This is the beginning of this tape recording. This is Joel Arogeti. We're here in Atlanta, Georgia. We are interviewing Judge Aaron Cohn on April 16, 2000, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the Atlanta Jewish Federation and the National Council of Jewish Women. What we're going to do for the next few minutes, Judge, is talk a little bit about your background and your experiences. This is an oral history project that's going to be recorded here in Atlanta. A copy of this tape recording will go up to New York City for a master Jewish oral history project. Researchers, historians, and others will have access to this information for generations to come. We thank you on behalf of National Council of Jewish Women, the Federation, and this oral history project. If you would, we've talked a little bit prior to going on tape about yourself, your family. Give me your full name and where you live presently. Tell me a little bit about your family.

JUDGE COHN: All right, Joel. This is a pleasure to give this oral history because, as you'll find out later on, I was one of the liberators of a concentration camp at Ebensee.¹

¹ Ebensee was a sub-camp of Mauthausen. The prisoners there worked in the armaments industry. The camp was in a dense forest and close to a rocky formation where tunnels were dug to protect the factories from Allied air raids. It was second only in size to Dora-Mittelbau with 12 factories and 1,404 feet of tunnels. The main purpose of Ebensee was to provide slave labor for the construction of enormous underground tunnels, which were to be used for the development of rockets. The tunnels were never used for rocket production, however. As higher priority was assigned to other kinds of military production, the tunnels that had already been completed were assigned new tasks. One series of tunnels (Plant A) was instead used for refining petroleum. The other series of completed tunnels (Plant B) were used for manufacturing motor parts for tanks and trucks. The first prisoners came from Mauthausen in November 1943 and started digging the tunnels. They worked 12 hours per day in all weather. More transports of prisoners arrived until 1945 when the number of prisoners peaked at 18,500 in the last desperate days of the war; although, overall about 27,000 prisoners passed through. About 8,200 prisoners died there. Living conditions were severe, and the work was exhausting and dangerous. The death rate soared. Those who fell...
No one is more interested in this project, I think, than I am. Actually, I was born in Columbus, Georgia, 84 years ago. I was the third child of Sam and Etta Cohn. My mother was 16-years-old when she and her family escaped the pogroms in Russia, in Kiev [Ukraine], roughly around the year 1905, sometime right around the Russo-Japanese War. She was 16-years-old. My grandfather on my mother's side was Moses Hirsch. He was a Talmudic scholar. He didn't have to work very hard because he was a scholar all the time. He spoke seven languages. He served in the Russian Army. The usual. However, he made the great decision in my family when he was 57-years-old. The family was . . . it was on the Shabbos that the Cossacks came in and did their usual when things weren't going too well with the Czarist government. They were killing every Jew in sight. Christian neighbors hid my mother and her family in a hayloft. After three days and three nights, he said to himself that he was going to leave that godforsaken country, which was the great decision that was made by him. In my family, had he not made that decision, I don't think I would have the pleasure of sitting here with you, Joel, today giving this interview. They came to Columbus, Georgia, because they had a cousin there. That's where my family was all born, the children were. I'm a first-generation American. I said so many times to civic clubs that the average American, having been on the bench for 35 years in the juvenile court system, that I don't think our children, and the talking to other people doing youth work, our children don't really appreciate how lucky they are to be an American. But that's what I heard all the time that I was growing up in Columbus, Georgia.

AROGGETI: What was your date of birth?

ill or who died, were sent back to Mauthausen until Ebensee got its own crematoria. The last roll call took place on May 5, 1945. The commandant Anton Ganz ordered the prisoners into the tunnels where it was rumored that explosives had been set up to seal them in. The prisoners refused to leave roll call. That night, about 600 guards fled the camp, and the next day, the Americans arrived. Several former guards and Ganz were tried and convicted after the war.

2 The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) grew out of rival imperial ambitions of the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan over Manchuria and Korea. The Japanese, eyeing Manchuria’s fertile farm lands and mineral deposits, attained victory over the Russian forces and occupied Manchuria (which is on the Chinese mainland right across from the Japanese home islands) and renamed it ‘Manchuko.’ After World War II, when the Japanese forces were defeated, China and Russia fought over Manchuria again and today most of it belongs to China.

3 Shabbat (Hebrew) or Shabbos (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. Shabbat observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the havdalah blessing.

AROGETI: Tell us what it was like growing up in a Jewish family in Columbus, Georgia, around the turn of the century.

JUDGE COHN: My era would be subsequent to 1916 when I was born. I can remember very well, you know, in the early 1920s, I can remember the Ku Klux Klan\(^4\) driving down the street. I can remember so well being the only child in a classroom and being . . . we had very few Jewish families in Columbus, Georgia, then. My father came from Lithuania around the Baltic Sea. He came to the United States about the same time. He had two brothers that had a trading post in South Africa during the Boer War in 1902.\(^5\) They settled in Columbus, Georgia. They sent for the rest of the family. My father came with the sisters. He loved horses. That was the first thing that he did. He bought a horse. Soon he became a . . . he loved horses so much that he decided that was going to be his business, that is, livestock. So he eventually stayed in Columbus, Georgia, for 50 some odd years. We are not the usual Jewish family in that there were no merchants in my family, but we had a large farm. I remember we had white faced cattle. We had 15 horses. We had kind of a big spread right next to Fort Benning, Georgia. My dad was a legend, a livestock dealer. At the time that he came, there were 14 livestock stables in Columbus, Georgia, but when my father died, he was really the last of the Mohicans. By that, I mean, there was nobody left except him. He was a kind, good man who helped black farmers who were not able to pay for livestock. Called them sharecroppers. Papa would let them have livestock so they could make a crop. He would never ask for them to pay until they were able to make a crop. Of course, we were a good family. We had no great hardships of antisemitism; although, we knew the usual unwritten rules about the country clubs and things of that nature, but that didn't bother us,

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\(^4\) The Ku Klux Klan (or Knights of the Ku Klux Klan today) is a white supremacist, white nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-black secret society, whose methods included terrorism and murder. It was founded in the South in the 1860’s and then died out and come back several times, most notably in the 1920’s when membership soared again, and then again in the 1960’s during the civil rights era. When the Klan was re-founded in 1915 in Georgia, the event was marked by a cross burning on Stone Mountain. In the past it members dressed up in white robes and a pointed hat designed to hide their identity and to terrify. It is still in existence.

\(^5\) The Boer War (1899-1902) was fought between the British Empire and two Boer States, the South African Republic (Republic of Transvaal) and the Orange Free State, over the Empire's influence in South Africa. It is also known as the Second Boer War, Anglo-Boer War, South African War, or Anglo-Boer South African War.
because my father and mother, like a lot of immigrants, were just busy raising family. The social atmosphere that they enjoyed was being with other Jewish families in the synagogue. We all gathered around the synagogue in those days. We lived about two blocks from the synagogue, as most Jewish families at that time.

AROGETI: At that time, what was the address of the house?
JUDGE COHN: We lived at 809 Fourth Avenue in Columbus, Georgia.
AROGETI: You grew up, then, on Fourth Avenue in Columbus. Where was the synagogue located relative to your home?
JUDGE COHN: Yes. We were roughly about two city blocks away.
AROGETI: What was the name of your synagogue?
JUDGE COHN: Shearith Israel Synagogue.6
AROGETI: How would you describe that today in terms of its religious affiliation? Was it Orthodox?7
JUDGE COHN: It was an Orthodox congregation. It's now a Conservative congregation.
AROGETI: We'll talk a little bit about the congregational life. But to remind me, your mother, Etta, was she born in this country or she was born . . .
JUDGE COHN: No. She was born in Kiev.
AROGETI: What is now the former Soviet Union?
JUDGE COHN: Yes. The wonderful story about her is when she came over to the United States when she was 16-years-old, she came to a train station that's still there. The mayor of Columbus and I shared law offices together. We have a painting of that train station. She chuckled and laughed, because when she first came to Columbus, Georgia, there were only 10,000 people. Now we got a metropolitan area of about

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6 Shearith Israel was established 1891 in Columbus, Georgia. The name was chartered as ‘Chevro Saris Israel.’ In 1950 the name was officially changed to Shearith Israel Synagogue. The original building was on the corner of 7th Street and 1st Avenue in downtown Columbus. In 1951 the congregation moved to a new Synagogue on Wynnton Road. In 2007 the building was sold. In 2013 the congregation moved to its current home on River Road. (2015).

7 Orthodox Judaism is a traditional branch of Judaism that strictly follows the Written Torah and the Oral Law concerning prayer, dress, food, sex, family relations, social behavior, the Sabbath day, holidays and more.

8 A form of Judaism that seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. They also observe gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis, and bat mitzvahs).
250,000. Momma is reported to have said, “Where is the city?” because she was from a big city. It was kind of dark, and she couldn't see anything around. She was just in a strange country.

AROGETI: How did she have the occasion to end up in Columbus?

JUDGE COHN: They had a cousin that had settled in Columbus, Georgia.

AROGETI: And his name was?

JUDGE COHN: It was a Bonfeld family. They were my mother's cousins. Then one of her sisters came as a result of the cousin. My mother's sister would then write my mother and my grandfather with the usual, you know, “Come to the great United States of America where the streets are paved in gold.”

AROGETI: You were telling us a few minutes ago that you lived on Fourth Avenue and the congregation synagogue was Shearith Israel just a couple blocks down. Tell me a little bit about life in the congregation, your experiences, the Hebrew school, and attending religious school.

JUDGE COHN: I can't feel too much sympathy for children when they think that they are overworked scholastically because my life was like a lot of the children back in the 1920s. We went to public school. After we went to public school, we all took music because there was a conservatory of music about three blocks away. We all took music. Then we went to music school. From there, we went down to Hebrew school, which was located in a small room next to the mikveh\textsuperscript{9} in the synagogue. There, we studied to be bar mitzvahed.\textsuperscript{10} Our rabbi, who was originally from Romania, came to Canada. He had a long, red beard. He was a fine teacher, but he taught a lot with a sharp pointed stick. So, if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you knew what that little stick was about.

AROGETI: What was his name?

JUDGE COHN: His name was Rabbi Jacob Shulman.

AROGETI: How long was Rabbi Shulman with your congregation?

\textsuperscript{9} A mikveh is a pool of water, gathered from rain or from a spring, which is used for ritual purification and ablutions.

\textsuperscript{10} Hebrew for ‘son of commandment.’ A rite of passage for Jewish boys aged 13 years and one day. At that time, a Jewish boy is considered a responsible adult for most religious purposes. He is now duty bound to keep the commandments, he puts on tefillin, and may be counted to the minyan quorum for public worship. He celebrates the bar mitzvah by being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue,
JUDGE COHN: I would estimate he was there about, I would certainly say about ten years. Later on, he went to Israel. I think he died in Israel. He was a wonderful man. A wonderful teacher. A very strict disciplinarian.

AROGETI: In the classroom, was the classroom broken down by children of different age groups? Or were you all collectively there . . .

JUDGE COHN: We were collectively there most of the time with the small ones, the larger ones, but if we were broken down, it was broken down to how far advanced we were. But we were all there together.

AROGETI: Approximately how many Jewish families were in the Columbus area in 1925 and 1930, between the time you were getting ready to be *bar mitzvahed*?

JUDGE COHN: I would say, roughly, it's hard for me to say. I would think that maybe we had maybe 40 families. About 40 families.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about leading up to your *bar mitzvah* and the day of your *bar mitzvah*, as best you can remember.

JUDGE COHN: Yes, I remember it very well. It was March 3, 1929. Everybody knows about 1929. That was a bad year for people because so many people lost. That was the year of the crash. In 1929, I remember my *bar mitzvah* because I saved a card. The invitation was just a little postcard that was sent out to our friends. We had the usual. We conducted the service in my congregation. Then, at noontime, we went to my mother's house and father's house, which was built in 1925, where my son and I have our law offices today. It was right next to the old courthouse in Columbus, Georgia, now next to where the government center is. There, we had a dinner. A luncheon. I spoke my piece about how lucky I was to be *bar mitzvahed*.

AROGETI: So you gave, in effect, your sermon, rather than from the synagogue, you gave it at home during the *Kiddush* luncheon?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. We didn't do it in the congregation. We did it during the luncheon at my home. And that was it.

AROGETI: So you were a 13-year-old boy. Tell us a little bit about the public

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*Hebrew: ‘Sanctification.’ A blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. In many synagogues congregants gather for *Kiddush* reception after the Friday night or Saturday morning service to recite the blessing over wine or grape juice and have something to eat.*
school you went to and what kind of activities young boys your age would be involved in back in the late Twenties and early Thirties.

**JUDGE COHN:** In the late Twenties and early Thirties, of course, we had no little league. We all played baseball, and we all played. You were very much a minority as a Jewish kid in those days. We had good, strict public schools. I had great grammar school teachers. When I was ten-years-old, I joined the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] and became an athlete, of sorts. It was great growing up.

**AROGETI:** Was the YMCA the athletic outlet for young boys in Columbus, Georgia, in the late Thirties?

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes, it was. We had no boys' clubs. We had no . . .

**AROGETI:** No Jewish community center?

**JUDGE COHN:** No Jewish community center. We all belonged to the YMCA. The YMCA in Columbus, Georgia, was very kind about the way they accepted the Jewish kids. We had a number of the Jewish kids that were good athletes. We all participated up to the nth degree. It was nice growing up in Columbus, Georgia.

**AROGETI:** Who were some of your peers, some of your Jewish friends that you recall growing up, athletically, with?

**JUDGE COHN:** Well, none of them received any great accolades later on in life, but they were all athletically inclined. We would play high school ball, Joel, things of that nature. But no super athletes, as such. For me, it was perfect because I ended up by falling in love with two clay tennis courts when I was about ten-years-old. Ended up playing on the University of Georgia tennis team. I was captain of the tennis team in 1937 and assisted the coach. I was an assistant coach of the tennis team in 1938 when I graduated law school. I played a lot of tennis and had pretty good success as an amateur until the war came along.

**AROGETI:** Let's talk a little bit. Now it’s the middle to late 1930s and you graduated from high school in Columbus. Where did you attend?

**JUDGE COHN:** I graduated Columbus High School in 1932. I was 16-years-old. My parents thought I was a little too young to go to college. To me, there was only one school in the world, and that was the University of Georgia. Although I had good grades and I believed at that time I could have gone to any of the Ivy League
schools. I believe, I wanted in that day and time, but to me, there was only one school. That was the University of Georgia.

AROGETI: Before we get into your college life, let's pause for a minute and talk a little bit about your brothers and sisters. I know of the brothers and sisters you have, each of them had a special relationship with you.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Tell me a little bit about your brothers, and let's talk a little bit about your sisters, their names and a little bit of information about them.

JUDGE COHN: Yes. My older brother was Sol Cohn. He died in 1977. He, too, was born in Columbus, Georgia. All of my brothers and sisters were. He graduated the same school I did, Columbus High School. Graduated the University of Georgia. He was a cattleman. He worked with my father in my father's farm in cattle and livestock business, so to speak.

AROGETI: How many years was he your senior?

JUDGE COHN: He was five years older than I was.

AROGETI: Who did he marry and tell me a little bit about his children.

JUDGE COHN: He married Della Estroff. Della Estroff was from a wonderful Jewish family in South Georgia. They were in little towns like . . . they were originally from Louisville, Georgia. Part of the siblings ended up in Lyons, Georgia, and Vidalia, Georgia, and small towns. They were a wonderful, good, solid Jewish family. They had the same type of backgrounds that we did. He had a wonderful wife. She was Della Estroff. She was his one and only sweetheart. They had three children. Alan, who is a lawyer in Atlanta, and has two daughters. Celia Solomon, who is in Columbus, Georgia, and Dorothy Luber, who lives in Duluth, Georgia. So, we all stayed in Georgia.

AROGETI: That's your brother, Sol. Tell me about your other brother.

JUDGE COHN: My younger brother, Harold, was a cattle auctioneer. He died just a few years ago, about five years ago. He was a wonderful auctioneer. He auctioned cattle. As I said, we had no merchants. He was my youngest brother. I had an older sister, Anne, who was a housewife.

AROGETI: Who did she marry?

JUDGE COHN: She married Louis Levy from Savannah, Georgia. She's still living,
but her husband is dead.

AROGETI: Your sister, Anne, is it?

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Does she live in Savannah now?

JUDGE COHN: She lives in Columbus, Georgia.

AROGETI: And your other sister?

JUDGE COHN: My younger sister, Sophie, married Emanuel Kulbersh from Atlanta, Georgia. She lives in Boca Raton, Florida.

AROGETI: Tell me a little bit, briefly, Sophie's children and Anne's children.

JUDGE COHN: Sophie had two children. One of them was Bill Kulbersh, who lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and Myra Sue Kulbersh. She lives in San Antonio, Texas. My sister, Anne's children, she has two sons that live in Columbus, Georgia. They are in the automobile business. And a daughter, Rita Rosenthal, who lives in Montgomery, Alabama.

AROGETI: Tell me the names of the Levy boys.


AROGETI: We've talked a little bit about your brothers. Tell us, now, we're going back. You graduated from high school and you're getting ready to go to college, but you didn't go to college right out of high school, did you?

JUDGE COHN: No, I did not.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about what you did in that time between high school and college.

JUDGE COHN: I spent a year on my dad's farm.

AROGETI: Where was that farm located?

JUDGE COHN: That farm was located at that time next to Fort Benning, Georgia, on the South Lumpkin Road. It was a large farm. We had, I would say, at that time . . . I don't know how many cattle, but certainly in excess 50 to 100 at that time.

AROGETI: Fifty to 100 head of . . .

JUDGE COHN: Head of cattle. We had horses there. We ran a riding academy for people who liked to ride horses. We also raised . . . We farmed some. Not too much. My father, even as a livestock dealer, we raised hogs, too. I can tell you one thing, they
are very difficult to count. I spent a year there. That's what I did.

AROGETI: Was the farm located in such that you would commute every day from Columbus?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. We were roughly about three miles from the city limits. Where that farm was, is highly populated now.

AROGETI: Suburban Columbus, Georgia?

JUDGE COHN: It's a subdivision now, but at that time, it was right next to the Chattahoochee River. It was a beautiful pastureland.

AROGETI: You had the occasion to work for your dad's business for about a year and then it was off to college?

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: The year was 1930?

JUDGE COHN: I went the fall of 1933.

AROGETI: In 1933, you enrolled at the University of Georgia in Athens?

JUDGE COHN: Right.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about what college was like. It was after World War I, but it was before World War II?

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: What was going on at University of Georgia at that time?

JUDGE COHN: Georgia, at that time, maybe had 5,000 students.

AROGETI: In the undergraduate and graduate schools combined?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. I don't think there was much of graduate program there, but about 5,000 students. We had about 18 fraternities. Three Jewish fraternities. All the Jewish fraternities, of course, maybe had an average of anywhere from 12 to 18 members. The Phi Epsilon Pi was there. Tau Epsilon Phi. Alpha Epsilon Pi, which

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12 The Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity, active between 1904 and 1970 with a predominantly Jewish membership, was founded in New York City and eventually opened at least 48 chapters on college campuses across the United States and one in Canada.

13 Tau Epsilon Phi is a fraternity founded by ten Jewish men at Columbia University in New York in 1910 as a response to the existence of similar organizations that would not admit Jewish members.

14 Alpha Epsilon Pi is a college fraternity founded at New York University in 1913 by Charles C. Moskowitz. The fraternity has more than 186 active chapters across the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Austria, Australia, and Israel, and has initiated more than 102,000 members. Although the fraternity is based upon Jewish principles, it is non-discriminatory and is open to all who are willing to espouse its purpose and values.
was my fraternity.

AROGETI: What type of courses did you study?

JUDGE COHN: I knew that I could get a degree in law by taking two years of pre-law. I wasn't interested in getting two degrees because I just wanted to go to law school. I knew I always wanted to be a lawyer, so I took two years of pre-law, three years of law school. I received my military commission in 1937, my law degree in 1938.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about your military career. Were you active in ROTC or junior ROTC either in high school or college?

JUDGE COHN: We didn't have junior ROTC, but we had some military training at Columbus High School. I lived in Columbus growing up. I lived in an area where there were lots of army noncommissioned officers. Some were retired. Some were not. There were non-Jews, of course. I was pretty familiar with the army and army law because we were a large army town. It sort of fascinated me to hear the old stories about the old volunteer army. When I went to college, the first thing I wanted to do is look at the ROTC program because it was infantry and cavalry. But since I was riding a horse when I was about seven-years-old, and I was riding a horse, I knew I wanted to be . . . it was the horse cavalry in those days. I wanted to be in the horse cavalry. I was very active in the military at the university because I was Scabbard and Blade, which was an honorary military fraternity.  When I was commissioned in 1937, I always took my reserve active duty quite seriously by going to Fort Oglethorpe and training with the Sixth Cavalry, which was stationed in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

AROGETI: For some of our listeners and researchers, they might not be as familiar with Fort Benning, Georgia, which, being a Georgia native, we're all familiar

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15 Founded in 1916, ROTC stands for Reserve Officer Training Corps. It’s a college program offered at many colleges and universities across the United States that prepares young adults to become officers in the U.S. Military. In exchange for a paid college education and a guaranteed post-college career, cadets commit to serve in the Military after graduation.

16 Scabbard and Blade is a college military honor society founded at the University of Wisconsin in 1904. Although membership is open to ROTC, cadets and midshipmen of all military services, the society is modeled after the U.S. Army and its chapters are called companies and are organized into regiments in order of their establishment. It was founded as a men's organization, and is now a co-educational society.

17 Fort Benning is a United States Army base straddling the Alabama-Georgia border next to Columbus, Georgia. Fort Benning supports more than 120,000 active-duty military, family members, reserve component soldiers, retirees, and civilian employees on a daily basis. It is a power projection platform, and possesses the capability to deploy combat-ready forces by air, rail, and highway. Camp Benning was established in 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson.
with. Tell us a little bit about Fort Benning, its role, its affiliation with the city of Columbus, and give us a little bit of background.

JUDGE COHN: Fort Benning was founded about 1921, I believe, right after World War I. It has become and it was even then the home of the infantry school. Later on, I attended there as an officer at the infantry school in World War II. It has become the mecca of the United States Army and has been voted over and over now as the finest military post in the United States. That is where we've trained our infantry officers. That is where we've trained people like General George Marshall, Omar Bradley, General [Dwight] Eisenhower. All the great names in modern military history have gone to Fort Benning, Georgia. As a matter of fact, we called Columbus at one time, laughingly, the mother-in-law of the United States infantry because so many army officers who went to Benning married Columbus girls. Even today, Fort Benning has played such a terrific part of the community of Columbus. The relationship between the civilian community and the military community has always been held in the highest esteem by people in the military. Even today, people know about the great relationship between the civilian community and vis-a-vis the military community at Fort Benning, Georgia. During World War II, they must have had 75,000 troops. This is where [United States Army] Airborne [School] started. The Airborne school is there. The Airborne started there. We had 2nd Infantry Division, which I was a part.

AROGETI: It's plain to see that the military and the Fort in Columbus played such an instrumental role in your life. Let's talk a little bit about your college days and your law school days in Athens, Georgia. Tell me a little bit about some of your peers, your colleagues, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

18 George Catlett Marshall, Jr. (1880-1959) was an American statesman and soldier. He was Chief of Staff of the United States Army under presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman and served as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense under Truman. He was hailed as the "organizer of victory" by Winston Churchill for his leadership of the Allied victory in World War II. After the war, in his service as Secretary of State, Marshall advocated a significant U.S. economic and political commitment to post-war European recovery, including the Marshall Plan that bore his name. In recognition of this work, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.
19 Omar Bradley (1893-1981) was the senior United States Army field commander in North Africa and Europe during World War II. At one point he commanded nearly 900,000 men or four field armies. It was the largest group of American soldiers to ever serve under one field commander.
20 Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) was the 34th President of the United States, serving from 1953 until 1961. He was a five-star general in the United States Army during World War II and served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, headquartered in Reims, France.
JUDGE COHN: I can remember, he died just recently. We were dear friends, Morris Abram, who I think was one of the great American Jews that we have produced in this part of the country. He came from Fitzgerald, Georgia. Morris was, as you well know, had a magnificent record. He died recently. I think everybody in the Jewish community knew who Morris Abram was. The main thing about Morris Abram was, as you know, he changed the whole political scene in Georgia because he was responsible for changing the old county unit system, which made the urban communities in Georgia suffer at the expense of the rural communities. He changed the whole complexion.

AROGETI: Some of our researchers may not know of Morris Abram, famous ambassador and president of the university and famous attorney. I believe he might have been a Rhodes Scholar, as well.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about how you first met him? Where did you first meet him?

JUDGE COHN: We just knew that he was coming to Georgia. They asked me, because my fraternity felt like . . . I was an athlete and I knew most of the non-Jewish kids on the campus. I got around the campus quite a bit. They wanted me to rush him, and I did. But Morris said that he wanted to stay independent, which he did. I respected that. Then I followed his career. We were great friends up until the day of his death.

AROGETI: Is he a classmate of yours?

JUDGE COHN: No. He was a little behind me.

AROGETI: Couple of years behind?

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21 Morris Berthold Abram (1918-2000) was an American lawyer, civil rights activist, and leader in the Jewish community who grew up in Fitzgerald, Georgia. Defending civil rights workers in Georgia in 1963, Abram won decisions that helped overturn the state’s insurrection and illegal assembly laws, which had been used against civil rights demonstrators. Over the years, Abram helped bring civil rights cases to the United States Supreme Court. President John F. Kennedy named him the first general counsel to the Peace Corps in 1961. President Lyndon B. Johnson made him United States representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, co-chairman of the Planning Committee of the White House Conference on Civil Rights and a member of the Committee on the Office of Economic Opportunity. Abram served as President of Brandeis from 1968-1970. He was the Representative of the United States to the European Office of the United Nations from 1989 to 1993. In 1993 he founded United Nations Watch while he was Honorary President of the American Jewish Committee.

22 The Rhodes Scholarship, named after the British mining magnate and South African politician Cecil John Rhodes, is an international postgraduate award for students to study at the University of Oxford. It is widely considered to be one of the world’s most prestigious scholarships. Established in 1902, it was the first large-scale program of international scholarships, inspiring the creation of a great many other awards.
JUDGE COHN: Morris was a couple of years behind me. I don't know exactly the year Morris came. I think I was a junior, or maybe a freshman in law school when Morris came to University of Georgia.

AROGETI: Share with us just a little summary about the . . . I know the county unit system related to the way state legislators were voted into the . . .

JUDGE COHN: Well, they had an electoral system, but it was warped. A little county like Chattahoochee County, which is very close to where we are, had two votes. The City of Columbus, Muscogee County, had maybe 80,000 people. Chattahoochee County may have had 800, and they had 80,000. We had 80,000, but we didn't have any more votes than they did. So the big thrust was, hey, it was unconstitutional. One man, one vote. When they overturned the county unit system, Morris Abram was primarily responsible for that. He argued the case for the [United States] Supreme Court. The Supreme Court held it was unconstitutional. Changed the whole complexion of the state. That's when Atlanta really grew. So, it was all for the benefit of the urban community.

AROGETI: Besides Morris Abram, Ambassador Abram, who were some of your other more notorious classmates, both Jewish and non-Jewish?

JUDGE COHN: I had good friends there. Igor Cassini,23 who later was Cholly Knickerbocker. He loved tennis. He played tennis with me all the time when he was at Georgia. We had a number of exchange students there. We even had five Nazi24 exchange students who were sent over here by Adolph Hitler25 as exchange students. They came to the university. They would come down to the tennis courts. I was playing number one on the tennis team. They'd come to me to talk to me about their problems with the Jewish community in Germany. Of course, you know what I had to say to them.

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23 Igor Cassini (1915-2002) was an American syndicated gossip columnist for the Hearst newspaper chain. He was the second journalist to write the Cholly Knickerbocker column. Born as Count Igor Cassini Loiewski, younger son of Count Alexander Loiewski, a Russian diplomat. He worked as a publicist, ran the Celebrity Register, edited a short-lived magazine called Status, was a co-director of the fashion company House of Cassini, founded by his elder brother, Oleg Cassini, and was a television personality in the 1950s and 1960s.

24 The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), commonly known as the ‘Nazi Party,’ was a political party in Germany active between 1920 and 1945. The party’s leader was Adolf Hitler.

25 Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was a German politician who was the leader of the Nazi Party, Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, and Führer (“leader”) of Nazi Germany from 1934 to 1945. As dictator of Nazi Germany, he initiated World War II in Europe with the invasion of Poland in September 1939 and was a central figure of the Holocaust.
But they even wanted to come on our campus. They wanted to espouse some of their hatred in our university chapel. First Amendment or no First Amendment, they never got there.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about that because I think that is such an unusual story. The year is, what, 1934 or 1935?

JUDGE COHN: Around 1935.

AROGETI: So, World War II had not broken out?

JUDGE COHN: No.

AROGETI: It was relatively quiet here in the United States about what was going on in Europe?

JUDGE COHN: Yes, but in 1935, the Nazi party was in full command. They came in full command starting about 1933. That's when it really started.

AROGETI: Was that something, looking back today, looking back at history, you could see that, but in 1933, 1934, 1935, as a young Jewish man in Georgia, in the State of Georgia, was this something that you were aware of, you were sensitive to?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. We were aware of the Nazis. The Jewish community in Athens, Georgia, was very, very aware of the fact that we had five Nazi exchange students.

AROGETI: How were you aware of this? Would you see them walking down the street?

JUDGE COHN: I would see them on the campus from time to time.

AROGETI: Were they wearing uniforms?

JUDGE COHN: No, no, no. They could not wear their uniforms. They were in civilian clothes, but we all knew who they were. They all loved tennis. So many of them would come down to the tennis courts. I would see them down there. Of course, they knew I was Jewish. Obvious name like Aaron Cohn, which I'm glad of.

AROGETI: I am not as familiar with your dialogue or your conversation with these people. What were some of the tenor of some of . . .

JUDGE COHN: The tenor of it was, they wanted to tell me about the problems they were having with the Jews in Germany. Of course, I wouldn't . . .

AROGETI: From their perspective, what types of problems were they
communicating to you, or what kind of propaganda were they giving you?

**JUDGE COHN:** They evidently received great training as the Hitler-Jugend. You know what Hitler did, he started with these children when they were real, real young. By the time they were exchange students at the University of Georgia, unless they were avid Nazis, they would not have let them come abroad to the United States of America because they might want to defect or whatever. But they were very, very . . . they had the Nazi creed all the time. I let them know real quickly how I felt, and I didn't want to hear any of this comment, damn foolishness from them. I think they were trying to convince me that their cause was right, and I told them what I thought.

**AROGETI:** You also told me earlier that, in addition to some of the more famous Jewish Georgians that went to Georgia at that time, you were also a classmate of a former governor and state senator.

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes. The University of Georgia spawned some marvelous, marvelous leaders in Georgia. To wit, in my law school, there was Herman Talmadge, who really served this community well. I know, and I still admire, him because he was a great person. He was president of fraternity council Georgia, and I was his vice president. I knew him quite well. When he served in the senate, he was always very much in the forefront and being very pro-Jewish in all affairs that affect the Jewish community. He was a great friend of the State of Israel. He was a great friend of mine personally. We not only had him, but we had Ernie Vandiver, who later became governor of the State of Georgia. He was a class behind me. Bob Jordan, who was a Supreme Court Justice. In other words, we had, I don't know how many congressmen we

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26 Hitler Youth was the youth organization of the Nazi Party in Germany. Its origins date back to 1922, and it received the name *Hitler-Jugend, Bund deutscher Arbeiterjugend* ("Hitler Youth, League of German Worker Youth") in July 1926. From 1933 until 1945, it was the sole official youth organization in Germany and was partially a paramilitary organization for males aged 14 to 18.

27 Herman Eugene Talmadge (1913-2002) was a Georgia Governor twice, once in 1947 and then from 1951 to 1955. Not to be confused with his brother, Eugene Talmadge, who was also elected Governor of Georgia in 1946 but who died before he could take office, so his brother Herman took over for him, but he was then kicked out by the State Supreme Court as unconstitutional and Ellis Arnall took over until the next election, which Herman then won.

28 Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Jr. (1918-2005) was an American politician who was the 73rd Governor of Georgia from 1959 to 1963.

29 Robert Henry Jordan (1915-1992) practiced law in Talbotton, Georgia, from 1946 until his appointment to the Court of Appeals in 1960, where he served until his appointment to the Georgia Supreme Court in March, 1972. He served as Chief Justice from December 20, 1980 until November 1, 1982 when he retired from the court.
had coming out of that law school and governors. We had a marvelous group of scholars at Georgia. Most all of them felt like I did, I think. We always thought about we were going to go to law school at Georgia. We were going to go back to our homes. We were going to go back to our communities. And we were going to get with the grass roots and make Georgia a better state. None of my friends, when I went to school there, thought about going somewhere else. They were all going to go home. They came from small towns in Georgia, and it was truly a state university. It's not quite like it is today, I don't think.

AROGETI: You had an occasion, then, to graduate from the University of Georgia with your law degree. Did you, in fact, come back to Columbus?

JUDGE COHN: Absolutely.

AROGETI: What year was that?

JUDGE COHN: I came back to Columbus in 1938.

AROGETI: And hang out your own shingle and started practicing?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. I hung out my own shingle. From 1935 to 1938, I worked in a law firm, of course, pro bono, free of charge, just for experience. That was the thing that you did in those days. You didn't get paid anything as an intern or for research or whatever. This was all for the experience. From 1933 to 1938. I mean, 1935 to 1938, I was in a law office there. Honorable T. L. Bowden. In 1938 . . .

AROGETI: T. L. Bowden?

JUDGE COHN: Bowden. B-O-W-D-E-N.

AROGETI: Was he a judge or . . .

JUDGE COHN: He later became a judge. In 1938, I also . . . there was a gentleman who later became a superior court judge named George C. Palmer. He was the son of a confederate veteran. He was a class act. He took a real liking to me because he thought I really wanted to be a good lawyer. He took a liking to me. He took me under his wing. I was with him until I volunteered for the army.

AROGETI: When you say you were with him, did you share a law office?

JUDGE COHN: We shared law offices together, and I worked for him. I worked for Judge Palmer.

AROGETI: Tell me a little bit about a day in the life of young Aaron Cohn as an
associate or as a lawyer, but a training lawyer with Judge Palmer.

**JUDGE COHN:** We had a number of criminal cases, among several were in Phenix City, Alabama. You know Phenix City had lots of trouble later on with the criminal element. That's a big story. Even in 1955, the events... They had to send in the National Guard.

**AROGETI:** For some of our researchers, Phenix City is a small town in Alabama?

**JUDGE COHN:** Just over the Chattahoochee River line.

**AROGETI:** Almost a sister city?

**JUDGE COHN:** It's like a sister city. It was right over the line. Several books have been written about it. A very bad criminal element took over the city. It was only in 1955 before they really straightened it out. It was a classic example of what happens in a community. In this case, it was a small southern community where the citizens allowed the criminal element to take over because the criminal element says, “Don't worry about taxes. Don't worry about anything. We'll take care of it.” Yes, they took care of it.

**AROGETI:** It's now 1938. You're a young graduate of University of Georgia. You're practicing law. You're also a graduate of the ROTC program. Tell us how you harmonized your practice of law. Harmonizing your work life as a young attorney and ROTC. It's now 1938, 1939. It's before the United States got involved in World War II, but you were very aware of what was going on in Germany.

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes. I followed, having known these five exchange students. Incidentally, in addition to those exchange students, we had some very wonderful people like Oleg Cassini, who became one of the great designers. He was Igor Cassini's brother. He was at the University of Georgia. Also Emilio Pucci. We had a number of them from France and from Italy. Of course, the German exchange students.

**AROGETI:** I was just listening to you talk, it seems to me that you were perhaps

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30 Oleg Cassini (1913–2006) was an American fashion designer born to a Russian family with maternal Italian ancestry. He came to the United States as a young man after starting as a designer in Rome and quickly got work with Paramount Pictures. Cassini established his reputation by designing for films. He was well known as a designer for Jacqueline Kennedy as First Lady of the United States.
more aware or more sensitive to what was going on in Europe than perhaps most other Americans or most other, potentially, Jews who didn't have family from that part of the country.

JUDGE COHN: Yes. Well, no, because my mother's family . . . my grandfather originally was born in Germany, but his parents had died, and he went to Kiev. They settled in the Ukraine. I had no family in Germany. But being a reserve . . . I was already a Reserve Officer. I could see the war clearance gathering. I was firmly of the opinion that we were going to go to war, that there had to be a collision course between the United States. As a Jew, I was very disturbed about what was happening in Germany because I was a history buff. I'm familiar with antisemitism. Although lots of people thought it was just business as usual, it hit home to me.

AROGETI: After a couple of years of practicing law in Columbus, you made, perhaps a life-changing decision.

JUDGE COHN: Yes. I couldn't sit still. I went to my judge, and I told my judge that I couldn't practice law anymore, that I needed to be in the army, and that's where I should be. He couldn't understand it because he knew . . . he was very fond of me, just like a father-son relationship. I explained to him as best I could the fact that I was Jewish, my folks had been immigrants, I feel like it was sort of time for me to go into the army. It was really pay-back time. I felt like this country had been good to my parents. I guess I was a patriot, if you want to put it that way. I decided that that's where I should be. Then, too, I explained to him that I was in the Combat Branch, Armored Cavalry, and I certainly didn't want a bunch of young soldiers to get killed because I didn't know my business. I had already been on active duty each year. I had no problem in the army, because most of them were southerners of the same kind of guys. Lots of them didn't have formal education, but they were magnificent soldiers. I came from an army town. Being Jewish never bothered me about being with a bunch of non-Jews who were professional soldiers, because I found out I got along with them real well. That was because I was a YMCA boy from the age I was ten until the days that I went off to college. I had no problem with that. I went in the army.

AROGETI: When did you enlist?

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31 Emilio Pucci, Marchese di Barsento (1914-1992) was a Florentine Italian fashion designer and politician.
**JUDGE COHN:** I went in in the spring of 1940 is when I volunteered for active duty. At that time, the Germans were sweeping down through the lowlands, and I couldn't sit still. It looked like they were going to capture Paris, and I just said, I'm going in the army, and so I went. I didn't get my orders until a little later on, but that's when I volunteered.

**AROGETI:** The year is about 1938 to 1940. At that time, were you married, or did you have a family?

**JUDGE COHN:** No. I didn't get married until 1941. I was in the army. I was in the army in 19 . . . my wife and I got married June 19, 1941. I was then a lieutenant in the 4th Infantry Division.

**AROGETI:** We are going to back up and talk a little bit about your military career in a few minutes, but let's take a moment or two and talk a little bit about your bride of many years. Tell me her name.

**JUDGE COHN:** My wife's name was Janet Ann Lilienthal. She was from an old German Jewish family who came over. My forebears were Eastern European. Her forebears were old German Jewish family. In the Deep South in those days, as you well know, there was a big schism between the old German Jewish families who were very, very Reform, and the Eastern European families, who were still quite Orthodox. Of course, our marriage in Columbus, Georgia, created lots of comment because it was an unusual event, they thought. But the more I think of it, the more I said to myself, when Hitler came to power, I said, you know, Adolph Hitler didn't give a damn whether your folks were born in Germany or they were born in Czechoslovakia or Ireland or New Jersey or what. If you were a Jew, you went to the concentration camp. This should be . . .

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**AROGETI:** This is the interview of Judge Aaron Cohn on April 16, 2000. This is Joel Arogeti. We were talking with Judge Cohn. He was telling us a little bit about his

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32 A division within Judaism especially in North America and Western Europe. Historically it began in the nineteenth century. In general, the Reform movement maintains that Judaism and Jewish traditions should be modernized and compatible with participation in Western culture. While the Torah remains the law, in Reform Judaism women are included (mixed seating, bat mitzvah and women rabbis), music is allowed in
involvement in the military. You were talking about some of the reasons you joined the military. Also, you were talking about your wife and your wife's family, about her German Jewish ancestry and your Russian and Eastern European Jewish ancestry. Please continue.

**JUDGE COHN:** There's one thing. The horrible things that happened in World War II brought home, particularly, as you know, Joel, I was a liberator of one of the concentration camps. It really brought home to you, how stupid can Jews be when they would cause a schism within their ranks over where your parents were born. To me, that was the most ridiculous thing in the world, but that's the way it was in those days. Alfred Uhry\(^{33}\) wrote that play, which would typify it up to a certain point, but it was there. We had that in the early 1940s, certainly in Columbus, Georgia, and in Atlanta and in Montgomery, Alabama, and in Macon, Georgia, and lots of places. How ridiculous the whole thing was.

**AROGETI:** Tell me a little bit about your early years in active duty before you got married, the years 1940, 1941. You knew the war had broken out. You had enlisted. Where were you stationed initially?

**JUDGE COHN:** I was chagrined because, as a cavalry officer, I would have probably gone to the Philippines. Had I gone to the Philippines, that regiment, Philippine Scouts, were wiped out by the Japanese in Lingayen Gulf when they landed in the Philippines. I thought perhaps I might go to the presidio or go along the west coast or down along the Texas border where most horse cavalry units were. To my chagrin, I was ordered to report to, of all places, Harmony Church Fort Benning, Georgia, where a newly-organized infantry division, the 4\(^{th}\) Motorized Division, which was a new triangle infantry division. I was to report to the reconnaissance troop. I went there. I got the great sum of 64 cents. As the finance sergeant said, “Lieutenant Cohn,” he says, “You are going to get the lowest pay that anybody in the United States Army ever got reporting to active duty. Eight cents a mile. Here is your eight miles. Here is your 64 cents.” It wasn’t the money. I thought everybody was telling me goodbye, and I was leaving. Here

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\(^{33}\) Alfred Fox Uhry (b. 1937) was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Uhry is a playwright lyricist, and screenwriter. He is best known for his play *Driving Miss Daisy*, which premiered in New York in 1987 and was later adapted into a film. Uhry has received a Pulitzer Prize, an Academy Award, and several Tony Awards.
I am, I'm still at home.

AROGETI: How long were you initially stationed in Fort Benning?

JUDGE COHN: At Fort Benning, I was with the 4th Infantry Division. When World War II started a week after Pearl Harbor, I was gone. We left Fort Benning, Georgia. Even with ball ammunition. We went to Camp Gordon, Georgia, in Augusta, Georgia, where I went overseas later on to liberate the camp. I left home then.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about your duty overseas in Europe. Tell us a little bit about leaving Augusta, Georgia, and traveling to Europe.

JUDGE COHN: Originally when the war started, it was maneuvers, maneuvers, maneuvers. I had gone to the infantry school, the cavalry school, and then later on to the commanding general staff college in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I left the 4th Division in 1943 because [Lieutenant] General [George Smith] Patton [Jr.]

34 On December 7, 1941 the Japanese surprised the United States by attacking the United States’ fleet in Honolulu, Hawaii. The ships were all docked in Pearl Harbor. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor was the beginning of World War II for the United States, which until that time had remained neutral. A few days later, Germany declared war on the United States as well and we began fighting in the Pacific and Europe.

35 General George Smith Patton, Jr. (1885-1945) commanded the Seventh United States Army and then the
draft came. When the draft came, so many of the youngsters came from the finest schools in the country. They came from Yale and Harvard and Columbia and the Ivy League schools. They came down, and they couldn't get over the idea that they were being trained by guys who were from Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia, where most of the volunteer soldiers were from the southeast who had very little formal education. They used to complain about the fact, “I'm so much more educated than them, and they are telling me what to do.” I used to tell them in no uncertain terms, “Listen to me good. We are training you guys to be killers. We are not going to defeat Hitler through who uses the best English or who is the best historian. Your momma, some day, will be glad that you had these people because they will save your life. They'll take you out on a patrol and make you knock a squirrel out of a tree at 400 yards, and they'll bring your momma's boy back home.” I used to impress them. At first they couldn't get that idea. I think Neil Simon, when he wrote Bilexi Blues, did a gorgeous job of that. But so many of the kids were Jewish kids. The fact that I had volunteered real early, they listened to me. I’m sure I was able to help lots of them along that area. In the old regular army, I found a certain amount of antisemitism with certain individuals, but it never interfered with my military career. I had no problem with that, basically. But when I went up the ladder, it took me a while to get out of the lieutenancy because I was with an infantry division. When I went back to my old cavalry unit, to a cavalry unit, my promotions came. I became a major, a captain, a major. They finally sent me to the command staff college, which was an honor. I was only a captain at the time. So when I went overseas from Fort Gordon, Georgia, my oldest daughter, Gail Cohn, who lives in Atlanta, she was just born. I left her as a baby, and I went overseas. We went to England on the [RMS] Aquitania. We sailed out of Boston Harbor. She was a sister ship, I think, to the [RMS] Mauretania and the [RMS] Lusitania. She had just come back from Singapore. We had no flotilla. We didn't go in convoy. They said she could outrun any U-boat alive. We say hope to hell she did, and she did, because we never had a problem, although there were cases of other people being torpedoed. We landed in Scotland. We were in England a very short time, because we got there just at the time of the invasion. AROGETI: I want you to stop for a moment. I want you to pan a picture. Tell
us what time of year it was. What was it like saying goodbye to your family, your wife and newborn baby? When was the last time you saw your wife before leaving to go to Boston and eventually to Scotland?

JUDGE COHN: I couldn't tell my wife the exact date we were sailing, exact day we were leaving, because that was in violation of our code of conduct. We were not supposed to tell our family. We were supposed to tell them, “I don't know the exact day we are leaving, but it’s time is coming close. You go home and wait for me.” My father sent a driver over to Fort Gordon, Georgia. He took my wife and my little girl. They went back to Columbus, Georgia. That was the last time she saw me for some time. But we didn't leave that exact day. We left in June of 1944. I think we sailed sometime around, as I recall, we may have sailed sometime in the spring of 1944. It was around that time of the first part of the summer in 1944, before the invasion. We sailed, and we landed in Scotland. We didn't stay in England very long. I think we left in June because the invasion had just started. We did not stay in England very long because they needed every soldier that they could find. We were armored cavalry, which is really an elite type of a unit. I would say armored cavalry was very much like Indian Scouts. Our mission was to do battle reconnaissance to find out where the enemy was. Once you find where everybody is engaging in combat, report back to the commanding general so he could make decisions based on what we found on the battlefield. We were known as the eyes and ears of the corps commander. We were directly under the corps commander’s control. The corps consist of usually about three divisions. Each division has roughly 15,000 people and either an armored division or infantry division. We were separate, two squadrons of cavalry. Each squadron had about 750 men in each squadron. We had about 1,700 men in our regiment. The average age of our regiment was 19. We were a great cavalry unit. We fought the 3rd Armored Cavalry. We were in the XX Corps of General Patton’s Third Army.

AROGETI: After you got to Scotland, you were in England, Great Britain for a short period of time. Where were you then assigned?

JUDGE COHN: We went down to Salzburg [Austria]. We had been on the plains of Salzburg. We went down to the port. We were on an LST [landing ship, tank]. We were going to cross the channel.
AROGETI: What is an LST?

JUDGE COHN: Landing.

AROGETI: Transportation?

JUDGE COHN: Landing craft specially designed for troops. That was my first experience with the [United States] Merchant Marine. When we got there, we had a port battalion that was supposed to unload us. We were offshore. They got a message back that the Germans were counter attacking in Mauritania, which was very near the coast. We didn't have a great foothold, and we want to make sure we were driven back into the Atlantic. We all know the history of that. The infantry was an infantry fight up until then, and they needed all the armor they could.

AROGETI: A lot of our historians, particularly contemporary historians, may not be as familiar with what was going on in France at that time. If you could take a step back and explain a little bit of, the war had been going on for several years. The Germans had come into France. They had a foothold in France. They were bombing England.

JUDGE COHN: Yes. The invasion of the continent and the landing of the third army. The operation of the third army started in England. It was operation on. June 6, 1944, the largest armada the world has ever seen hit the beaches. Those of you who have not seen Saving Private Ryan by Steven Spielberg, I would advise you to see it because this is the way it was. The infantry, with all their casualties, they were able to get a foothold. But they were fighting in the hedgerow country. We call it the hedgerow country because it came from the Romans, who had, we call it a hectare. If you had landlines, speaking like a lawyer, the landlines were by a shrubbery and big plants. It was a horrible fighting because the Germans got in behind those hedgerows. We suffered terrible casualties getting a foothold, but once we got a foothold, we were looking for a breakthrough. That would have been part of my unit to use the breakthrough. There was no place on the beaches for a cavalry recon unit. Finally when they got a foothold, they said, hey, we need all of you guys, all of the armor we can get. At that time, we were trying to get off the ships. We were supposed to have a port battalion to unload us, and they weren't there. I went personally to the guy. He was a merchant marine. I said, “Hey, we got to get off. Can you help us get off this place?” He told me, he said, “Have
you seen my contract?” I said, “What contract you talking about?” As a lawyer, I was amazed. What kind of a contract? We are in gun battle. He says, “My contract says I'm to get you here, and how you get off is your business.” I will never forget that until my dying day, because I turned to him and said, “Hey, don't we belong to the same country? Aren't we in the same outfit trying to defeat the Nazis?” He just gave me a look. He said, “Well, that's my contract. You guys are going to have to get off the best way you can.” The port battalion finally showed up. They found out that there was a hole in the German lines there.

AROGETI: Where were you when you landed in France?

JUDGE COHN: We landed on Utah Beach. We went through Sainte-Mère-Eglise, Cotentin, Laval, LeMans. We turned the corner at a little town called Vitré. It was along, close to the Loire River. We slipped. It was like a football game. We slipped in through an open space there. It was the 3rd Cavalry. We became the right flank unit of the Third United States Army along the Loire River. As you know, the Loire runs east and west. We were on the right flank of the Loire River. We went along the Loire to Chateau Orleans, Chateaudun. We ended up in old World War I areas like Verdun, France, where the Germans and the British each lost about a million men in 1916 fighting there in the trenches. Luckily, we didn't have those trenches. We could fight a fluid warfare. It was perfect terrain for type of unit like we had. It was like a killing field. My unit killed Germans right and left. We had ambushes. We would get them in positions where . . . they didn't even know we were there. It was like we were covering 60 miles a day. It was like a football game that once you got past the line of scrimmage, and the Germans had not brought up their reserves, we hit them in every direction. It was like cowboys and Indians. The next thing you know, in August, it was like a dream. We butchered them. Next thing you know, my unit was the first unit in the Third Army that went into Germany. We got held up because we ran out of gas. We no longer operated from a tactical map. We operated from a Michelin roadmap. We ran off the tactical map.

AROGETI: Just so that I’m clear and the historians and others listening to this

36 Utah, commonly known as Utah Beach, was the code name for one of the five sectors of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France in the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), during World War II. The westernmost of the five code-named landing beaches in Normandy.
tape understand that, one of your missions was to penetrate the German line in France, which you successfully did in the summer of 1944?

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes.

**AROGETI:** You were then marching towards Germany?

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes. We were headed east along the Loire River.

**AROGETI:** And then . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** The Germans had not landed in the Mediterranean south. You see, there was nothing between the Loire River and the Mediterranean Sea but a lot of Germans. They asked George Patton, what about your flank? We were interested in the flank, too, because we were the right flank unit along the Loire River. He says, “Damn the Germans.” He says, “Let them worry about their own damn flanks.” It was our flank, and we were interested in that, but we were moving and moving fast. We were going, sometimes we would go 30 and 40 miles down the road when the British were talking about Montgomery's moving two miles or whatever. That was the famous Third Army. We had everything our way.

**AROGETI:** How were you being transported? Through trucks or vehicles?

**JUDGE COHN:** No. I was in a half-track. I had a half-track. I had a gun crew, 50-caliber machine gun, a 50-caliber machine gun superimposed. That was the command post. It was a moving command post. I was the regimental combat officer. All the orders would come out of that vehicle that I was in.

**AROGETI:** Was it an armored truck or . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** No. It was a half-track. A half-track has front wheels, round wheels. The back was a track, like a tank. It's called a half-track. That's what they call it. Half-track. Armored half-track. Our radio, our command radio was there. A gun crew was there with me. I operated the command section from that vehicle. That's where the orders came, from the vehicle that I was in.

**AROGETI:** At this point in time, you're traveling east through France towards Germany. It's now summer of 1944.

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes, August of 1944.

**AROGETI:** So the weather now is still relatively mild?
JUDGE COHN: Beautiful weather. Sunshine. Beautiful summer weather in France.

AROGETI: You've just experienced, perhaps, one of the massive killing fields of World War II?

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Now you're marching towards Germany. What was the sentiment of the troops and the sentiment of people that you could talk to at that point in time?

JUDGE COHN: Listen. Morale was high. It always was in my outfit. There was never bad morale in my outfit. The morale was high. What simply happened is, we never thought we would move that fast. Our supplies didn't catch up with the main body, and we ran out of gas.

AROGETI: What happened to your unit once you ran out of gas?

JUDGE COHN: We ran out of gas. It's a good thing the Germans didn't attack, because we couldn't have moved. We were immobilized. We ran out of gas just as we came up towards the Thion came up to the Moselle River in a famous little town called Thionville, which the Germans called Diedenhofen. That was a confluence of which. We could always tell, basically, the attitude. When we were going through France in those days, the French women were jumping in our vehicles. They were giving us champagne. Vive l'Amérique! Everybody loved us. It was just great stuff. Then as we start getting into Alsace-Lorraine, you know the story of Alsace-Lorraine. In 1870 and 1871, they were taken away from France, the two provinces. They were given to Germany. After World War I, when Germany was defeated, he went back to France. So Alsace and Lorraine . . . when we got to Alsace-Lorraine, there was nobody out there cheering us. Everybody had their doors closed. They didn't know whether we would go in or the Germans would go in. There were a lot of them. We didn't know whether they were pro-German or pro-France. That's the way it was in those days. We hit the Moselle River. The Moselle River was like a little creek. In Columbus, we would call it like Bull Creek. It was a small creek. The Moselle River was just about dried up. Then we ran out of gas, and then the rains came.

AROGETI: When your unit ran out of gas, did you then set up camp either in a city or pitch tents?

JUDGE COHN: No. Let me tell you the way we operated. When we finally
hit the Moselle River. . . I wrote an article for the *Cavalry Journal* in the attack
on Metz later on. The city of Metz was holding out. They were south of us.
Where we were, there was a big French chateau right in the middle of our sector. We set up a cavalry screen along the Moselle River. The Germans were on the east side of the river. We were on the west side of the river. We set up cavalry patrols to make sure the Germans were not coming to our sector. We had combat patrols. When we were at Verdun, we lost our regimental commander. He was shot up and captured. At the same time, two of our officers who had a vehicle with the regimental colors was also nearly captured, but the Germans got our colors. Later on, there was a separate article in the *United States History Journal* where they called me up about it. We finally recovered those colors back. It was September 5, 1944. We were around Verdun, which was a great . . . I remember one of the old timers coming to me. General Collier. He pointed a little place on the map. He says, “Damn you young whippersnappers.” I'll never forget the way he said it. He says, “I spent nearly 60 days right in that patch of woods right there.” He pointed them out. He says, “Y'all went through it in two hours.” That was the difference in World War II and World War I. That was a static war. They fought from the trenches. We were moving all around. We could fight a smart war. It was built for us, for cavalry, because of the road men and so forth. We finally had to stop because we didn't have the gas. At that time, you will find that they wanted to give the British First Army in Montgomery petro, as the British would call it, and we didn't have gas. George Patton was mad as hell. He said, “Give me the damn gas, and I'll go to Berlin.” And then the rains came. When the rains came, it presented a different situation. Now, the Moselle River, which was not an obstacle because it was practically dry, it became a big river. A big, wide river. The rains made it into a big, wide river. There we were. So, it became a static situation. Metz was holding out just south of us. The Saar and Moselle meet at that place, and the Germans were

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37 Battle of Metz was a battle fought during World War II at the city of Metz, France, from late September 1944 through mid-December between the U.S. Third Army commanded by Lieutenant General George Patton and the German Army commanded by General Otto von Knobelsdorff. The city was captured by U.S. forces and hostilities formally ceased on November 22. The last of the forts defending Metz.
entrenched. We didn't use our vehicles. We had a static situation. We found out there was some rolling hills along the river, but we would get in these little French houses that were made out of stone. We found out that we would lose more people to the elements than to combat, because so many of our soldiers were getting trench foot digging into the soil and everything. Our kids, we learned how to fight from houses. We learned how to put our tanks in defilade and to put our tanks but command the terrain. We had combat patrols up and down the river. We were doing our job. We were doing our job. In the meantime, we were living like kings in a big French chateau. When the guys from way back in headquarters, and they were living in the dirt, we were living like kings. When they came up, I'll never forget it. We invited one of the generals. When he saw his cavalry out there and the way we were living, we even had three French maids who came in with hot biscuits. I thought this general was going to fall out of his chair, but we knew how to live.

AROGETI: It's now 1944. You're now in August, September, October of that year?

JUDGE COHN: We didn't stay that long, because after the rains were over, in August, starting in September, and the attack on Metz. We attacked Metz. The Metz had not been taken since, I think, 1471. We provided the cavalry screen north of Metz, the 5th Division, the 95th Division, and the 90th Division. I wrote in my article on this battle and our part of the *Cavalry Journal.* It's written in our unit history. We eliminated that. Metz, at first, did not fall because they had all these forts that surrounded Metz. The forts were from a Franco-Prussian war. The Third Army had a frontal assault. They couldn't make it. Finally, they had the 90th Division attacking from the north along the Moselle River and the 95th. We were north of them protecting their flank. Then the Fifth Division was the south. We had a pincer movement where there was a road going east. The higher-ups let this road be open so the Germans would get on that road and retreat to the east. We let them get that. They had what we call a horse-drawn artillery. None of

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38 The Franco-Prussian War or Franco-German War, often referred to in France as the War of 1870 (1870-1871) or in Germany as 70/71, was a conflict between the Second French Empire of Napoleon III and the German states of the North German Confederation led by the Kingdom of Prussia.
their artillery was self-propelled. It was horse-drawn. That's when artillery is more vulnerable than any time. We let them get out on that road, and they got out on that road. When they did, General [Otto P.] Weyland's 19th [Tactical] TAC Air Force hit them on the road because we had knocked the Luftwaffe\footnote{Luftwaffe literally translates to “air force” and is the generically used German term for their air force. From 1935-1945, it was also the official name of the Nazi air force led by Hermann Goering (German: Göring).} we couldn't have done all of these things without the air force. They had knocked the Luftwaffe out of the sky. We commanded the air. We could have gone into Paris, but we didn't. We were told not to go into Paris. We had patrols in the Forest of Fontainebleau. I had sent messages out, “Do not go into Paris.” Do you know what? It was the most amazing thing. Those vehicles used to be back to back. We followed the 1st French Armored Division who went into Paris when we did not go into Paris because we were headed towards the east. The Germans got on that road, and our air force just tore them apart. You could see for 50 miles. All you could see was dead Germans and dead horses. Up and down. It was like a turkey shoot.

AROGETI: Let me ask this question. Now it's August and September, 1944. Judge, you had just gone through, perhaps, yet another, what I call, killing fields of German soldiers and supplies. Around this same time, 1944, the fall of 1944, you, as a Jewish soldier, Jewish commander, suddenly coming upon Rosh Ha-Shanah\footnote{Rosh Ha-Shanah [Hebrew: head of the year; i.e. New Year festival] begins the cycle of High Holy Days. It introduces the Ten Days of Penitence, when Jews examine their souls and take stock of their actions. On the tenth day is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The tradition is that on Rosh Ha-Shanah, G-d sits in judgment on humanity. Then the fate of every living creature is inscribed in the Book of Life or Death. Prayer and repentance before the sealing of the books on Yom Kippur may revoke these decisions.} and Yom Kippur.\footnote{Hebrew for ‘Day of Atonement.’ The most sacred day of the Jewish year. Yom Kippur is a 25 hour fast day. Most of the day is spent in prayer, reciting yizkor for deceased relatives, confessing sins, requesting divine forgiveness, and listening to Torah readings and sermons. People greet each other with the wish that they may be sealed in the heavenly book for a good year ahead. The day ends with the blowing of the shofar (a ram’s horn).} What was it like being in combat in the military in perhaps one of the bloodiest wars of recent mankind to suddenly experience the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement? What was that like?

JUDGE COHN: Joel, I didn't know whether it was Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday, and I didn't care. It was just one day after another. All we were thinking about was our mission and what we were supposed to do. I never saw a rabbi the whole
time I was in combat. I didn't see a rabbi. As a matter of fact, we had two chaplains. We had a Catholic chaplain, who became my life-long friend, called Father [George] Brennan. He later became a monsignor. I loved him dearly. He loved me dearly. I had told him if I was killed, I wanted him to take care of me. He became a monsignor. He was in Providence, Rhode Island. He's gone now, but George Brennan was one of the finest chaplains I've ever known in my life. We also had a protestant chaplain named K. K. Cunningham from Missouri. He was the best scrounger in Europe. If you wanted to find some wine or some booze or you wanted to find some weapons or something that we needed for supplies, he would find it for you. He was called the best scrounger we ever had.

AROGETI: So for you as a commander and as a soldier, come August, September, October, you were so involved in your mission, protecting yourself, protecting your men, that you had effectively lost track of time?

JUDGE COHN: I lost track of time. I wasn't interested in whether it was Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. We knew the dates and so forth, but Sunday was another day. Shabbos was another day. I adopted the theory, you know, the Rabbinical Conference\(^{42}\) had always said, “In times of emergency,” like we were, “dietary laws, everything was out of the book.” I had no problem with any of this. That’s why I didn't have a rabbi. That never worried me. I did not grow up in a background of just . . . I was not into a . . . I was Jewish in a small southern town. I assimilated. Not my religion. I was always an affirmative Jew. But I learned to live with my Christian friends and show them that I could compete with them, that I was as good an American as them, if not better, and more sensitive to the needs of our country because of what they had done for my family.

AROGETI: So it's the fall of 1944. You had just gone through the Battle of Metz. You were engaged in heavy combat at this time. You were observing everything. Now you're coming into the latter part of the fall of 1944 and approaching winter of 1944. Tell us a little bit about what was it like as a military officer and commander in

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\(^{42}\) Assemblies of rabbis wherein they determine common courses of action or common principles of faith. Rabbinical conferences are a late phenomenon in the history of Judaism, dating from the early nineteenth century. There had been occasional gatherings of Jews during earlier centuries to consider important issues touching the life and religious practice of the people, but the deliberations at these gatherings, or synods, as
Europe, marching towards Germany. You are going through the Alsace-Lorraine. What was it like?

**JUDGE COHN:** Finally, we couldn't do anything until we crossed the river. Once Metz fell, we crossed the river to aid in the fall of Metz. After Metz fell, we fought in the Saar-Moselle Triangle and got into what we call the Palatinate. That's the land between the Moselle River and the Rhine River. Little by little, we did our job. But it was slow going. The rain was coming in. We didn't have the weather. The Germans became much more affirmative and so forth. In December, we were still, a part of us were on the Moselle River. We spent nearly 90 days around the Moselle River, up and down the Moselle River valley. I'll never forget, on Christmas day . . . I mean, on December 16, 1944, my colonel had asked me to go to the 4th Division, my old division, who was now in Luxembourg, to see if we could get some artillery to clear out the Saar-Moselle and uncover our front, so to speak. If we uncovered the front, then we wouldn't have the Germans. We were on one side of the river. The Germans were on the other side of the river. All of a sudden, on December 16, I have to tell my old buddies in the 4th Division, “Hey you got it made.” We were on our dens then. <unintelligible> It was real lull all of a sudden. Then on December 16, 1944, in the fog and the rain and everything, then it hit. That was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge. We were very fortunate in the Battle of the Bulge. We were very fortunate because we were on the tip end of the bulge. We were not in the very center of the bulge. We were guarding the flank of the third army. The rest is history. The Third Army was attacking to the east. Then we couldn't attack to the east anymore because General Patton had our Third Army attack to the north. He had given orders what to do. They left us along the river, guarding a 23 mile front along the river, we wanted to make sure the Germans didn’t attack the underbelly of the bulge. So, that was our mission. I say, that maybe Adolph Hitler saved my life. The reason I can say that is because we picked up some prisoners of war, who

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43 Also known as the Ardennes Offensive (December 16, 1944 through January 25, 1945), the Battle of the Bulge was a major German offensive launched toward the end of World War II through the densely forested Ardennes mountain region in Belgium. Hitler threw everything he had into trying to drive the Allies back and stopping their advance out of Normandy, France. The Germans achieved nearly complete surprise during a period of heavy overcast weather, which grounded the Allies’ air forces. The Germans nearly broke through (“the Bulge”) the Allied lines. Nearly 19,000 Allied troops were killed and 62,000 wounded and 26,000 missing or captured. The Germans suffered nearly 85,000 casualties before they
said <unintelligible> Division during the Battle of the Bulge had been committed by [Gerd] von Rundstedt, and they were going to attack right through our sector. We were a light calvary unit, and they were one of the elite <unintelligible> divisions in Europe. I say that Adolph Hitler helped save my life. Why? Because he countermanded the order.

AROGETI: The German commanders in the field gave an order to effectively attack where you were stationed.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Yet, Hitler overruled his generals?

JUDGE COHN: Yes, he overruled von Rundstedt, who had given the order. That’s what the prisoners’ of war told us. I think it was verified, but he said no. He did not want to commit that division. So I say, when Hitler, who was the commander in chief, although he was a corporal . . . when he countermanded von Rundstedt’s order, I think he saved my life because no longer would we have to stop. The <unintelligible> Division fighting an armored cavalry regiment over a 23 mile front is like asking a light weight boxer to knock out a heavy weight. They had heavy tanks Mark VI. We were not equipped. We used to have a saying in the cavalry recon unit sometimes based on our mission: He who runs away today, lives to fight another day. We did not want confrontation with units. You cannot beat up pocket battleships with a little light cruiser. That’s what we were. I mention that because people say hey, who saved your life over there? I say Hitler saved my life. If I want to look at it that way.

were pushed back. It was the largest and bloodiest battle fought in World War II.

44 Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt (1875-1953) was a Field Marshal in the Wehrmacht of Nazi Germany during World War II. Born into a Prussian family with a long military tradition, Rundstedt entered the Prussian Army in 1892. During World War I, he served mainly as a staff officer. In the inter-war years, he continued his military career, reaching the rank of Colonel General before retiring in 1938. He was recalled at the beginning of World War II as commander of Army Group South in the invasion of Poland. He commanded Army Group A during the Battle of France and was promoted to the rank of Field Marshal in 1940. In the invasion of the Soviet Union, he commanded Army Group South, responsible for the largest encirclement in history, the Battle of Kiev, as well as the largest mass killing of the Holocaust to that date, at Babi Yar. He was relieved of command in December 1941 but was recalled in 1942 and appointed Commander-in-Chief in the West. He was dismissed after the German defeat in Normandy in July 1944, but was again recalled as Commander-in-Chief in the West in September, holding this post until his final dismissal by Adolf Hitler in March 1945.

45 Any of a class of cruisers with large-caliber guns, operated by the German navy in World War II. The terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, limited German warships to a displacement of 10,000 long tons (10,160 t). The first class of ships designed under these restrictions was the Deutschland class, designed in the late 1920s, and commonly referred to as “pocket battleships.”
AROGETI: It’s now December 16. You’re in the Battle of the Bulge. You are protecting your flanks. Winter is approaching or winter is there in full force and effect. You are there on the cusp, so to speak, of this Battle of the Bulge.

JUDGE COHN: The rest is history. After that storm, all of a sudden, my God, the sunshine came out. The clouds left. The fog left. You looked up at the sky, and you didn’t see anything but American planes. God, it was the most gorgeous sight. Then, the rest is history. That was Hitler’s last gasp. They retreated. They let them get back across the Rhine River.

AROGETI: The German’s retreated over the Rhine?

JUDGE COHN: They went over the Rhine. That was their next line of defense. We had our friends, the 9th Armored Division, who had never been in combat. They came to see us. My best friend was a guy named Tom Greenfield, who was with the Green Bay Packers. Tom Greenfield was a great guy. Tom was a captain. He says, “I had a message sent out to the troops.” I would give it to Tom and Tom would call me chief. He would say, “Chief, why are you always giving me these messages?” I said, “Tom, because I know if a big damn dumb football player like you can understand it, anybody in the regiment can understand it.” He was my lifelong friend. He lives out in Arizona. We talk to each other all of the time. What happened was, the rest is history. The 9th Armored Division said we can’t wait to get in there.

AROGETI: So the Germans are retreating. The 9th Division is there. Your cavalry group is ready and charged up.

JUDGE COHN: The 9th Division, they are the ones who took the <unintelligible> bridge. The 9th Armored Division, not the 9th Infantry Division. We got a bridgehead across the river. My unit crossed the Rhine River on March 3 on my birthday.

AROGETI: In 1945.

JUDGE COHN: In 1945, we crossed the Rhine. Little by little, we slogged on through. We hit the German-Swiss line. We hit the Siegfried Line. We went back later on after the war, the Siegfried Line. I went with my colonel. I had a great colonel named

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46 Thomas Guy Greenfield (1917-2004) was born in Glendale, Arizona. He was a professional American football linebacker for the Green Bay Packers from 1939 to 1941. He was named to the Pro Bowl after the Packers won the championship in 1939. He played college football at the University of Arizona.
James H. Polk, who commanded my regiment. He and I were lifelong friends after the war. He was a great soldier. He later became a four-star general. He was from El Paso, Texas.

AROGETI: Let me ask this question. I’m going to stop for a moment. It’s now March, 1945. Tell us what you heard back from the military, the community, whatever, if anything about what was going on in Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, about the concentration camps.

JUDGE COHN: I didn’t know anything about the concentration camps until we got into Germany. About April 1, I think I saw my first concentration camp, Ohrdruf. O-H-R-D-R-U-F. One of the first camps. It was in the western part of Germany. I saw it because they wanted us to see it. That’s when I saw what was happening.

AROGETI: Tell us, as a witness to history, particularly in light of what has happened in the world today. Like I said, it’s April 16, but just less than a week an English court issued a decision, finding that an Emory University professor of Judaic Studies, Deborah Lipstadt, who wrote a book about people denying the Holocaust was sued by David Irving, a reputed historian, who sued Dr. Lipstadt, alleging that by calling him a Holocaust denier somehow he had defamed her. The British court found in favor of Professor Lipstadt, not only found that Irving was a Holocaust denier and pseudo-historian, but also entered an order requiring the pseudo-historian to pay Professor Lipstadt’s attorneys fees, but you are a witness to history. No one, not your wife, not your children, no one can tell the story that you saw with your eyes. What you smelled,

James Hilliard Polk (1911-1992) was a United States Army four-star general who served as Commander in Chief, United States Army Europe from 1967 to 1971. He was one of the last senior commanders in the army to have served in the horse cavalry.

Ohrdruf camp was a sub-camp of Buchenwald camp, the first Nazi camp liberated by U.S. troops. Created in November 1944 near the town of Gotha, Germany, Ohrdruf supplied forced labor in the form of concentration camp prisoners for railway construction leading to a proposed communications center, which was never completed due to the rapid American advance. In late March 1945, the camp had a prisoner population of some 11,700, but in early April, the SS evacuated almost all the prisoners on death marches to Buchenwald. The SS guards killed many of the remaining prisoners who were too ill to walk to the railcars. When the soldiers of the 4th Armored Division entered the camp, they discovered piles of bodies, some covered with lime, and others partially incinerated on pyres. The ghastly nature of their discovery led General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, to visit the camp on April 12, with Generals George S. Patton and Omar Bradley.

Dr. Deborah E. Lipstadt is a professor of Jewish Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. She was sued by the English Holocaust denier for libel in 2000. She called him a Holocaust denier in her book, Denying the Holocaust. She claimed that he was a denier as well as an antisemite and a racist who consorted with right-wing extremists around the world.
what you tasted, what you touched in April, 1945. Will you please tell us about that?

**JUDGE COHN:** I only saw Ohrdruf after the Germans had left. I didn’t talk to any inmates then. That was the first camp that I had seen. The rest is history. We had no problems slicing through Germany and beating the living hell out of them, which we should have done. Then, as we were headed towards the end of the war, we were headed into the Austrian Alps. We were told that Tito’s and his guerillas\(^50\) might come up into our sector. We ended the war down towards Austria.

**AROGETI:** Now it’s April, May . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** No. This was, I told you, the end of the war. We ended the war in that area. This was around May 3, 4, and 5. Just before the war was over. We went down there, and our tank company, Fox Company, told us that they had run into a concentration camp. My colonel said, “Aaron, go down to see them. See what is going on.” He told me to go. When I went in, when I walked into the camp, they were standing around in their striped outfits. There must have been, I would say, 100 of them. There must have been about 50 or 75 dead, lying there on the ground with their eyes looking at the sky. Maggots all over them. The guards had fled, but they were there, and they didn’t know what was going on. I think I was the first Jew they ever saw. The 80th Division said they liberated it. We said we liberated the camp. Both of us got there about the same time. They were a division, and they get credit for it, but my unit is written up in the history book, the 3rd Calvary ran into it. We liberated that part of it.

**AROGETI:** Tell us, you saw German Jews or European Jews . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** They were from all over Europe. When I walked in, I had on tank boots and a helmet. It was 1945, so I was 29-years-old. When I walked in, they shrunk back. One of them said, “*Das ist ein Schutzstaffel meier.*”

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

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\(^{50}\) Josip Broz Tito was the supreme commander of the People’s Liberation Army and Partisan Detachment, known as the ‘Partisans,’ in Yugoslavia during World War II. In 1933, Tito was appointed Prime Minister of a provisional executive body formed in Yugoslavia, called the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (Nacionalni komitet oslobodenja jugoslavije or NKOJ). At the time, he received the title, “Marshal of Yugoslavia.” The Partisans were recognized as the Allied Yugoslav resistance movement, and granted supplies and wartime support. Later, Tito became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.
AROGETI: This is the second tape on April 16, 2000. This is Joel Arogeti. I’m interviewing Judge Aaron Cohn of Columbus, Georgia. Judge, you were just telling us the story of the liberation of the concentration camp. One of the first things an inmate had said to you upon seeing a young 29-year-old soldier wearing a helmet and tank boots. He spoke to you in German. What did he say to you, and what did you say back to him?

JUDGE COHN: I had my shoulder holster gun across my chest. Tankers usually carry their handguns that way, at least we did. I don’t even know who said it. As I walked into the courtyard of the camp, there were approximately 100 inmates standing there. They were living skeletons. They looked like cadavers. There were about 50 dead, lying there in the courtyard. Nobody said a word except, they shrank back from me. One person in the crowd, I heard him say, “Das ist ein Schutzstaffel meier,” which means in German that I was an SS major. I turned to them. I said, “Nein.” “No.” “Ich bin ein Schutzstaffel meier.” “I’m not an SS major.” When I said I was an American major and was not an SS major, I was the first American they had seen. Then they began to crowd toward me. When they did, I said “Ich bin ein amerikanischer Jude.” “I’m an American Jew.” When I said that, it was like the super bowl. They kissed me. They hugged me. The put their arms around me. They really wanted to lift me up, but I think they were too weak to do so. That was my part in the liberation. They were just so overjoyed. I spent nearly three days there because we were told to just hold tight there. Then we were ordered to cross the Alps like Hannibal to meet the British 8th Army coming up because we did not want Tito and his guerillas to come up through the mountain passes. That was when the war ended, right in that area with us. I talked to other people there. I saw the camp. These barbarians were the biggest bastards in the world. They were the most systematic extermination of a people. Let me tell you how the barracks were. There were seven or eight barracks. When you first reported there, you went into barrack number one. Of course, they didn’t feed you very well. Naturally. You work there in slave labor, and then you went to barracks two. Then you went to barracks three. Then you went to barracks four and barracks five. In other words, the longer you were there, the less food you got, the more you went towards the crematorium. The last one that you went to, and I saw some of them. These people were
just lying there in their excrement. Just lying in their excrement, and they were dying. From there, that last place, that's when they went to the crematorium. In other words, it was a systematic way of . . . and, of course, they kept wonderful records. That's one thing about the Germans, they kept wonderful records. That's the reason, of course, we have found them out and able to do the job that we've done, but that's the way it was. The crematorium I saw, I talked to the people there. They told me their stories. The horrible part of all of this was, the man that I talked to the most who kissed my hand and told me that I must tell my story when I get back to the United States. He made me promise that. I've done so at lots of civic clubs that I've been to and the Holocaust things. What he told me, he said, “I was born in Vienna.” He says, “The bones of my ancestors lie in this godforsaken land.” He says, “I will leave this godforsaken place,” he said, “but I want you to know, Major Cohn, look at me.” He says, “I was a lieutenant in the Austrian army, and I was decorated by the Emperor Franz Joseph\textsuperscript{51} himself for bravery. I received the Austrian Iron Cross.” He says, “My family lived in Vienna, and they lived here for 800 years. I was one of the leading lawyers. Look at me now, and I am now going to leave here. We are going to get out of this damn place. We are going to go to our own country in Israel where no one will ever drive us out.” He says, “You must remember this and tell this story.” I said, “I won't ever forget it.”

AROGETI: Do you know the name of that gentleman?

JUDGE COHN: I don't know his name at all. Don't know his name at all. Don't know his name at all. I have talked to lots of the others. I talked to a young lady who the Gestapo\textsuperscript{52} came at three o'clock in the morning, drove she, her father, her little brother, her mother, her grandmother, out of the house. It was snowing. They made them get out immediately. Right away, they took the grandmother over here, the grandfather over there. They sent her to a brothel. Her little brother, she never saw again. She told me the whole story. When I got back to the United States, people didn't ever want to hear this. I was not Don Quixote tilting the windmills. My synagogue didn't want to talk.

\textsuperscript{51} Franz Joseph (1830-1916), also called Francis Joseph, was emperor of Austria (1848–1916) and king of Hungary (1867–1916). His empire was into the Dual Monarchy, in which Austria and Hungary coexisted as equal partners. In 1879 he formed an alliance with Prussian-led Germany, and in 1914 his ultimatum to Serbia led Austria and Germany into World War I.

\textsuperscript{52} Gestapo is an abbreviation from Geheime Staatspolizeri, meaning “Secret State Police.” It was established in Prussia in 1933. By 1936 its authority extended throughout Germany. The Gestapo and the
about it. The temple didn't want to talk about it. Nobody wanted to talk about it. Nobody wanted to talk about it. I just went back to my civilian life, stayed in the army reserve, and went back to practicing law.

AROGETI: We'll talk about . . . we are going to finish up this loop of your career.

JUDGE COHN: Of course, that was the way it was. We went down below Klagenfurt. We ran into the British 8th Army. We were there for a few days. Then we went to Gunden, Austria, and the war was over.

AROGETI: When you say the war was over, how did you receive notice from your commanding officer or . . . ?

JUDGE COHN: I got a message that came to me. I still have a copy of it in my office, in which they declared the Cessation of Hostilities. And we passed it on to the troops.

AROGETI: How long was it from the declaration that the war was over, stopped, from the time that you were able to return back to Columbus, Georgia?

JUDGE COHN: I came back around November, 1945. I was the high point man because I had been in the army. You have to have lots of points. I did not come back with my original unit. I came back with the 90th Infantry Division, soldiers of the 90th Division.

AROGETI: Did you spend any significant time transitioning down, making sure that areas were safe, that even the Germans knew that the war was over, or did everybody just drop their weapons?

JUDGE COHN: I'll tell you how I remember the war was over, because on my way, about two days, we always sweated out. We'd get killed right before the war was over. About two days before the war . . . we had one of our young officers was killed a day before the peace. I was going from one town to another. There was a fluid situation. The Germans all wanted to surrender to Americans. They did not want to surrender to the Russians.

AROGETI: Why is that?

JUDGE COHN: Because they knew they would receive good treatment under the Criminal Police together constituted Nazi German’s Security Police.
Geneva Convention\textsuperscript{53} with Americans. But with the Russians, they didn't know what the Russians would do with them. They were horrified to be captured by the Russians. They wanted to surrender to Americans. I went down the road, and I saw a German boy, a young German soldier. Hitler now had 16-year-olds in there, and he was there. He stuck his hand out. He wanted me to capture him. I said, “Wait a minute. I haven't got time. I have to go.” He says . . . he spoke English. He told me, he says, “There are 100 soldiers in that little village you just passed. They could have killed me. They could have ambushed me, but they were all hidden. They wanted to wait to surrender to somebody.” I said, “Well, I've got to go back because I want to make sure.” I took him. I had a machine gun jeep. I said, “If I see you not doing what you're supposed to do, we are going to kill you.” He says, “Don't you worry. I'll show you what I am going to do.” He went, and I heard him holler, “\textit{Der Amerikaner ist hier}.” “The American is here.” And they all came out. I had a machine gun jeep. There had to be about 100 German soldiers. They all lined up. I told them throw their weapons. They threw their weapons down. I had on nothing but a 45 machine gun. All of a sudden a guy says in perfect English, he says to me, “Major, please put that goddamn gun up. You are going to get one of us killed.” I said, “Who the hell said that?” This guy said, “I did.” I said, “Who the hell are you?” He said, “Well, I'm from Cincinnati, Ohio.” I said, “What are you doing in the German army?” He says, “I was visiting with my momma, who was from Germany, and when the war started, they would not let me go back to the United States. They drafted me.” I said, “You take these lunkheads, line them up in columnar fours. There is a POW camp right down the road.” Because they were surrendering by the thousands. There went my boys, 100 of them. They went on down the road. But we never knew whether we were going to meet up with some fanatic SS unit hidden in the woods. You would ride down the road, and you were dead by ambush.

**AROGETI:** Were land mines an issue?

**JUDGE COHN:** The Germans didn't have time to put any land mines in this part of the country because they were never in a defensive position. It was such a fluid situation.

\textsuperscript{53} A series of international agreements on the conduct of warring nations and the treatment of prisoners of war. Originally drafted in 1864, the convention’s 1929 revision stipulated that belligerent powers must treat captured prisoners of war humanely and provide medical care for the sick and wounded. This agreement was ratified and followed by most countries.
The Germans just disintegrated.

AROGETI: It was not uncommon for you to see German soldiers with their hands up marching towards a prisoner of war camp?

JUDGE COHN: Not at all. Not at all. In those days. It was the last few days of the war.

AROGETI: Transitioning back home, you . . .


AROGETI: It's now . . . you've now been overseas, what, a little over a year?

JUDGE COHN: I left for overseas in 1944, in the spring of 1944, about the end of spring 1944. I came back in the latter part of October, 1945.

AROGETI: Almost a year and a half?

JUDGE COHN: Year and a half.

AROGETI: You have not seen your family?

JUDGE COHN: Oh, no.

AROGETI: Were you able to correspond periodically?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. I would write letters to Janet Ann.

AROGETI: And letters got back to you?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. During the Battle of the Bulge, she was always sending me things. She would send me stuff like wurst, bologna sandwiches, sardines. Different things. Bread. Different things.

AROGETI: Were you able to receive packages?

JUDGE COHN: Some of it. I always shared it with my gun crew. I shared everything with my gun crew. I used to get, what we call, a Nafi ration. I would swap a bottle of scotch for two bottles of gin and get some grape juice. In my outfit, I would give them . . . we would drink together. You know, when you were the gun crew, rank didn't mean a damn thing. The 88 millimeter shell that went through that half-track wouldn't stop and not kill me because I was a major. I once went into the line when we had a vehicle, we would go into the line, half-track, we were replacing an outfit that had been there, been in combat. The corps commander, where I sat, and the driver were sitting there. There was nothing but their necks. An 88 millimeter shell had come
through and knocked off both of their heads. My driver was named Frank Pemerochi [sp] from Massachusetts. We called him penochle. I said, “Penochle, don't you dare do that to me. You are driving this vehicle. Goddamn it if you let that happen to me.” I said, “I'll never speak to you again as long as I live.” Sergeant Mowin [sp] was from Iowa. He was a big, wonderful guy. Mowin used to always say, “When the war is over, we all going to go to Georgia and eat fried chicken and potato salad with Major Cohn.” Rank didn't mean a damn thing to me. They knew I had a job to do. They had a job. There is a way of getting along with enlisted men if you are an officer by showing that you are a leader. You care about them. You want to help them out. That they are your guys, and you protect them. That's what a leader is all about. See, here's what you learn in the cavalry. If you had a horse or a vehicle. First, you brought the horse back, and you went to stables. You took care of your horse. You saw he was groomed, you saw he was taken care of. Then you took care of your equipment. After you took care of your equipment, then you took care of your men. After you took care of your men and your equipment and you equip everything else, then you could take care of yourself. You came last. Everything else was first. That's the mark of a leader. The same thing happens in civilian life. Same thing.

AROGETI: Now you're transitioning back. You've just been through one of the bloodiest wars of mankind. You're now transitioning back to civilian life. You return back to Columbus, Georgia, your wife, your 18-month-old, two-year-old daughter.

JUDGE COHN: She didn't know me.

AROGETI: You had some adjusting to do getting to know.

JUDGE COHN: She didn't know me. I have the same thing in my court with guys who have gone overseas. They have been overseas two years. They haven't seen their child. They come back. They expect their child to immediately respond to them, and the child doesn't respond. Then they start beating the hell out of them. I have had that in my court before with army people. It took a long time for my daughter, Gail, to understand I was her father and her grandfather was not her father.

AROGETI: Let's talk a little bit about your life. You're now coming back to Columbus. You're coming back to civilian life. You got a wife and a child. Your family
is still there. Your parents were alive at this time?

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes. They were all there.

**AROGETI:** All there. So you came back to, what, a hero's welcome?

**JUDGE COHN:** Except my wife's brother. My wife's brother was 18-years-old. He was killed in combat.

**AROGETI:** Tell us what his name is.

**JUDGE COHN:** His name was Leslie Lilienthal, Jr. Graduated Castle Heights Military Academy [Lebanon, Tennessee]. He was 19-years-old, 18-years-old. He was a rifleman. He was a rifle replacement. He was assigned to General Charlie Gerhardt,\(^{54}\) 29th Division, who had lasted D-Day. He was killed fighting around Fort Kerenroux [Germany] on September the 13th, 1944. He is now still buried in the Brittany United States Military Cemetery, in Lot 11, Plot 5, between a kid from Arkansas and a kid from Texas. I did not want my . . . Janet Ann's parents to bring him back. The Star of David is there on his grave. I wanted to make sure . . .

**AROGETI:** Let's talk a little bit about . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** I wanted to make sure that they understand that not only Christians died for the United States of America, but we Jews played our part.

**AROGETI:** That was going to be my point.

**JUDGE COHN:** Yes. I wanted them to know that.

**AROGETI:** You were there. You were firsthand in person combat soldier who knew that people of all religions and races and colors and creeds fought in the war. Is there anything that you can share to us historically about what it like in the south? Talk a little bit about black and Jewish relations, either in the military . . .

**JUDGE COHN:** I saw the black soldiers with the 761st Tank Battalion. I saw the black soldiers put their life on the line. When I came back in Columbus, Georgia, and I had some personal experiences representing young blacks, dealing with race relationships. I was sick about how the blacks were treated with those lousy Jim Crow

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\(^{54}\) Major General Charles Hunter Gerhardt (1895-1976) was a senior United States Army officer who fought in both World War I and World War II. During the latter, he commanded the 29th Infantry Division from 1943 until the end of the war and during part of the occupation of Germany. The division's most famous combat operations were the Omaha Beach landings of June 6, 1944 (his 49th birthday), otherwise known as D-Day, and the taking of the French crossroads town of Saint-Lo in July 1944.
laws. I always said, I hope someday that I would be in a position to do my part in bettering race relations between the blacks and the whites. I've had a chance to do that in 35 years on the bench.

AROGETI: Let's talk a little bit. You returned back to Columbus. It's now 1945. You had to rekindle your legal career.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Basically from scratch. You had been in the military for a number of years and now returning to a private practice of law.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about your family and your practice of law. Bring us . . . tell us a little bit about Columbus history. Columbus, Georgia's history in the mid-1945.

JUDGE COHN: Columbus history, as you know, most of my clients when I came back were not any of the older Jewish families or Jewish businessmen that had been in business all those years. Everybody had made their connections and so forth. There were still a few sometimes about, you know, “It's best not to get a Jewish lawyer if you got a problem in the courtroom.” I've run into that. It didn't bother me. The people I represented were, 50 percent of them were the young blacks who had returned from the service, some of my non-Jewish friends who were starting new businesses. People of my age. I was not proud. I would take collections. I would take anything that was honest. I was not a gun for hire. I still had stars in my eyes to the extent that I

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55 Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States enacted between 1876 and 1965. The name seems to have originated in the song “Jump Jim Crow,” a song-and-dance caricature of blacks performed by white actor Thomas D. Rice in blackface in 1832. As a result of Rice’s fame, “Jim Crow” became a pejorative expression meaning “Negro” by 1838 and the later segregation laws became known as “Jim Crow” laws. Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in the southern states of the former Confederacy, with a supposedly “separate but equal” status for black Americans, although in reality this was not so. Some examples of Jim Crow laws are the segregation of public schools, places, and public transportation and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. Private businesses, political parties and unions created their own Jim Crow arrangements, barring blacks from buying homes in certain neighborhoods, from shopping or working in certain stores, from working at certain trades, etc. In the middle twentieth century, the Supreme Court began to overturn Jim Crow laws on constitutional grounds. Rosa Parks defied the Jim Crow laws when she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, which became a catalyst to the Civil Rights movement. Her actions, and the demonstrations that followed, led to a series of legislative and court decisions that contributed to undermining the Jim Crow system. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially ended Jim Crow laws.
felt like the old saying. This may sound corny, but “the object of all legal investigation is the truth.” I just took the things that I felt comfortable with. I would not take anything else. It took a long time for me to make a decent living. We lived with the folks, well, maybe . . . my son, Leslie, was born there in 1947. Two years later, we were still living with my wife's parents. For two years. They wanted me to go into the clothing business with Dad when his only son was killed in combat. He had a beautiful store like Regenstein's in Atlanta. It was called Kayser-Lilienthal. They sold ladies' clothes. They offered me about anything I wanted. But I said it was just not for me. My non-Jewish friends who practiced law thought I was crazy. They said, “Aaron, you are going to give all of that up?” I told them, well, you guys always think the Jews just love money. I said, “I am not going to spend the rest of my life . . .” There was no merchant in my family. I said, “I'm not going to sell ladies' clothes for the rest of my life.” I said, “I was a lawyer before and I'm going back to what I know best. I want to be a lawyer. I'm going back to being a lawyer, even though I don't have the first client.” I hung up my shingle. I had an office. My god, it was so hot in there. There was no air-conditioning. But my friends said, “You're crazy.”

AROGETI: Did you practice on your own, or did you practice with a group of other lawyers?

JUDGE COHN: Practiced on my own. I took what the other lawyers didn't want.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

AROGETI: In 1947, you said your son Leslie was born?

JUDGE COHN: Leslie was born.

AROGETI: The first son of Aaron Cohn?

JUDGE COHN: Yes. The one and only.

AROGETI: The one and only. Tell us about your children. Gail is your oldest?

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Leslie is your son.

JUDGE COHN: Gail is my oldest. Leslie is my son. He graduated University of Georgia as a distinguished military graduate. He felt about this country the way I did.
He was a DMG [Distinguished Military Graduate]. They offered him a commission in the regular army, but . . .

AROGETI: A DMG is?

JUDGE COHN: Distinguished Military Graduate. I want to say one thing. I ended up in the army as a . . . I retired from the army after 28-27 years of service as a full colonel in 1964. In 1964, I received a letter from the Department of Defense that I was in the Zone of Consideration. I was in the Zone of Consideration for promotion to brigadier general. My youngest daughter, Jane, was born in 1950. Today, I want you to stand because there are not that many Jewish generals. I was in a good position at that time. I was still in the army. I had not retired, but then I was appointed on the bench. I felt like I just couldn't do it all. I had to make a choice, so I did. I went ahead and retired from the army because I was going on the bench. I felt like I couldn't do it all.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about that experience. In the early 1960s, there were not very many . . . there were Jewish lawyers but not very many Jewish jurists. Judges.

JUDGE COHN: Yes.

AROGETI: Tell us about that experience.

JUDGE COHN: I was appointed in 1964. My wife did not want me to go on the bench. She said, “You will be judging other people's children, and lots of these people are friends of ours we’ve known all of our life.” I told Janet Ann . . . I finally told her, “I won't do it then. Okay. Just don't hawk me. Go to bed and quit hawking me.” The next morning, I told Jan I was going to go down and I was going to take the appointment. The reason I took the appointment, Joel, is because a lot of times . . . there would never have been a Jewish judge in Columbus. Sometimes we complain about so many things happening in the community, and we don't want to get in there and get dirty with criticisms and this, that, and the other. That didn't bother me at all. I kind of felt like I did when I went in the army. I think it is pay-back time. I felt it's about time that the Jews who are offered a position in public life in a community should go into public life, and so I did. I've never regretted it. It has brought me lots of frustrations, of course, on individual cases, but the rewards are so great, so great when you see these young people that you had 35 years ago. They're now businessmen or they are police officers or they
are deputy sheriffs. They remember you and what you did for them years ago. They just come up to you and want to show you pictures of their children. They talk about old times and what it meant to them. I get that every day of my life. They say man does not live by bread alone. My rewards in my community have been so numerous and so many different things, not monetarily, but from being someone who was a part of the community and help people out.

AROGETI: I don't want to fast forward 1964 now to the year 2000 because there are close to 25 plus years of a lifetime of experience. But I want to tape the next portion of our conversation because, again, this is an oral history project. The 1960s were very tumultuous times in the south. You were a judge. We're not going to go through the entire 25 years, but what was it like being in the early 1960s as a Judge and being Jewish?

JUDGE COHN: Let me tell you about this. In 1960, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, we had . . . voter registration was very bad. They asked me to serve as a Chief Voter Registrar in Muscogee County, Georgia, my superior court judges. I told them, there is no such thing as a second-class citizen in the United States. When I came back, Joel, the first thing I wanted to do, I wanted to make a better world. I'm not trying to be melodramatic, but I had seen all of the suffering. I had seen the hatred. I had seen . . . I told Janet Ann, I says, “I wouldn't live in Europe if they gave me the whole continent. They can never forget their nationalistic feelings. They don't have the feeling that we have. Even though we have prejudice in the United States, still there's nothing like United States of America. The principles that we've got. The fact that we have taken people . . . I don't call it a melting pot. I think of people of various cultures, various religions . . . it's not a melting pot. Everybody has retained their culture, their religion, and we have . . . Hitler said we were a polyarchy country that could never match the Germans because of the . . . they were looking for the master race. We have done something in this country that nobody has ever done. We have taken people of every

56 The American Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans and enforce constitutional voting rights to them. The movement was characterized by major campaigns of civil resistance. Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Noted legislative achievements during this phase of the Civil Rights Movement were passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Immigration and
ethnic background, and we molded this democracy where everybody has a right to live. We are a country of laws and not a country of men. We, for instance, when there is a transition, we don't kill each other over the transition. It's a successful transition. To me, that was what was so great about this country. I wanted to be a part of that. So I said, “Yes, I'll take that job.” I said, “There's not going to be anybody that's not going to vote because of their race.” They said, “We know that, and that's why we want you to do it.” So from 1960 to 1964, I was the Chief Voter Registrar. I got a lot of pressures. I got some pressures from blacks and from whites. Junior chamber of commerce president, who later became mayor of the town, he wanted me to set up booths in a certain place. I said, no. A black actor wanted me to do it, and he said he was going to get my job. I told him, “You want my job, you can have this damn job. It's the hardest job I ever had.” I says, “I'll tell you how much I make on this job.” He looked around and said, “How much?” I said, “After they take out my social security and hospitalization,” I said, “I get $3.62 a month.” He said, “Man, you are kidding me.” I said, “Man, I kid you not.” What we did in Columbus, Georgia, we set up big tents downtown. I had whites registering blacks and blacks registering whites. I wasn't the only person. That was what we wanted to do. We did not want a polarization. We did a good job in voting. I think this was the beginning of a good year in Columbus, Georgia. People don't talk about it. They have forgotten about it, but I remember it well. I was more proud of that four years that I had as Chief Voter Registrar, the fact that we never had the first federal agent coming down there and saying we were discriminating against everybody because this was something that I hated. I hated the Jim Crow laws. I hated the county unit system. I hated all those things that made blacks second-degree citizens. And democracy works. The same token, in Selma, Alabama, where my wife was born, I used to call up some people over there that I knew real well. They said they weren't going to do it. They asked me, what are you going to do about it in Columbus, Georgia? I told them what we were going to do. They said, well, we are not. This particular person, I don't want to mention his name, but he was Jewish. I said, “You will rue the day. This is not 1860. This is 1960.” I used to call him up every day. I said, “How does it look over there?” They said, “Boy, the tail end. Everybody in the world is over here.” I said, “Well, you asked for it, and you got

it.” I says, “As Jews, we should know what it is to be second-class citizens.”

AROGETI: Selma, Alabama, was particularly noted back in the 1960s because of its racial . . .

JUDGE COHN: But in Georgia, in certain counties, it was the same thing. Listen, I know a county . . . I am not going to mention the county's name, near Columbus, Georgia. If you were black, you just didn't vote. That's all there was to it. It was a real . . . they knew he who controlled the ballot box controlled the destiny of the community. We know what we got today. Lots of people have forgotten about it. It wasn't so long ago, and I was part of that. So I just wanted to do . . . obviously I joined everything in the world. The YMCA. I went to maybe 100 different churches talking about Judaism. My army friends used to say, my YMCA friends say, “Aaron, what makes y'all tick?” I went to more Brotherhoods57 and people talking about what Judaism stood for and everything. I wanted to make it a better community for my children.

AROGETI: Tell us a little bit about the community. Tell us a little bit about the synagogue that you had grown up in Shearith Israel. You said earlier in our discussion that over the years it had transformed itself from an Orthodox synagogue to a Conservative.

JUDGE COHN: That wasn't the reason. I really belonged to Temple Israel58 after I married Janet Ann because they were still giving sermons in Yiddish when I left Columbus, Georgia. I just didn't understand it. It was not modern enough for me to comprehend the sermons and so forth. When I went to the University of Georgia, we had some wonderful young rabbis who inspired me, and I liked the service. So I lean more towards Reform Judaism.

AROGETI: Could you share any of the names of any of those rabbis you might remember?

JUDGE COHN: I remember when Rabbi [Abraham] Shusterman was there. He became one of the great leaders in Reform Judaism. Rabbi Shusterman was just getting

57 A group of men in a synagogue congregation who join together to offer social, cultural, educational, and volunteer service opportunities.
58 In 1854, twenty Columbus families banded together to form congregation B’Nai Israel, later known as Temple Israel, the second oldest Jewish congregation in Georgia and a member of the Union for Reform Judaism. The two story brick temple was built in 1886. The last service at this location was held on March 8, 1958. The congregation then moved into a contemporary building on Wildwood Avenue.
ready to leave when I first came there. Then I had Larry Block, Rabbi Lawrence Block, who was out of the University of Texas, who was a wonderful person. When I came back home, they told me, they said, “Aaron, we want you to take over the Sunday school at the temple.” So we combined the two Sunday schools from Shearith Israel and also the temple. I was superintendent of the Sunday school. I have been very active in Temple Israel. I tried to belong to both of them, but I couldn't do it. I was riding two horses. I preached over and over and over again. I don't know why some people get so upset about the fact that you either wear a tallit\textsuperscript{59} or you don't wear a tallit. Or you wear a yarmulke\textsuperscript{60} or you don't wear a yarmulke. Why should we Jews fight each other over it? I don't think that's the most important thing. I still go back to what I saw in the concentration camps where Jews were ugly to each other. How can we expect non-Jews to be kind to us when we are not kind to each other? I couldn't stand hypocrisy of some of the Jews that I saw who would fight you about religion, and the same token, they would daven\textsuperscript{61} so like they wanted God to hear them. They were not in their daily lives. They never lifted a finger for the community. They didn't care about anybody, and they considered themselves to be religious. Religion, to me, is a way of life, Joel. It's how you treat other people. How kind you are, whether you care about people, whether they are Jewish or not Jewish, whether they are black or not black. To me, that's what religion is about. I think that's what Judaism preaches. Lots of people can't see the forest for the trees. They are so narrow and so small. If you don't believe just the way they do, they get real uptight. I think that's stupid, just like I thought it was when I was growing up in Columbus, Georgia.

**AROGETI:** You shared with us some very powerful stories, very unique stories and life experiences about growing up in the south, growing up Jewish, growing up very patriotic. I'm reluctant, although we are towards the very end of our discussion today, just to leave us sort of in 1965. So much has happened in the last couple of decades. Can you share with us some of your observations of the last 20 or 25 years given what you

\textsuperscript{59} A prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of tallit at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of \textit{bar mitzvah} age and older

\textsuperscript{60} Jewish men cover their heads during prayer with a small skull-cap called a ‘yarmulke’ or ‘kippah.’ Orthodox Jewish men wear it at all times to remind themselves of G-d’s presence.

\textsuperscript{61} Davening is the act of reciting Jewish liturgical prayers during which the prayer sways or rocks lightly.
have seen in your lifetime? Here is an opportunity for you to tell some future generations some of your life's learned lessons. I know you just gave us, perhaps, one of the most powerful statements that you could in the last statement you gave us. But share with us, because so many dynamic things were happening in the south, in Georgia, in the Seventies, in the Eighties. I mean, Columbus, Georgia, was not too far from Plains, Georgia, where a president of the United States was elected from. You've been a Jewish judge on the bench and active in communal life for the last 25 to 30 years.

JUDGE COHN: I don't think it's enough to be Jewish and just support your congregation. I think that when you live in a community, you got to broaden your horizons, not only as a Jew, but as a person who cares about, quote, “the whole community.” I think you should devote part of your life towards community work, not just within your congregation. That’s one thing.

AROGETI: Tell us some of the things that you've been active in the last 20 or 30 years that are either Jewish communal related or community related. I know that the state Juvenile Court Judges' Society. I know you've been active in the Lions Club or Civitan.

JUDGE COHN: I was president of my Lions Club, commander of the Military Honorable Awards, president of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges, president of my city bar association, president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. I’ve been on the fiscal council of the YMCA. Just a few other things. The Chief Voter Registrar of the county. So many things dealing with interfaith, the National Conference of Christians and Jews. I had one of my dearest Catholic friends and protestant friends, we pioneered that thing in Columbus, Georgia. There are just so many things you can do to make a better world. Maybe because after what I saw of the world, there was something that I really wanted to do was to make it better.

AROGETI: There is one story I will be remiss if I don't have you share with listeners of this tape. It goes back to, perhaps, one of the most powerful stories I've ever heard in my life. You were the liberator of a concentration camp. You were a young soldier. You told me the story of reacquainting yourself . . .

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62 James Earl “Jimmy” Carter Jr. (b. 1924) was the 39th President of the United States from 1977 to 1981. He was a Democrat.
JUDGE COHN: Yes.
AROGETI: Kindling the relationship with someone who was in that concentration camp. I want you to take the time now to share that story with us.

JUDGE COHN: There's a saying: When you cast your bread upon the waters, they will come back to you. My son, Leslie Cohn, was in Israel, and his guide was a wonderful guy named Eliezer Ayalon. He lives on Herzl Boulevard in Jerusalem. He and Leslie became great friends on the mission that Leslie and Bonnie were. He began talking to Leslie about the different camps that he was in. He told my son, he says, “You know, I was in a camp called Ebensee.” That's E-B-E-N-S-E-E. This was a satellite camp for Mauthausen.63 He says, “I was told by a survivor once who knew that there was a Jewish officer who was part of the party who liberated my camp, and he was from Georgia.” My son said, “Well, that was my father.” So Eliezer Ayalon has written a book called, A Cup of Honey: The Story of a Young Holocaust Survivor. He asked me to give a little byword. I was honored to give that byword. It was under Eliezer Wiesel's comments on the book. In the meantime, Eliezer Ayalon said, “I want to meet my liberator.” He told Leslie he's coming to Columbus, Georgia, to meet me. So he came. We had headlines in the Columbus newspapers, and they said, “It's b'shert.” [Yiddish] “It had to happen.” There was a picture of he and I with our union looking at the map. We have become great friends. My son is a friend of his. We communicate with Eliezer Ayalon. He's in Jerusalem, and we're here in the United States.

AROGETI: Judge, thank you very much. This has been, perhaps, one of the first of my most impressionable highlights of being able to interview people for the National Council of Jewish Women, for the Jewish Oral History Project for the Atlanta Jewish Federation's program. I want to thank you very much. Thank you, Judge.

JUDGE COHN: Thank you.

63 Mauthausen was the primary camp in Austria. It had a whole series of sub-camps (about 50). It was opened after the Anschluss (when Germany annexed Austria) in March 1938. It was established on the site of the Weiner Graben granite quarry and its purpose was to use slave labor to exploit the quarry. At first it was a punishment camp where prisoners were sent to serve out their sentences under very severe conditions. The death rate was the highest among all the camps in the Greater Reich. In addition to working in the quarries, which was essentially a death sentence, the prisoners also worked on construction projects (such as building roads, power plants, tunnels or power stations) and for the armaments industry. Its last commandant, Franz Ziereis was notorious for his brutality and cruelty. About 200,000 prisoners passed through Mauthausen and its sub-camps and the death rate was about 50 percent. The Americans liberated it on May 5, 1945.
<End Tape 2, Side 2>

INTERVIEW ENDS