong side of the equation, that I did not see it because I'm not used to looking for it. But my guys were pretty good at coming and telling me when there was an issue, so that was good.

COHEN: Yes, so you would have been aware, you know.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: I think you wrote that the biggest challenge was doing jobs previously done by men. Was that—did you feel, at least at the point when you were in the Army, that you needed to prove yourself?

ARVIDSON: Absolutely. And when I was in the Navy, too. And actually, even right up to my last—well, I filled in for a female after my last job but the command master chief I was in for—filling in after a guy. And it got better along the way, but females still sometimes have difficulty being taken seriously at the table. Once they realized that you could do the job, and like you said, it's a case of essentially having to prove yourself, it gets a lot better once you prove yourself. But a guy wouldn't have to prove themselves and—where we do and that's very common throughout not only intelligence, but everywhere else in the military, I'm afraid. So we're still… we're still having the challenge, but we're still beating them down, so, I mean, for me that's the good part.

COHEN: Yeah, progress. Yeah…

ARVIDSON: Yep.

COHEN: Uhm—

ARVIDSON: —Because we're coming up with a lot of very competent females out there and I'm not saying just me. I mean, there are a lot of females out there that really know what they're doing. They've had some good training as they went along. They've been willing to step forward and push people around a little bit when it needs to be done and sometimes that does need to be done. And, yes, I have done that. And it has resulted in a fairly, very good group of females who are now heading those leadership spots now.

COHEN: When was an example of a time that it was necessary to push?

ARVIDSON: Think of one that's… [laughs] Well, the bit about being included at the table. That has on more than one occasion been an issue where I've had to go back and say, "You were missing someone in that meeting." "Who was missing?" "Me." "But you weren't supposed to be there." "Yes, I was." And if you have a good relationship with the people that are leading you, and quite honestly, even if you don't, you can make the point that there are reasons for having us at the table, that we've got a different perspective. And that they're not—you know, all soldiers, all sailors, all airmen and Marines are not the same. And whether or not it's female or male, you've got to watch out after each one of them, so.

COHEN: What is the moment of which you're most proud?

ARVIDSON: I think, quite honestly, when I made master chief, because it was so rare that a female, especially in intelligence. It was not common at all for a female to make master chief. For that matter, there were six people up—six quotas for master chief that year. They chose four people, so they took two quotas and they left them unfilled. And there were five people, if I remember, that were eligible, so they had six quotas for five people, and one was—two were left unfilled. And the guy who didn't make it, called me, he was like almost my first phone call after the selection board notice came out. And he says, "How did you get promoted and I didn't? I said, "Because we were both off at Office of Naval Intelligence after September 11th, and when we told them that we needed a senior enlisted person to take care of the reservists, you said I'm too busy for that." I said, "So you are the reason that I was promoted and thank you very much."

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: So, and at that point I wasn't going to put up with this stuff because he was trying to insinuate that it was me being female that was the reason why I was promoted. And I had that also, by the way, when I went to my first-class petty officer. I had one of the other sailors who didn't get selected come in and say, "It's because you're the golden child" I said, "I'm not the golden child. I'm the one who's willing to step up and do the work." Because if you do the work, you kind of don't have a problem. Making master chief was fun because one of the things I was able to do was—all my nieces and nephews, all those ones that I said that I told that I would come back… [laughs] They're the ones who pinned me. So the nieces and—

COHEN: —they're the ones who… who…?

ARVIDSON: They pinned me. They're the ones who put my rank on my uniform.

COHEN: Oh…

ARVIDSON: We had them come in and they were part of the ceremony and they were the ones that pinned me. So, that was just a really cool thing to be able to do.

COHEN: Yeah, what a time.

ARVIDSON: Yeah, it was neat. It was neat...

COHEN: Well, I got to meet you as a result of the upcoming Women's Honor Flight to Washington.

ARVIDSON: Yay!

COHEN: [laughs] So will this be the first time you're participating in the Women's Honor Flight and are you looking forward to it?

ARVIDSON: Oh, uhm, it's the first time I've been on an Honor Flight. I hadn't done the Honor Flight because I thought it—I didn't want—as many people have said, I didn't want to take the place of a World War II vet or Korea vet or a Vietnam vet who had actually been in country in the Honor Flight. So I had sat back to see what would happen. But then they came up with this all-female Honor Flight out of Chicago and it was like, 'All right, I'm going for it.'

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: For a couple of different reasons. One of the reasons I found out about it to begin with is one of the sponsors of it is the Daughters of the American Revolution. In about an hour, I have my Daughters of the American Revolution chapter meeting that I'm running. But I'm the regent for the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter here in Palatine-Arlington Heights area. And that was how I first found out about it, put in the application, I got accepted. I think I may have been one of the first ones on the list, which is kind of cool. And then it came out and, you know, we were all ready to go and then got closer to October and it was like, nah, it's not going to go. It was like "ugh…" And I said, "Well, we're going to go again next year." All right, all right. Yeah, I'm very excited. We had the announcement down at Pritzker and I got to go down for that and meet a lot of the people who are planning to be on the flight. What an incredible group of women. I mean, it—it always amazes me, even now. The kind of characters you get in the women, it's because—and a lot of them, it's because they've gone through the same things that I have. They've had to kind of—you know, you have you have a little bit more of a burden than the guy coming through. You have to do things just a little bit better. You have to make sure your uniform looks a little bit nicer. You have to make sure that you're within weight standards while they may not be. And we've all run through that and it's nice to have a bunch of people who have had the same experience.

COHEN: Yeah, yeah. Are you involved in a veteran's group, as well?

ARVIDSON: I'm in the American Legion. Yeah, I'm at the Lake Zurich post of the American Legion. I don't do a whole lot with them, I'm afraid, but I need a minute.

COHEN: [laughs] Oh yeah, okay.

ARVIDSON: And then I'm also a member of the Disabled American Veterans, so.

COHEN: So you are in contact with the veterans and…

ARVIDSON: Yeah. And quite honestly, through the Daughters of American Revolution we do a lot of work with veterans. We just got my chapter, particularly, did a project where we made fleece hats for veterans that are homeless in Chicago or living-challenged, and we ended up making six hundred and thirty-four hats to send out to the vets. So we've always got some sort of veterans project running. Right now we're doing boxes for a sailor that's out on a carrier—that she's handing things out to, like we—the last boxes, a lot of Christmas decorations and things

like that that they can use on the ship to just make things a little bit more towards home, so.

COHEN: Yeah… The Pritzker Military Museum and Library is—their mission is to study the Citizen Soldier and collect stories and preserve artifacts pertaining to the Citizen Soldier. So what does this term "Citizen Soldier" mean to you?

ARVIDSON: Well, especially as a reservist, I mean, we are the true citizen soldiers. We've got two masters, essentially. We've got the daily, everyday work that we're doing, but at the same time, either—you know, theoretically two weeks out of—or two days out of each month and two weeks out of the year, we're off doing our Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine stuff. And the Coast Guard -- I'll stick Coast Guard in there, I won't stick in the Space Force because I'm not sure what they do. But, so the Citizen Soldier really does apply to a reservist. You've got to balance the two things there, but the citizen soldiers in a larger capacity is that even though we are in the military, we are still citizens of this nation. I will admit that being in the military makes life just a little bit easier for me because throughout my entire career, we aren't allowed to really—we could express political opinion, but you have to be careful where you do it. You're —you know, when you're in a military situation, everything's apolitical and that's come in very convenient for me, especially over the last year. Because I can just keep my mouth shut.

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: But, we've got a unique exper—unique perspective, I think, because we have taken it one step further. We are not only being citizens, but we are also trying to protect not only this world, but this country, but everyone else that needs to be protected. And, I don't know, that's what I've always felt the military is. It's a kind of a big protection thing and… there is such a thing as good guys, bad guys. And, you know, I think we need more good guys in this world. Like I said, a little bit more courtesy, a little bit more common sense. Be nice. And it's part of our responsibility to bring that to fruition.

COHEN: Well-spoken. Is there something that you would like to talk about that we did not address?

ARVIDSON: Gosh… gosh, gosh, gosh.

COHEN: Well, actually, I do have a question. It's—

ARVIDSON: Okay.

COHEN: Did you have to sign nondisclosure agreements either after you left the Army or later, you know, the Naval Reserves or active—I think it was more active duty at the end of the Navy. But were there different points where you had to sign nondisclosure agreements?

ARVIDSON: Because of my level clearance, I had to sign nondisclosure agreements for the rest of my life, on some items. Some items it's like a fifty-year thing. But by the time it gets to fifty years, I'm not going to remember what it was to begin with. But yeah, almost every job I've been at, nondisclosure agreements have been required and are justified, so.

COHEN: Was it hard on a personal level just to keep things quiet?

ARVIDSON: Not so much keeping things quiet. I think that when you're in intelligence you learn to compartmentalize your brain and the hardest part is when someone's saying something, especially, let's say in Afghanistan, there may be an attack that occurs and someone says, "Yeah, that's because this happened," and you know it isn't. And just keeping quiet. Because, and especially with your family, you just learn to have those two different parts of your brain. One part of your brain just keeps its mouth shut. But it was really hard sometimes not to be able to say, "What are you, an idiot?"

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: There's a reason why we're doing this. You realize that. There's a reason why. You may not know the reason, but there is a reason why.

COHEN: I'm trying to think, is there something else that we did not talk about? And you're welcome to email me afterwards, as well. I had that recently where a person had a long list and we had a second interview. [laughs]

ARVIDSON: Yeah. I can't think of anything offhand. But if I do, I'll let you know.

COHEN: Okay.

ARVIDSON: Yeah.

COHEN: Well, really, it was a pleasure hearing you, listening to you today and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, we'd like to thank you both for sharing the story of your career today and, of course, your very dedicated service to the nation and beyond, as you put it. And as a token of our thanks, we will be sending you a challenge coin in the mail.

ARVIDSON: Well, thank you. Thank you.

COHEN: You're welcome.

ARVIDSON: When people thank me for my service, I tell them I'd still be doing it if they would have let me, so. I was, like I said, having more fun at the end than I did even in the beginning, so. It was—It really is probably the one thing that I've done—that going and standing and sticking my hand up in the air and that cold July day—or hot July day in Chicago, was probably the smartest decision I've ever made in my life.

COHEN: Wow.

ARVIDSON: So. And it pretty much dictated how the rest of my life was going to happen, so.

COHEN: And my impression, too, was that it was fun all along, although maybe the more so at the end, that was my impression...

ARVIDSON: Yeah, it was fun all the way along. I mean, there were moments where I would have—could have really dumped it. But as a general rule, I got to see people, learn things… Like, during the Pentagon part I got to meet people that people never get to meet in their entire lives, and it would be a point that I could actually just walk into their offices, you know, I was…

COHEN: Wow…

ARVIDSON: That was really neat. I mean, I got to see people that I would never have been able to see. I got to go down for the 10th anniversary of 9/11 when they dedicated the Pentagon memorial. I grabbed up two of my youngest sailors who, literally, had just shown up in the command the day before. I said, "Put your white uniforms on, we're going to go down to the Pentagon and you're going to watch the ceremony." And the president was there, the secretary of defense was there, the vice president. And, you know, things that I could never in my life have imagined I could have done. I've been in the Situation Room of the White House… places that I never thought I could ever go! So...

COHEN: I don't know if this is appropriate, but what were your impressions of, let's say, one major figure that you had ongoing contact with?

ARVIDSON: Actually, it won't even need to be one major figure. What really amazed me when I got to the point that I was doing… high level briefings and things like that was how smart senior members of the government are, how much they can

remember, it would astonish me when one of the admirals that we would brief would look up at us and go, “No, that's not right. This is what happened.” And he would know specifically about some minuscule point that you may not have been aware of. The amount of stuff, I don't know why their brains don't explode. They just—they are very, very competent, as a general rule. I’ve met only maybe one or two idiots. [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs]

ARVIDSON: But as a general rule, especially on the military side, quite honestly. Although on the civilian side, too… but actually on the civilian side, too, because the senior—what they call it the “senior executive service,” which is the senior civilians. They’re a, uhm… storehouse of information. And they know how to apply it, which is—you can know everything you want to, but if you don't know how to apply, it doesn't help you. So that has been my impression of higher level people I've dealt with. It's just that they're very, very smart.

COHEN: It's my impression, too, that you're very smart and very open to learning different types of duties that involve different skills and did you find that hard or was it you were just very interested in many things or you're very multitalented or...?

ARVIDSON: Yeah, originally it was difficult because, like I said, you know, I had this suburban Chicago and not much experience to anything, but it developed as it got along. And then I finally got to the point where I realized that the day you stop learning things is the day you are worthless. Even as a command master chief, I needed to be able to go to my chiefs and say, “What is this about? How do I do this?” I need you to learn a little bit more. There was no way that I was ever going to tell them I've got all the answers because there is no way I've got all the answers.

COHEN: Well, on this note, I'd really like to thank you, once again, and…

ARVIDSON: You’re quite welcome. I'm honored.

End of Interview