

Betty Bonwell Paps

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COHEN: Yeah. All good.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So good afternoon. So today is Friday, April 9th, 2021. My name is Gabrielle Tornquist and on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library [PMML], I have the honor today of interviewing retired Colonel Paps. Colonel Paps served in the US Air Force as chief flight nurse with the 63rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron. This was at O'Hare Airport, or excuse me, O'Hare Air Reserve Forces Facility for twenty years. And she also served in active duty for five months during the Persian Gulf War. We also have with us today Leah Cohen, the PMML oral history and reference manager. Welcome, Colonel Paps. Thank you so much for your time today and for your contribution to the oral history program. Are you ready to begin the interview?

PAPS: I am ready, yes.

TORNQUIST: Okay, uhm, so we'd like to start with a little bit of background. So I guess at the very beginning, where were you born and where did you grow up?

PAPS: Okay, I was born in Scottland, Illinois, which is very—well on a farm, which is east-central Illinois. My parents were—well, my father was a farmer. He actually went to Parks Air College to be a pilot, but then his father got sick, and he had to take over the farm. My mother went to Purdue and studied homemaking and, of course, then she had five children. So she was a homemaker. I have one brother and three sisters, my brother's the oldest and one sister older and two younger, so I'm the middle child. And as I said, my father was a farmer. He was a big farmer in central—east-central Illinois. And we grew corn and beans and frequently he had the highest yield in the state of Illinois. And there were a few years WLS [radio station] would come out and say, "Oh, Bert Bonwell is "Corn King of Illinois" again!"

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: [laughs] And then we would go out to the Palmer House in Chicago, where they had the big banquet, and they gave him awards. But that was kinda—kinda fun. I went to school—I started at school in the one room schoolhouse, way back. Just first grade and it was a first to eighth grade. And, of course, there was only like ten of us, so we didn't have somebody in every grade. But after the first year, it was all consolidated. So after that I spent the last eleven years at Scotland schools in Scotland, Illinois. Scotland's a small town, maybe a hundred people, and the school was small, we had maybe fifty people in all of high school. There was only thirteen in my graduating class, so it's quite small compared to most schools. And uhm... let me see, you know we were quite busy. I had a very, very happy childhood. You know, we had horses, so I rode my horse all the time. We rode our bicycles... My father had a... army surplus scooter with a box in front, so we would go pick up our friends and go fishing. At the high school there was—or the school, I should say, we had lots of activities going on. One thing we had every year that we looked forward to - was a donkey basketball game.

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: And traveling people would come through with ten donkeys and then we'd have five on a team and we rode the donkeys and played basketball. And my sister and I always volunteered to be on the women's team. And that's something we always looked forward to. Of course, we had the typical—well, maybe not typical—typical for other schools... Since we were small, we had a basketball team, we probably had a softball team, and we had Future Homemakers of America, which I was president of, and my mother was the mother for that. Let's see, what else did we do? Uhm, well, every Monday night we'd take the school bus down to the county seat, which was Paris, Illinois, and we went roller skating. And this happened almost every Monday night unless something else was going on. And I liked roller skating and I frequently won the fastest skating, so I got a free ticket for the following week. And besides school activities, we also had a lot of church activities. So church and school was our primary social life. So we did a lot of that.

I really hadn't—I did not come from a military family. My father was not. My grandparents weren't in the military. My brother was not in the military. So I did not come from a military family at all. A neighbor of mine was General Wilma Vaught, and she lived two roads over from me. You know, her father was a farmer also, our mothers were friends, and she was really kind of a mentor for me. She encouraged me to join the Air Force. And she was also one of my

references when I applied to the Air Force. And that was great. I graduated from high school in 1955, it was a long time ago, I guess. Doesn't seem like it but I guess it was. At that time, women either became a school teacher, a secretary or a nurse, or they got married and became a housewife. And there were several people in the neighborhood that were nurses. And so I said, "Oh, I'll be a nurse because that's only three years and being a teacher, it takes four years." So, I decided to go into nursing school. I was seventeen years old. It was a three-year hospital school of nursing. So I was a registered nurse at the age of twenty. Nursing school was, well back then, the school itself took the place of your parents. So they had to kind of keep track of you. And, you know, my classmates were all about the same age as I was, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen. There were I think about nineteen of us or so and we had very, very busy days. They would get you up at—early, so at six forty-five in the morning you either had a class in microbiology or if it wasn't that day, it might have been somebody coming and teaching us how to talk. So you walked around saying, "How now brown cow." [a phrase used to demonstrate rounded vowel sounds].

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: And we also had a speech—well, speech and then posture. We'd walk around with books on our heads so we would stand up straight. And we also had a chorus so that they had us singing, too. And at Christmas time we'd wear our student nurses' uniform and go out to the country club and perform. Singing, whether we could sing or not. [cell phone rings] Uhm, so that would happen from like six forty-five to seven thirty. And then you had to have breakfast because you had to be on the wards by eight o'clock to work. And the problem with that, you only had a half hour. But in those days, anybody that outranked you got in line before you. So if a doctor came down, they stood in front of you. If an upperclassman came, they stood in front of you.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: So you were lucky to have five minutes to eat once you finally got through the line...

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: ... because you had to be on the floor from eight to ten and then you had to take care of probably six patients. And that meant a total bath, bed making, medications, etc., that you don't see too much of going on today. But we had to

do that and if somebody had a lighter assignment, they would come and try to help you, so you get off at ten o'clock. Because at ten o'clock then we had to be in class from ten to twelve, taking nursing courses. Then it was—we had time for lunch, but not much again, because then we had to walk over to the junior college [Danville Area Community College], which was about a mile away. Until one to three, we had to take our courses in anatomy and physiology and nutrition. The only good thing about that is we earned college credit. Had the hospital given it to us, we would not have gotten the college credit. And, you know, we had to get back to the hospital because, again, we had to go and get the patients ready for dinner. So we had to get their hands and face washed and serve their dinner trays to them, etc. And then get down and have our dinner and then at seven o'clock we had supervised study hall. So you had no choice, you had to go to study, to the library and study from seven to nine. Well, we didn't have to be in our rooms till ten. However, there was no place to go around the hospital, so nobody went out from nine to ten. So we just kinda talked to each other and went to bed just to repeat it the very next day. When I started nursing school, we had a forty-four hour week. So we also had to work four hours on Saturday morning taking care of patients. And then we had Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. You got to go home one night a month. So it was pretty rigorous, but we were all in the same boat, so we went okay with that. We had our rotations, and it went alphabetically, so since my name was Bonwell, I was in the first rotation. And so, you know, I went to the operating room, which I dearly loved, and obstetrics, nursery and the diet-kitchen. And by the time we got through with that, then—we didn't have some of the specialties. So we had to go to Cook County Hospital in Chicago for six months. So in Chicago, we had three months of pediatrics, one month in contagious diseases, and that was back when polio was rampant, and we had patients on iron-lungs at that time. And then we had two months in psychiatric nursing. By the time I got back to Danville, Lakeview Hospital where I went to nursing, it was starting my third year. So by that time I'd had all of my rotations. So I essentially just worked for the hospital for a year. We pretty well covered the evening shift and the night shift, and until we got our three years in and graduated. It—you know, I developed some very good friends there, but we were all going through the same thing. So, that was my nurse's training.

TORNQUIST: Sounds like a very busy time in your life...

PAPS: My life has been very busy, period.

TORNQUIST: Yeah. [laughs]

PAPS: Yeah, so I did work in the operating room at a few hospitals for a couple years or so, and then I decided... I really—I got into teaching only because I'd taken a couple courses at the junior college, which meant I had more education, because I had taken an English course, than some of the other nurses who hadn't taken an English course. So I started teaching practical nurses—nursing there in Danville. And Mildred Bennett was the head of the program, and she encouraged me to go ahead and get my bachelor's degree. And so by that time I was married and had a daughter and so she and I went to Chicago, and I went to University of Illinois and got a bachelor's degree. There was only two of us that had any children in that class and whoever was the head of the nursing program did not approve of women who had children being in school. But we had children, so. So we were in school. And my friend was twelve years older than I am. And so we finished that degree. And then I decided, well—I went back to teaching practical nursing again, in Chicago, and then I thought, might as well get a master's and then I can teach in a junior college or associate degree program. So while I was teaching that I had another child and I got my master's degree and I was teaching in the diploma program at Mount Sinai Hospital, and then a classmate called me and said, "You know, Kennedy-King College is starting a nursing program and they need nurses with master's degrees." Well, there weren't too many of us at that time. I said, "Okay, fine," and I was accepted, and my salary was twelve thousand dollars for the year, which doesn't sound like much now, but it was what they were paying back there in 1970, I think it was. And so I taught there at Kennedy-King for twenty-seven years. And—with part of the school, you got promoted depending on how many extra courses you picked up. So, you know, you just start going to school above the master's program and fifteen credit hours gave you assistant professor... thirty hours gave you associate professor... sixty hours gave you, uhm, full professor. So I just kept going to get my credit hours so I could, you know, move along. Uhm, about... 1974, I think it was, my girlfriend, who I met at the University of Illinois, called me up and she said, "Betty, I think you should join the Air Force." She says, "I'm too old, so you have to do it." So I think, well, I've got two kids and I'm working full time and I'm working on my doctorate and so forth, and—but I thought, 'Well, a challenge.' And there was a—an aeromedical unit that had moved from Chanute [Air Force Base] up to O'Hare [International Airport] and they needed nurses. Well, even though I was thirty-five, or maybe thirty-six years old, I did apply, and I was accepted in the 63rd AEF [Aeromedical Evacuation Flight], at the

time. That was pretty exciting. I remember Wilma Vaught, General Vaught, had told me, "You know, when you get the papers, go get them notarized immediately. Cause that will be the start of your service plan." So I did and I came home, and my daughters were five and ten at the time. My five-year-old looked at me and she said, "You're no captain, you're my mommy!"

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: It was kinda cute. And I became a captain. I was commissioned a captain because I'd had fifteen years of experience in nursing, and I had a master's degree. So I skipped those lieutenant years. Yeah, it was pretty exciting at the time. And being reservists, we didn't necessarily do the same things that active-duty people did. Such as, they would send you to basic training and then they would send you to flight school and so forth. Well, I joined in January. I was teaching, so I wasn't free till the summer. So they sent me to flight school, which was six weeks at Brooks Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. When I got there, I—my first test, I made a hundred on it. So we were all lined up and the General came by to congratulate me. I think I was the only one that got a hundred. And then she says, "You know, you're not put together right." Well, my rank and things were not in the right places. My USs' were not perpendicular to the floor. So she had one of the active-duty nurses teach me how to wear my uniform, which was nice. She was—the General was very nice about it, you know. And so we were there six weeks in the summer. My children went to live with my family down state. And I loved flight school, you know, they taught you what to do on a ditching. So we had a mock up plane with a swimming pool. You had to jump out of the plane and get yourself into the raft and, you know, cut off the equalizing tube and stuff like that. We also had to go out into a bivouac, I guess they called it. So we went and spent a night in the woods, and you had to learn to get water, put pills in it so it would be drinkable. We had to do some of—use a compass to find our way around. For eating, we got prickly pear cacti and we had to cook them to eat. We also had K-rations, now those were the old ones. It was—they came in a tin, and they were dehydrated food. Well, you'd have to use water to soften up the food so you could eat it. But it was kind of a bit of a bivouac type of thing. So, we learned a lot, of course, they didn't teach—well, they did teach us something about nursing, of course, we were all nurses, so they weren't teaching us nursing, per se, but they were teaching us how to take care of patients at altitude because altitude affects all the body's systems, it affects how your IVs run, etc. So—so we had to do that. The other thing, part of that was the altitude chamber. We had to go to that and then it was like a rapid decompression. And

they didn't want you to put your oxygen mask on because they wanted you to know what the symptoms were if the plane decompressed. So you waited till you got a few symptoms, then you could put your oxygen on. However, if you were in the real situation, there was no oxygen for the medical crew. But what you have to do is if you knew you were having a decompression, we usually flew at twenty-three thousand feet, and so the pilots just had to take the plane down to ten thousand or less so we could breathe because there was no oxygen for us on the planes.

Let's see, we went from like twenty-four people in a flight and then we doubled it to like fifty people. We finally got up to, when we became a squadron, it was like a hundred and forty-hundred fifty people. And I became chief nurse after being in for like six years and I was chief nurse for thirteen years. So, I made colonel. You know, we had a lot of training exercises. We had to do your annual tour, per year for two weeks, and, you know, it was usually in summer time. And it could be working in a hospital, it could be going to Germany for two weeks, working there. It could be a flying exercise that we went to. We were there one time in Germany. Anyway, you had to do your two weeks every year, active duty. Depending on flight status, you had to fly a minimum of once every ninety days. But for me, that was never enough because I love flying, so. Besides our one weekend we had to spend during meetings at O'Hare. We usually did a cross country once a month. We could go to Florida, we might go to New Orleans, we might go to California, for the weekend from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon. They always had to go where there was water because navigators had to have over water training. Our work always took place in the plane because we were practicing for a wartime mission and because we weren't having a war. So all we did was practice. So if we had to, uhm, configure the plane, because it was a cargo plane, a C-130. And we would get that ready to receive patients and then we would carry the litters on with people on them. So if you were not crew, you were a patient or a loader bearer and so our crew was strictly for training. And I trained for seventeen years before a war came by, but it was good training.

TORNQUIST: Wow. So you were pretty well prepared when that time came.

PAPS: We were extremely well prepared. When it came time for deployment... we were supposedly the backup crew. They expected a lot of casualties, and they expected a lot of medical crews to be killed. And so we were there to—as back up, we were going to go as backup. So I came to Florida every year for Christmas, and I was thinking, 'Are they going to call me while I'm down here?' Well, I'd

have to fly right back to Chicago to be activated or what that they did. But I was kinda nervous and I didn't want to be overweight because they weighed you every—I figured they'd weigh me before I went and if I was overweight they wouldn't let me go. And everybody really wanted to go and, I mean, you're trained for it. So it wasn't till I got back to Chicago they actually did activate us, and we had time there to, you know, get our wills together and tell our families goodbye and take care of your bills and... So we were well prepared and only about half of the unit or less got to go. And the other people were saying, "How come we don't get to go? Aren't we good enough?" They were good enough. But, you know, they could only take so many. So our Chicago plane flew us to Dover, Delaware, and let us off and then I had to go find us C-5 to get us over to Saudi Arabia. I did find one, but it was full of bombs. So we decided, no, maybe we didn't want to be on that particular aircraft—ah, C-5. So we waited another day and then we found one that was going to Riyadh. That was our final destination. We stopped in Germany to refuel and then we went on to Riyadh. And I did send a message ahead of time because I wanted to make sure they knew we were coming so somebody would be there to meet the fifty or sixty of us. We had our chemical gear with us. You had to carry it because you didn't know when they were going to use chemicals. So we got there, and they put us in Quonset huts for a short period of time and then they said, you know, if a Scud [missile] is coming in, there'll be a siren. And so we hear a siren, so we're all putting our oxygen mask on, our chemical gear. Only to find out it was a call to prayers. They called it for prayers five times a day. Everybody's laughing at us. It was okay, because when new people came in, they did the same thing and we laughed at them too.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: Scuds were coming in, but we were okay then. And then we got moved over to the airport. And then we started breaking up. We would send a couple crews to up near the Iraq border. Then we sent a few people to Bahrain, and then people to the UAE and the rest of us were there and we went to King Fahd [International Airport]. In King Fahd we lived—that was in the middle of the desert. We lived in temper tents. And there they considered your base, US property. So they had swimming pools, so we could go swimming. Well, I spent time when we were still in Riyadh, they had a swimming pool. They didn't have one in the middle of the desert, but anything inside the fence was considered US territory. So, you know, if we weren't in our flight suits on duty, we were wearing sneakers and shorts and T-shirts, type of thing.

Once we got out there... Well, of course we were still on flying status. So, you know, you would be assigned different hours when you were going to be on call. If you weren't on call, you could pretty well do anything you want unless there was a meeting you had to attend. And so we did a lot of walking if we were not on call, and we would walk all over the base. The Army was outside of the Air Force base, so sometimes we'd walk to their BX [base exchange] just to see what they had that was different than the Air Force. And we had all kinds of tents. One would be administration, one would be a chapel, one would be a post office, and another one is an exercise tent. So we had a whole mall with everything we needed that was uh—but they were in tents. And our bathrooms... Well, you went one way down the mall, so to speak, and there was the tent with the toilets in it. And you'd walk down the other way and there was another tent with the showers in it. And they did our laundry for us if we wanted it done. And if you were a colonel or higher, I was colonel at the time, we got our laundry back in twenty-four hours. If you were a lesser, then it took forty-eight hours. So it wasn't unusual for the major to put her clothes in my bag that said colonel, so she'd get it back quickly.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: We, you know, we spent time talking to the pilots who we flew with, we talked to the engineers. I loved going over and talking to the engineers because they had a porch swing on a stand, and I'd go over and swing and swing. One night, I got back, like eleven o'clock, and there's that swing outside my tent. So they had brought it over with a forklift and had put it out there by my tent, which was kinda nice because when we came in, like eleven o'clock at night, we could, you know, swing until we cooled down and decompressed and we'd go to sleep. And crews would come in from Germany, and they were the 141 crews. They couldn't believe there was a swing there for us outside.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: As far as patients... Well, of course, back at O'Hare we had to—we had training in the M16 [military rifle] and we had training in pistols. 'Cause when you flew, you carried a pistol. One of my first flights was right at the end of the 100 Hour War [i.e. the ground invasion of Kuwait by the coalition forces, which followed aerial and naval bombardments, led to a decisive victory and expulsion of the Iraqis 100 hours later] and we flew up near the Iraqi border and the pilot said we will be on the ground no more than forty-five minutes and we did fine, and we

were supposed to pick up two injured servicemen. One got there. The other one, the ambulance driver got lost. So the pilot says, "We gotta go." So we took just the one and then we dropped him off where he was supposed to go. And then they said, "Oh, now we're going after enemy prisoners of war." So we flew to KKMC [King Khalid Military City] and had a whole plane load of enemy prisoners of war. You know, the plane, if they were all ambulatory, holds ninety. But we had some patients on litters. So we didn't have that many, like fifty or sixty patients. They had IVs, they had chest tubes, they—one was running a temperature, I was kind of worried about him. But, of course, our flights were only like two hours at the most. We were in theater, so we were right in Saudi Arabia. So I had four military police get on the plane. They said, "Oh, we can finally rest." I said, "Uh-uh." I put one in each corner of the plane because we'd heard a rumor that one of our doctors had been killed because one of the enemy prisoners of war had taken his pistol and shot him. Well, that was not true. That was a rumor. But anyway, I had the military police in each corner trying to protect us as we took care of the patients. And that was an exciting time. And we had a lot of flights going on because, well, there was no drinking in Saudi Arabia. It's a dry country. So the guys played mean games of volleyball. So we had a lot of knee injuries and so forth that we had to fly them for help. You couldn't be more than fifty-five years old and even at that, we had a lot of heart attacks and so we had to fly the people with heart attacks. Another one, I remember getting home, and a Jeep had turned over and the guy was sixty percent burned and we had to pick him up and get him back to the burn center in Riyadh. And so—so we did that. Again, we kept busy enough, I would have to say. And when we were over there, we were part of a 1611th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, which was a provisional group that was at Desert Shield, Desert Storm. Even though their structure was there, my people were so used to me being chief nurse, that when they had problems, they always came to me regardless. Even if they were at a different base, they would call me up to solve whatever problem they thought they were having. So... we also did a lot of walking and you had to walk, oh, at least a half a mile, maybe further, to find the phone banks. This was before we had cell phones and etcetera. So we'd go over to the tents where the phones were, and we'd have a tent for the Air Force and a tent for the Army. We could use each other's phones, of course. So I'd have to call home but then with the difference in times I had to be careful that I wasn't calling them in the middle of the night. And you had to call collect. But the other thing—we knew that we weren't getting a whole lot of information about what was going on over in Saudi Arabia and we knew everybody at home was watching CNN, 24/7, so when

we'd call home, we'd find out what was going on over where we were. There was also a Baskin-Robbins truck, and you went inside, and it looked just like any Baskin-Robbins store back in the United States. So you get your Baskin-Robbins. We also didn't know what day of the week it was, necessarily. So us and the pilots had—every Friday night we'd have a party, so we'd know it was Friday night. We'd have a Baskin-Robbins party, we might have a pizza party, we might have a Good Friday party, those kinds of things, just so we knew. One day we got invited by Americans who lived at Aramco, and they said, "Oh, come over for a beach party." So we're thinking it's like being in the desert, we'll take our blankets, we'll take our bottles of water. And we got there, and it was if you were going into something in Florida. There was grass, there was nice housing and so forth and we walked in, and they said, "Well, would you like a brown or white?" And we said, "A brown or white?" They said, "Yeah we make our own booze." The brown could be scotch or whisky or whatever. White could be vodka or gin. So I just looked at him and said, "I'll take a brown and water." So it was a nice relief from being out living in a tent in the middle of the desert, to go up to Aramco and see how they were living over there, which was pretty nice, actually. Maybe I should look at my notes here... I'm not sure what I have missed here.

COHEN: Well, I was wondering... a little bit about the enemy prisoners of war. Like, how did you communicate with them when they were on the plane?

PAPS: Oh, yeah, I did mean to tell you that. We had an interpreter. Unfortunately, the interpreter was female, and all the prisoners of war were male. And so they were not about to tell her their basic needs. But we were able to pick that up and get a picture of their basic needs. But it was interesting, our interpreter, of course she lived in Kuwait, but she—they also, her family, had a home in Colorado, and one in Washington, D.C., and so, you know, they still had their home in Kuwait. I did go on a mission to Kuwait, and we took supplies to a children's hospital. And we had all the news... you know, CNN, we had NBC, ABC. We had all the news people with us covering that particular one. So... that was kinda interesting, seeing all the oil wells burning, seeing all the cars along the road that had been, you know, wrecked... lots of them, lots of them and a lot of oil wells burning. We also had a lot of dark clouds coming over depending on the wind and so you would see oil and sand all around your tent because—because the oil well was burning. Did you have another question...?

Tornquist: Uhm, I was wondering, you mentioned that you did, obviously, with the Air Force... So you're doing a lot of flights and missions in that regard. But did you ever do any kind of ground work or hospital work at this time?

PAPS: No. No, we were strictly Aeromed. So all we did was take care of the patients in the air.

TORNQUIST: Okay. How many—uhm, you were there for—was it five months...?

PAPS: I was activated for five months. I wasn't necessarily over there all of five months. But, uhm, yeah, I was on active duty orders. So after I came home, I was probably at O'Hare for another month still on active duty. We came home at different times, it—did I tell you this? Uhm, I came home alone when they didn't need me anymore, on a C-5, and I was up with the crew because I was on flight status. And so we stopped in Spain and then we went on to Westover Air Force Base. And because we had been with a lot of the Westover aeromedical crew. They—some of them were there when I came in and as you entered, they had lines of civilians welcoming you back and then the ones that knew me came out and gave me a big hug, you know—

COHEN: Aww...

PAPS: —so it was a nice welcome back. And I got back in time for the big parade they had in Chicago for the Desert Storm people. And it was interesting, you know, we medical, we're not real good on marching and so forth. So one of our nurses sang a song to keep us in step. And unfortunately, she died two days ago, but she was really good about keeping us moving right, you know. So that was pretty exciting being a part of the big parade in Chicago at the end of Desert Storm.

TORNQUIST: Uhm, so back to your time in Desert Storm, so you were—for how long were you colonel at the time you were in Saudi Arabia?

PAPS: Uhm, maybe three, four months.

TORNQUIST: Oh, okay, so relatively new? So I'd love to hear a little bit more about how you communicated with the rest of your subordinates in the Air Force and kind of how you structured your chain of command and different groups and such...

PAPS: Well—while we were activated, I was the troop commander, so I'd be looking after all my people. But then, supposedly, we went into this other 1611th Aeromedical and they should have been. But my people, they still called me. It

didn't matter where they were, they still looked at me as if I was a leader. I took care of them, of course, but I was not in charge over there. I was a troop commander going over and was still taking care of my troops.

TORNQUIST: How was it working with—uh, you worked with both nurses and medical technicians?

PAPS: Yes. A flight crew is two nurses and three medical technicians, and we work together as a group. One nurse will be designated the medical crew director and really in charge of the crew. The second nurse really takes care of the patients. And then your three techs help you out, you know, whatever the medical crew director wants. [Assigning?] patients to whomever. So you always were a five member crew: two nurses and three techs.

TORNQUIST: Oh, okay. So what would have been like a typical day while you were in active duty, from your perspective? Like, what's happening from the time you get up?

PAPS: Well, if we weren't on call, and you'd know ahead of time if you were going to be on call or if you had a mission. If you're not, you were pretty well on your own. And the biggest decision we had to make was: which chow hall are you going to go to? We had three or four chow halls and you had a choice wherever you went. And that was the kinda biggest decision we had to make if we weren't in class, or if we were not on call or assigned to a flight. And... yeah.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So about how many—like, how often were you going on these flight missions to pick up and care for patients in the air?

PAPS: Every two or three days.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: It varied. Another thing we did while we were there, on a day off, we would get with these engineers, called the engineering squadron, and they would have this great big truck and we would go out in the desert looking for camels. And so we had a big—we had a camera with us, and we finally spotted the camels, and we took MREs, meals ready to eat, and gave them a couple of cases of those and talked to the Bedouins and saw the camels out in the desert.

TORNQUIST: Oh, wow.

PAPS: So you'd have a lot of things just to keep yourself busy if you weren't working.

TORNQUIST: That sounds exciting. [laughs]

PAPS: [laughs] It was pretty exciting and—

TORNQUIST Yeah!

PAPS: —yeah, everybody was so nice because we were all there together and we were all in the same boat. So it didn't matter if you were enlisted or an officer or a pilot or in the engineering squadron. We were all there together, regardless of your purpose.

TORNQUIST: And it—so it sounds like you knew some of the people that you came—like, you knew a lot of the people you came over with from O'Hare?

PAPS: Oh, I knew them all because I was chief nurse.

TORNQUIST Oh, right. Okay... so you came over with—they were...

PAPS: [laughs] I knew every one of them very well!

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: Yeah, right.

TORNQUIST: Yeah, that sounds like it would have been a benefit because they already knew, like, how to work with you and you knew their...

PAPS: Yeah. We had trained together. Yeah, we worked extremely well together.

TORNQUIST: How was your training? So did you—how long did it take... and, like how long did you know you were—like before you went, how long did you know that you had to prepare?

PAPS: Well, we kinda knew we'd be called. We just didn't know when.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm.

PAPS: I think once we got activated, we had about two weeks to get whatever—if we didn't have our shots, if we needed to do our wills, say goodbye to our families... But we were pretty well-together. I know some of the crews that went from other bases, early on. They didn't have time to prepare like we did, but we were all well prepared and we wanted to go. And we had time to say our goodbyes,

and so forth. Write our letters to our people in case we didn't come back and our family members, we left them letters. Yeah.

TORNQUIST: How old were your kids when you left for active duty?

PAPS: You know, they were older. I'd written that down somewhere. I think they were—I had a seven-year-old grandson, by the way.

TORNQUIST: Oh!

PAPS: Yeah. And I think my kids were like, uhm, maybe... twenty-three... and twenty-eight, my two daughters. But it was my seven-year-old grandson. And what was interesting, when I came back, I gave a lot of talks and so forth. And I think he was in maybe second grade and he had to write something about somebody that you admired. So he wrote about me. And he says, "My grandmother's in the Air Force," and I think the teacher didn't believe him. So she had him change it to say, "My grandma works for the Air Force." Because she just couldn't imagine Grandma was in the Air Force.

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] That's funny. All right, and I know that you wrote that your child care, I suppose, before—more when you were in the reserves [US Air Force Reserve], that that was kind of a challenge like—you know, when you were going on different places around the country for periods of time... How did you manage kind of balancing your personal and then your kind of reserves life with your career?

PAPS: Very difficult.

TORNQUIST: Right. [laughs]

PAPS: You know, because I was working full time. I was going to school, working on my doctorate, and I was flying with the Air Force. And so it took a lot of time and I think my daughter still resents the fact that I wasn't home with her, the youngest one. The other older daughter, she was okay with it, but the younger one kinda resented the fact wasn't home and I do feel I probably cheated her of a lot of mother time.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm.

PAPS: But the way it was.

TORNQUIST: Yeah, I understand. Uhm, what made you decide to pursue a Ph.D.? I know you said that you were kind of working towards different levels of professorship and...

PAPS: Yeah, that's—that's why.

TORNQUIST: Oh, okay. So it just was that.

PAPS: You just needed the—the credits, so you might as well apply them to something, you know, rather than just picking up credits. So, that's why.

TORNQUIST: Gotcha, so it wasn't like a—one decision. It was just—it kinda happened as your career kind of expanded and...

PAPS: Right.

TORNQUIST: Right. And so you taught for the City Colleges of Chicago?

PAPS: I did, for twenty-seven years. It was Kennedy King College, which was on the south side of Chicago. And... I liked it. The one thing I really liked about that particular college is they let me do anything I wanted to because I had to do my teaching, but I could do research... I could write programs. I wrote up a nurse's aid program for the college... I wrote another one-plus-one program for Olive Harvey College. So one year you became practical nurse, two years you became an RN. So I was able to do a lot of things, especially the research. And then I was head of the program and I got us national accreditation, which was a feather in our cap, because there was five nursing programs in the Chicago system, and we were the first to get national accreditation.

COHEN: Oh, wow.

PAPS: And they would say, "Kennedy King?!" Yeah, that's us! We got the national accreditation first.

TORNQUIST: Wow, that's exciting.

PAPS: That was pretty exciting, yeah.

TORNQUIST: Yeah. So they—you wrote that they basically gave you a semester off when you were activated?

PAPS: I did, yes. Ah, they kind of figured I was going, and I was gone from January to June, type of thing. And so they had thought about it, so they—they knew what they were gonna do to cover the time I was gone.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: So, that worked out well.

TORNQUIST: That's good. And, so going back to the Middle East. So you were active from January to June, uhm, so the weather—how was, like, the more physical challenges there, like as far as weather and, I don't know, culture shock...?

PAPS: Uhm, not a whole lot of culture shock... because we were on base, which is considered American soil, at the time. When I was in Riyadh, if we did go downtown, or take a bus to somewhere else, we did have to wear our abayas, the black robes. When we got over to the other side, King Fahd [Military Medical Complex], and we went to Dhahran all you had to do was wear a long sleeve shirt and long pants. You did not have to wear the abaya. Of course they didn't—women did not drive... off base. And so, yeah. Sometimes I went with a priest because he had a car, and I could go shopping in the city with him. But we didn't go off base a whole lot. We did have a little R and R. We went to Bahrain one weekend and stayed, instead of a tent, we stayed in a condominium. But let me tell you, it was so humid there, I was happy to get back to my tent. Really happy, even though it was a tent. I was happy to get back to it.

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] Did you—so you—did you like living in the tents and that kind of experience? Was that exciting or a challenge...?

PAPS: It was pretty exciting. Yeah, I didn't mind it at all. You know, we had our cubicles. I was in the senior officers' tent at the end and instead of having twelve in the tent we only had six. And so we had a—wooden structures, about six inch off because they had snakes, and then we had blankets we'd put down for rugs and you had your own light. It was rigged, you know, just a bare light bulb. But—and then there was all kinds of water there for you and you had your flavors. You could put it in and flavor your water. And we finally got a phone in our senior tent. However, none of us knew how to work it. So you couldn't call home because we didn't know how to...

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: ... how to get through to the United States, so!

TORNQUIST: Did you—

PAPS: But we had a phone! The other thing is when we got there, it was cold. And so we did have a—I don't know if you call it a furnace or something, outside and so we did heat our tents. And then a month later, it was hot, it was air conditioned. All you had to do out—go out and turn a little lever and you had air conditioning in your tent. So, yeah... it was comfortable. Yeah.

TORNQUIST How was the actual nursing and the actual work that you did? How did that compare to what you had done prior at O'Hare with the reserves?

PAPS: Oh, well, of course at O'Hare it was strictly training missions. We had no patients.

TORNQUIST: Oh.

PAPS: And so having actual patients wasn't a whole lot different because we still had trained and, you know, we had cards saying, "This person had a heart attack," "This person has a chest tube," so we had all the equipment there that we had practiced, even though they were not real patients. So it wasn't a whole lot different than what we had trained for. We were well prepared.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So was your role, at the O'Hare facility, was that more training other nurses who were coming up to be in the Air Force or...?

PAPS: Uhm, yeah, right... training missions, yeah. They had to take so many training flights and we would teach them how to be flight nurses or med techs. And, so yeah, we trained for seventeen year—in my case, seventeen years before the war came by.

TORNQUIST: Interesting... So in the U.S. you—you said that you would travel to places like New Orleans or Florida and that that was, you know, several times a year...

PAPS: No, it would be every month.

TORNQUIST: Oh, every month? Oh.

PAPS: Usually once a month. You didn't have to go, but you had to fly at least every ninety days. I just liked it probably flew more than a lot of people did. And those were training missions, such as you'd get on the plane and you'd carry patients

on, you'd have a training mission while you were in the air and then when you landed, it was your own time until you flew again, the next day. And you couldn't be on the ground more than twelve hours. And so we'd fly at, say Patrick Air Force Base [Florida], we'd be there maybe eleven hours or something, and then we'd fly, say out of, say, Key West [Naval Air Station]. And as we were flying, we had our mission and then as soon as we landed at Key West, the mission was over. And we were okay until the plane took off again. So all of our training was in the air.

TORNQUIST: So, uhm, you said you were there for like a little bit of time before you left again, did you ever get to do anything in that kind of off time in the U.S?

PAPS: Yeah. You could do anything you wanted to in the downtime. You just knew what time you had to report base ops [base of operations] the next day.

TORNQUIST: Oh, okay. And, so when you were back in the Chicago area—so you were just back to working with the colleges...?

PAPS: Right. Right. You know, teaching college, we had a twelve-hour week, which is not a lot of time. And then besides the twelve hours you had to meet with students, you know, you had meetings and things. So it wasn't real time-consuming, which gave me time to be with the Air Force more. It's not like I got a forty-hour week [position?]. Because it's different when you're a college teacher.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: It's full time, but it's only twelve hours, the whole thing.

TORNQUIST: Sounds like a lot of—you had a lot of variety in your career overall. Just lots of different things happened... So back to when you first joined with the Air Force. Why did you choose the Air Force, in particular, or can you explain that kind of opportunity that you said came up at that time?

PAPS: Uhm, when I first became a nurse, I looked into joining the Navy. And the reason for that—back then we wore nurses' caps, and I thought the Navy had the prettiest nursing cap.

TORNQUIST: [laughs]

PAPS: So I did not join... And it wasn't until my girlfriend said, "Hey, they need a flight nurse out at O'Hare" and I got—I didn't want to work in a hospital, I didn't want

to be on the ground, but I thought flight nursing, hey that's pretty exciting. So—so then I applied for that position at the unit that flew.

TORNQUIST: Okay and you said you really like flying. Well, what—what do you like about that?

PAPS: You know, it was something different. I was always looking for challenges and it was just something different taking care of patients in the air and going different places and doing different things. It was just different than being on the ground, in a hospital, kind of thing. So I found it very exciting.

TORNQUIST: Yeah, it sounds really exciting. And so I personally haven't been in many airplanes. So how—you were on these planes for a long period of time performing different duties and can you kind of walk us through kind of like what would you be doing from like a full flight from ground to air to ground again?

PAPS: Well, you know, most of the flights were only two hours.

TORNQUIST: Two hours, okay.

PAPS: Yeah, some—some were a little longer, but many of them were only two hours. And so [by the] time you loaded the patients on, even though they were make believe patients, and then you had to take your seat until you got altitude and that could take another fifteen, twenty minutes, or half hour, and then they'd say, "Okay, you could be up now." And then we would take care of the patients. They all had cards saying this is what's wrong with you. And then you'd have to ask them questions and they would pretend to be that kind of a patient. And you had to do your charting. And we always had a—for training purposes—we always had a medical emergency we had to respond to. Make believe, of course. And we always had a plane emergency, something went wrong with the plane that we had to respond to. So we knew how to take care of any emergency that came up. By the time it was two hours, it was time to land.

TORNQUIST: So it probably went by pretty fast then?

PAPS: It went very fast, it did.

TORNQUIST: But what might have been something like a plane emergency? And did you ever deal with one that wasn't a training?

PAPS: Yeah, you know. At O'Hare, we had the oldest C-130s. They were A-models. There was always something going on wrong with one. And they have four

engines. And one was always—something happened to it and they'd have to—we'd say, "losing it," you didn't lose it, they just feathered it when it wasn't working anymore. So it wasn't unusual to land with there's three engines working. One time—I think I put that in the paper—that they didn't know if our wheels were down for landing or not. It was a malfunction. And we just didn't know if we had wheels to land. We didn't know if we'd be belly-landing and so they alerted O'Hare and they had the fire trucks out there all along the runway, just in case, they had to foam the runway. And they wanted to know how many of us were on board in case they had to rescue us. And they opened the ramp so we could get out pretty fast if there was a problem. But fortunately, it was a malfunction of the light, and the wheels were down.

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: We did okay there.

TORNQUIST: Was that—

PAPS: But you don't know!

TORNQUIST: Yeah, yeah. Was that scary experience like that or was it kind of you were prepared for it?

PAPS: Oh, I don't know. It's just kind of like what will happen, will happen.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm.

PAPS: You know... But we trained for so many emergencies that we kinda knew what we were supposed to do in case they did happen.

TORNQUIST: And did anything such as this happen when you were in the Middle East?

PAPS: Uh... no. We had newer planes. They were not Chicago planes. So they were planes from all over and they were—they were newer planes, and they did not have problems, no.

TORNQUIST: Okay and these were the C-130s or...?

PAPS: C-130.

TORNQUIST: C-130, okay.

PAPS: Yeah. You know, we did train on the other planes. When I was at O'Hare I did go down to Scott [Air Force Base, Illinois] and I flew the C-9, they call it the Nightingale, and they're the ones that move the patients around in the United States. And I also went out to the West Coast and flew in the C-141s, and the longer missions and they went to Alaska and went on the Aleutian Islands just to get training in the other two planes.

TORNQUIST: Okay. Yeah, and I know that the C-130s have, like, a good capability for landing on, like, rough terrain and in the Middle East were you—what kind of situations did you respond to outside of that one you were talking about with the enemy prisoners of war? What were some other events that you kind of dealt with?

PAPS: Well, when we went up to the Iraq border, I think they just landed in the desert. So most of it was desert over there or they could land anywhere in the desert, you know, but many of the places we flew into was like, KKMC [King Khalid Military City]. They had airports all over. So we would fly into the airports, but we could also fly and land in the desert too.

TORNQUIST: I know you mentioned that you didn't have too much access to, like, the news, what was going on when you were there. But what was your, like, level of awareness being a little bit, you know, being a colonel and did they prepare you for any kind of situations, concerns for being attacked or something like that?

PAPS: No, I think we just assumed we wouldn't be.

TORNQUIST: Right.

PAPS: So, you know, I called my husband. My husband was not well at the time, and he would be going to therapy. And the nurses there said, "Your wife should not be in the war. She should be home taking care of you." And he'd look at 'em and he'd say, "Her country needs her."

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: Her country needs her... But he was extremely supportive.

TORNQUIST: When you were called—called up for active duty, how did you feel knowing that you would be going somewhere different?

PAPS: Oh, I think I was pretty excited about it.

TORNQUIST: Yeah, mmm-hmm.

PAPS: Because we all wanted to go. We trained. That's what we were there for. And it wasn't like, "Oh, I don't want to go." I don't think anybody ever said that. It was like, "Why can't we go?" "How come we're not included and aren't we good enough?"

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: Everybody wanted to go.

TORNQUIST: It's very interesting. And so when you were there did you ever feel—I know because you have your grandson and your husband not feeling well... Did you have, like, feelings of homesickness?

PAPS: No.

TORNQUIST: No?

PAPS: In fact, I would have been happy if I'd stayed longer.

TORNQUIST: Oh [laughs]

PAPS: I think we all kind of felt that way and we all, you know, came home at different times, but uhm.... Yeah, I got home just in time for my wedding anniversary.

TORNQUIST: Oh.

PAPS: So. So, that was nice, for my husband's sake. That was nice that I got home for our anniversary.

TORNQUIST: Yeah... Uhm, so was it a really sudden decision when you were called up? Like I know you said you had about two weeks to prepare, but had you heard rumors or any kind of talk before, ahead of time, that they were like, "Okay, it's gonna happen soon since we're preparing—

PAPS: —Oh, yeah. We had been feeling that way for a month or two, that we would be called. We just didn't know when we'd be called.

TORNQUIST: Okay. Okay and I have kind of a little bit of a different question. So I know that the utilization of female military personnel has, you know, changed a lot over the course of your career. You were working during a lot of different changes that occurred. And, like, post 9/11 I know a lot of jobs were opened up. But during the time that you were in, did you feel well utilized in your area and...?

PAPS: Ahh... Yes. Definitely. And I think one question you've given me is, "Was there any problem being a female around males?" Absolutely not. We all worked as a team and there was just none of it that was going on that made—you know, we were all equal. And nothing at all about women being there. I didn't experience it and I didn't hear from anyone else in my unit who experienced it.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So, yeah, that was my next question. So you never had many c conversations about that kind of problems or...?

PAPS: No, there were no problems.

TORNQUIST: Okay. And... so when you're working—you're working at, like, different pickup points that are kind of situation dependent. Like you're not going to, say, a specific military hospital in the Middle East, but did you have, like, pick up and drop off points or was it consistent or did it vary?

PAPS: Well, uhm... well, it varied but many of them were medical staging facility units that we would take them—like when we had the enemy prisoners of war, we took them back to King Fahd [Medical City] where they had a prisoner of war area, but they also had an area for the medical prisoners of war. And so as soon as we got back, we unloaded them and then them and then the medical staging facility base took them and that was the end of our time with them. And sometimes, like the burn patient we took to Riyadh, because they had a burn unit there—so, yeah, we had specific places where we took them.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So what kind of—you wrote, or you mentioned that there was burn patients and dehydration, but were there any other kinds of physical ailments or...?

PAPS: Oh, heart attacks, knee injuries... uhm, just what you would normally have anywhere. Except, you know, most of them were, you know, you had to be in pretty good health to even be activated to go there. So, you know, they were all in good health when they arrived in Saudi Arabia.

TORNQUIST: Okay and then—so you were saying that you've been really well prepared at this point because of all the time leading up to being activated.

PAPS: Right.

TORNQUIST: But was there anything that you felt that was, like, so different or that you had

felt that you really were adapting to that was different than being on the reserves at O'Hare?

PAPS: Not really, just living in a tent instead of going home. [laughs]

COHEN AND TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: That was about it, but the work itself was no different than what we had trained for. And I noticed one of the questions was, "When I came home, how different was it?" Well, you know, I had my walls painted beige and I'd wake up in the morning thinking I was still in my tent because the tent was beige. And so it took me a while to realize, 'No, this is actually my bedroom.' And I think my family kind of wanted me to just fall right back in and pay the bills and do everything I did, and I just didn't—couldn't do it right away because sometimes it'd be overwhelming and I'd—I just had to go out and take a walk and, you know, get my head straight, type of thing. And eventually I did take over doing the things I did before I went to the war, but there was some adjustment there when I got home.

TORNQUIST: Was part of the adjustment just getting back, and you think, like, the time zone and back into a different routine because had, you know, family responsibilities and...

PAPS: Yeah, that was it. The responsibilities 'cause in the war, they told you when you're on call, they told you when to go to chow hall. The biggest decision—we made no decisions, we didn't pay any bills, everything was taken care of. Just, "Which chow hall we gonna go to?" That was the biggest decision we had to make and then when the end came, you know, they expect you to go back to your life where you were in charge of everything. And.... Yeah, it took a little adjustment getting back, especially those tan walls in my bedroom, thinking I was still in my tent.

TORNQUIST: Did you ever think about repainting it? [laughs]

PAPS: [laughs] Not—not then.

TORNQUIST: No, okay. Uhm, did your family like to ask you questions about your time there? Like, did you have a lot of conversations or stories to...?

PAPS: Uhm... not really. I wrote a lot of letters. You know, you could write all you wanted to and instead of putting a postage stamp on it, you just wrote "free." So

all your letters came back free. And so I wrote a lot of letters to the families and to my friends and so forth. And all you had to do was put “free” on it. And so I think I pretty well told them everything in my letters.

TORNQUIST: Aha, yeah. So in lieu of a telephone, ‘cause it didn't work, you took advantage of that. That’s nice.

PAPS: Yeah. Well the telephone you had to pay for, you know, you had to reverse the charges. So the letters were free, and some people felt they had to get mail every day from home and I didn’t feel that way, never. I mailed a letter a week. That's good, I know they're okay.

TORNQUIST: So, they sent you letters back and were they just letters or did they ever send you anything, like a...? I know I've heard stories of some groups getting, like, a care package or was it more just communication?

PAPS: Mostly communication, I think my husband sent me some magazines. But, you know, we had so much food over there and people, companies... We had shelves full of food that went to waste, actually, ‘cause we had so much food. So we really didn't need care packages.

TORNQUIST: [laughs] Sure.

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: So it sounds like you had a lot of good camaraderie with a lot of your people. Like you said, you were all in the same boat and you knew most of them, coming over. That sounds like it was really important to you at this time and did that stay with you after you came home, like you were saying?

PAPS: Oh, yeah. We still have that camaraderie. I imagine at least half the people on Facebook with me are people from my unit. And, you know, we continue to have parties, you know, maybe once a year or whatever. So we still see each other quite a bit.

TORNQUIST: That’s nice.

PAPS: Oh, we also went—we worked very closely with a unit for Westover that was aeromedical. And also from Detroit that was aeromedical. So it seems like our three units were interchangeable with crews. You know, we could have anyone from any of these crews, but we all had the same training, so it didn't make any difference. We really worked well together.

TORNQUIST: And so you oversaw a large group of people, both in the reserves and in active duty. So what are some challenges of managing that many, like, different sub-teams? Because I know you had, like, over a hundred people under your command at one point.

PAPS: Oh yeah, way over a hundred. Uhm... you know, something about the military is that everything's regulations. You have to know your regulations. And... So, you know, I would counsel every one of my nurses every year to tell them what they had to do to make rank. There were certain steps you had to do to make rank. I'd have a chief nurses' meeting every month and go over with all my nurses there and tell them what—what was going on, what was the latest, what we needed to do, what we needed to change. But everybody was there because they wanted to be there. It made a big difference because they wanted to be there. And I worked very closely with my commander, and we worked extremely close together. So we were on the same page all the time.

TORNQUIST: And were you ever working with—I know there were groups that came over from Germany and different things, like, that worked in tandem with the U.S. Did you have any personnel that you were communicating with that weren't U.S. personnel?

PAPS: I did not. No. I did—we did send a crew to fly on the Saudi Arabia C-130s and that crew did have some.... Well, worked with some of the Saudis, but I personally did not.

TORNQUIST: Okay. And... So you mentioned that you were working, like, on the Iraqi border and that you had some time to go to, I think it was Bahrain at one time...?

PAPS: That was for R and R, rest and relaxation.

TORNQUIST: Oh, right. Okay. So, overall what was your impression of coming to places like this? Had you ever thought about the fact that you might go there someday? And what was your reality of actually being in this environment?

PAPS: Uhm, I'm not sure, but I had traveled some, and I really traveled a lot since I got out of the Air Force and retired. And I've been all over the world. And so I guess I didn't think too much about it. I kinda knew what it was going to be like and, you know, since then I've been to Qatar, I've been to UAE, you know, Jordan. I've been all over that, but that was after not before, somehow. And so, yeah. I don't expect it to be America.

TORNQUIST: Right. [laughs] Yep.

PAPS: Yeah.

TORNQUIST: Yeah, that was gonna to be one of my questions, if you ever went back to some of the places you were stationed. So it sounds like you did, and did you enjoy—was it—how was it different from being, uhm, working there? Was it kinda like your R and R times or...? [laughs]

PAPS: [laughs] Well, no. No. It was just... travels. And I've done a lot of traveling since I got out of the Air Force. I've been on all seven continents. I've been, you know, all over Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Russia, a couple of times, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan... and, you know, Egypt, Morocco, Kenya, South Africa, Easter Island... all over Central America, all over Asia, all the countries in Eurasia, South America, quite a few countries. So I've done extensive traveling.

TORNQUIST: Oh my. Yeah, and I feel like that your career and what you've done, like you said, all the many, many years of preparing and then your time in active duty would prepare you for doing, you know, things like that cause just—it takes a lot of coordination to go to different places. And that sounds like it—you were used to that kind of change and activity.

PAPS: I was, even before the Air Force, I traveled. So, yes. It was wonderful.

TORNQUIST: So I would love to go back and talk a little bit more about your training as a nurse, if you don't mind.

PAPS: Sure.

TORNQUIST: Could you describe a little bit more about your thinking on kind of what you—why you decided to go into nursing. I know you said it was rather, you know, common for women at the time and it was, like, another option to teaching. And you kind of ended up doing both, but how did that sit with your family? And, like, what was some of the thinking when you were getting into this, like at the very beginning?

PAPS: Well, my father would talk to me a lot throughout high school about what I was going to do with my life, because a lot of the people in the area had gone to this particular hospital for nursing. I kinda knew what to expect. I knew several people there from the neighborhood. And so he was all for my being a nurse and he was even more so afterwards because he knew world events. He would

watch the TV, when we got a TV, you know, and he would—the international news he would look at, when the local came on he'd turned it off. And when I was taking, like, some of these courses, like Air War College, and I would talk about Minsk, or some of these places, he knew everything about it. And so, you know, my father was a really good supporter of everything I did.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm. Were you—were you able to bond, like, bond over that kind of decision or because he was so supportive?

PAPS: Oh, yeah. You know, we were very close, my father and me. We were very close.

TORNQUIST: And how did your mother feel and your other family members?

PAPS: About...?

TORNQUIST: Oh, about your joining the Air Force.

PAPS: Well, I think they were all proud of me because we weren't a military family. So it was like, "Why are you joining the military?" But they were all very, very proud of me. Before I went to Desert Storm my mother came to Chicago, and my brother, to see me before I left. And... yeah. You know, and they'd helped me with my children. They'd take care of them when I had to go up to school. So, no they're very, very proud of me.

TORNQUIST: That's nice. And did you ever have any friends from your early training and education that ended up going into the Air Force so that you had any kind of impact on them making a decision? Because I know you wrote that your friend did towards you.

PAPS: No... uhm. Back from my school days, I don't know of anybody that went into the military.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: Again, it was a farming community and farmers were kinda exempt from the military. And then, of course, soon after I joined, they stopped the draft, so people didn't have to go anymore. And so I just don't recall too many people that I knew went into the military.

TORNQUIST: And my sense of timing's a little off. What time—or what year did you join the Air Force?

PAPS: 'Seventy-four. 1974.

TORNQUIST: Okay. So with all the events going on at the time, did you have any thoughts that you might be sent somewhere sooner than you eventually ended up being sent?

PAPS: I didn't give it much thought. I thought, well, 'Vietnam was winding down'. And if they'd said, "Oh, we're gonna train you fast and send you to Vietnam," I probably would have said, "Okay." One of the girls that was in flight school with me, she was active duty though, and they sent her—she was on the Babylift [Operation Babylift] out of Vietnam and the plane crashed and she was killed. But I think if they'd told me I was going to Vietnam, I'd say, "Okay. Whatever you want."

TORNQUIST: Sure. Was it—did it ever set in that you were going to be maybe doing reserves duty for a long time? That was kind of like what you were doing then?

PAPS: No, I was just playing it by ear.

TORNQUIST: Uh-huh.

PAPS: But I'd signed up so many years and when that came up, well, I'll just sign for another... and then it got to the point, well, I'll just sign up for the whole twenty [laughs] you know and get it over with, so I didn't have to keep signing up all the time.

TORNQUIST: It sounds like you had a, like, kind of an eagerness to just experience different things and the—like a real openness to experiences as far as even with your education, just kind of seeing where it went and, like, I guess an ambition. That sounds like it served you well going so far with what you did both in civilian life and in your military career.

PAPS: I think I loved everything I did. I loved working in the operating room. I loved my teaching. I loved the Air Force. I just really liked everything I did.

TORNQUIST: Why did you love the operating room?

PAPS: Uhm... I don't know. I just knew the instruments. I didn't find it boring. Sometimes I found working on the floor a little boring and it wasn't in the operating room. You know, we could go through a whole operation and the doctor didn't even have to ask for an instrument because I knew exactly what he was going to use all the time. And I just found it exciting.

TORNQUIST: Yeah. [interrupts] It sounds like you felt that—

PAPS: We were a team.

TORNQUIST: Sounds like you felt comfortable.

PAPS: Yeah! Yeah.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: But, you know, there was just more action going on. And I noticed with our flight nurses, the people that joined were not just floor nurses. They were either in the emergency room, the ICU, surgery. They were where the action was and not just working on a floor, type of thing, taking care of patients. And that's pretty well the type of nurses that we had in the unit. We had very good nurses.

TORNQUIST: Do you think that the thought of doing, like, flight nursing— it attracted people who were already interested in a little more action, like, kind of, I don't know, adrenaline seeking or just people who were prepared and seeking that? That's who you ended up with?

PAPS: Oh, yeah.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: Oh, sure. Yeah, because if they'd gone in other units, they might have just been in the hospital, so taking care of patients and—but flying is, it's just a different world.

TORNQUIST: Right. So probably with the exception of our very first on the job training, you didn't ever do any more floor work in your career, really?

PAPS: Well, not really, I—of course I took my students to the hospital and taught them how to do bedside nursing. No, I really didn't do much. I did a little bit, but not much after that, except for taking my students in—

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: —you know, two days a week we'd be in the hospital.

TORNQUIST: And, ah... So. You said that General Wilma Vaught had kind of a mentor impact on you. Was there anybody else in your early days where—that was like a

mentor figure? And how did that translate later on to you being kind of a mentor figure?

PAPS: No, I think Wilma was my biggest one. And, you know, she was at—she established the women's museum at the entrance of Arlington [Military Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery]. [Leah Footnote: Museum is within the Memorial] And when I'd go to Washington, D.C. to meetings and things, I would see her and we'd go out for dinner together. I am registered there. So if you ever get there, you can type my name in and my picture will come out about what I did. Yeah, she—and then there was—our unit reported to Fourth Air Force, which was out in Sacramento, California, and there was a MSC officer [Medical Service Corps] there and he also was a mentor to me. He encouraged me to do a lot of things and he even wanted me, after my twenty years was up, he wanted me to go to the Pentagon. But my husband had just died, and I just wasn't quite up to any more time. Uhm, one thing that the military taught me was to read regulations. Everything had to go by regulations. And now that I've been on several condo boards, I know how important it is to read the bylaws.

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: And because I'm used to reading regs, I read bylaws. And you don't expect people—they're not as good as the military was about going by bylaws or regulations. But that was that. Another thing that happened when I was in the 4-H [umbrella of youth organizations whose mission is to engage youth to reach their potential] when I was a kid. You know, we learned Robert's Rules and we had to go by Robert's Rules for all of our meetings and they had stuck with me clear until today. So I run all my meetings with Robert's Rules. It's amazing that people don't know Robert's Rules and how we still have structured meetings going on.

TORNQUIST: So what are some of Robert's Rules and how did that help you think a little bit better about doing meetings and such?

PAPS: Well, it's just... you have to open the meeting. You have to make sure you've got a quorum. You've got to go over the minutes and have them approved. And when you'd get to new or old business, you've got to—somebody's got to make a motion and second and then there's discussion. And so many times they forget the discussion before you ever vote, and you have to discuss it and then you can take a vote and it has to be so many yeas or nays and move on to the next topic.

But so many of this discussion, nothing ever gets done because they don't know enough to, you know, run it.

TORNQUIST: Right. And did this kind of thinking transfer to your time as a nurse educator and as a leader in the nursing portion of your Air Force career?

PAPS: What about it?

TORNQUIST: Oh, this type of, like, thinking about meetings, like as a leader and as a nurse educator and in the Air Force, did you have like a certain way that you structured your—like, the times you had to do the more like...?

PAPS: Well, we always had an agenda.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: You know, you knew points you had to cover, you just used it in the framework of Robert's Rules. And if it was a chief nurses' meeting I was having, whether—any, any meeting, even in my civilian life. There's just a way of doing it and everybody follows Robert's Rules, if you know it.

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] Uhm, did you like the responsibility of the more—I know a lot of times they talk about you getting, like, more office responsibilities and paperwork with more higher up in no matter what you're doing. But it's—did you like that aspect of the responsibilities?

PAPS: Oh, I didn't mind the paperwork at all. You know, I knew what had to be done. I knew what had to be written. And one thing you did there is we had to write up, I forget what they were called now, how you did everything. How you did counsel, how you did—everything had to be written up and you had to follow that format. And I—you know, of course that didn't happen in my civilian jobs. It was kinda, this is the way I'm going to do it, type of thing. But, yeah. And paperwork, no, I didn't mind the paperwork. I knew what to do. I knew how to do it. And, you know, even counseling everybody. Every one of my nurses, at one point we had sixty nurses or something, I had to counsel them every year and that had to be in writing too. So, yeah.

TORNQUIST: Yeah. And how did you feel when you were finally promoted to your highest rank, which was colonel, and what was kind of going through your mind and did

you know it would be happening and maybe kind of talk us through that time of your life.

PAPS: Yeah, I assumed it would happen because I filled all the squares. You know, to get promoted, you have to take all these correspondence courses. First was Squadron Officer School, just to make major, and then I forgot what the next one was to make lieutenant colonel. And then you'd have to do Air War College. And with that, you know, you'd get at least twenty-thirty books in the mail and then you'd had to go into the base to take the test. We also had to write papers and because I wanted to make sure I made colonel; I even took one extra course: national security course. So I really stuck with that step to get there, to be pretty sure. And then I was in the right positions. I had the right ribbons. I had, you know, I had everything so there would've been no reason for me not to move to colonel.

TORNQUIST: And what was like a moment when you knew, like, you could call—or people would be calling you colonel at this time? Was your family aware of the changing kind of position in your career? Were they proud or...?

PAPS: Of course, they were proud. But, you know, as a lieutenant colonel, which is the step below colonel, they call you Colonel. So even though you're a lieutenant colonel, they still referred to you as Colonel. So that part was—except you had eagles on your shoulders now instead of the silver maple leaves. But yeah.

TORNQUIST: And uhm, do you have any other milestones in your career that you'd like to share either in civilian or reserves or otherwise?

PAPS: Uhm, no, it was just an exciting time and besides that, we were members of the Aerospace Medical Association. So we went to those conventions every year and then there was AMSUS [Acronym for Association of Military Surgeons of the United States] ... which is also connected to the military, and we went to both conventions every year. And being chief nurse, I went to a lot of meetings. They would have chief nurses' meetings for all the chief nurses and aeromedical evacuation all over the United States and, you know, I might go to Lake Tahoe for those meetings or wherever they had the meeting. So I was gone a lot with things like that. It seems, when I was in the Air Force, I felt like I lived in a plane. If it wasn't an Air Force plane, it was a commercial plane taking me to some meeting that was Air Force.

TORNQUIST: And so how—it sounds like you were gone a lot and consistently and for different meetings or whether it was for you know, your reserves across the country. But how did you prepare mentally, physically, whether it be like, did you have a routine to get yourself packed? And how did you handle your family? Like, you know, telling them that you'd be gone again?

PAPS: I uhm.... No, I'm pretty fast. You know, even when I go on a month vacation, on a trip, I'll pack the day before. I don't pack the week before, I'm just a fast packer. I know a couple of weekends I could go to Panama, and I would call my husband up, "I can go to Panama, but I have to leave in an hour." And he would say, "Okay, what'd you want me to do while you're gone?" So, you know, I had a lot of support from my husband. But... "Go ahead and go, go ahead and go." He really encouraged me to do everything I wanted to do.

TORNQUIST: And your—were are your children supportive? I know you said your youngest was a little, maybe especially now, looking back, but was that a challenge back then?

PAPS: She didn't say anything, but I think she—she would say, "Oh, Mom, you were never there. But *Peter* was always there." You know, he would come and if I was at school, he would take her out for dinner and then he'd take her to the bowling alley where he'd just pick her up at the school, at the bowling alley where he'd do bowling and then I'd pick her up, when I got home from school, at the bowling alley and take her home and put her to bed. So, you know, she had a lot of probably alone time that probably was not the best for her.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm. I understand, yeah. And so back to your time in Saudi Arabia, in the Middle East. Did you—how was it when you finally found out that you were, or maybe it was finally, maybe it was suddenly, but how did you find out that you'd be going home and...?

PAPS: I think I found out and they said, "Your plane's leaving in two hours."

TORNQUIST: Oh! Same thing again, right? [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: Okay, I'll pack my stuff!

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] Did you have any kind of rumors that you knew something would be changing or did you expect to stay longer than you did?

PAPS: No, you never knew. We never knew. The war was over, you know, it was a tear down, it was washing equipment and that kind of stuff and people were kind of leaving... But you just never knew, and it was going to happen. And so they came over and told me they were leaving on a C-5 in two hours and so I just packed my stuff.

TORNQUIST: Okay. And did your—I know you said people left at different times. Did you leave with anybody that you knew or was it a little more—

PAPS: No.

TORNQUIST: —solitary?

PAPS: Just me, just me. And the C-5... I have no idea where that crew was from, or the plane and I was just there with the crew. But, you know, everybody in the military is kind of nice to each other.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: So, you know, they welcomed me, and they took me all the way to Westover, in Massachusetts.

TORNQUIST: Do you have—oh, okay. So that was your first point of landing when you got back to the U.S.

PAPS: To the United States, yeah.

TORNQUIST: And you stopped in—I think you said Spain in between?

PAPS: Yeah, we did for refueling, yeah.

TORNQUIST: Oh.

PAPS: We couldn't go anywhere, you know, it was just refueling.

TORNQUIST: Okay. And so that's a fairly long journey from start to finish. So do you get to know the different personnel that are on board and kind of where they were during the war and where they're going or...?

PAPS: I'm not sure I did because I probably slept.

TORNQUIST: Oh, right.

PAPS: I probably slept, and I don't recall where they were from or anything, but they were very nice to me. And I was up in the crew quarters and there were probably bunks up there and I probably slept.

TORNQUIST: Uhm, so this was a C-5. Can you describe the inside of a C-5 compared to like a C-130 for someone who's never been in one?

PAPS: Ah...A C-5 is probably four times, at least, bigger than—you can put, what, four Greyhound busses inside of a C-5. They're really quite big, very big.

TORNQUIST: So there are, like, spaces you can walk around inside, obviously, because that's—they're mobile units, almost...?

PAPS: I guess you could. I was not back in the cargo area. I was in the flight compartment.

TORNQUIST: Sure.

PAPS: So I think they probably had a dozen cots up there. They had a little kitchen and stuff. I was not back in the cargo part.

TORNQUIST: Okay, and then so when you get to Westover, how long are you in Massachusetts before you get home?

PAPS: Oh, I was there just a very few hours, very few hours and then I took a civilian flight back to O'Hare.

TORNQUIST: And what was the moment like when you got to see your family again after being away for five months?

PAPS: It was pretty nice. You know, my daughter had decorated my yard. There were streamers, there was, "Welcome Home" signs. She had all kinds of things out in the yard welcoming me home, which was very nice, and the neighborhood would come by and other people in the area. There was a General, he was "Follow me, guys. I'll see what's in Betty's yard," you know.

COHEN: Uh-huh.

TORNQUIST: [laughs]

PAPS: He had a big welcome for me.

TORNQUIST: Aww. And yeah, and then you got to participate in some of the parades, you said, in the following weeks...?

PAPS: Yeah. And I gave a lot of speeches and different places wanted somebody to come and talk. And so I went a lot of places giving speeches.

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: And I went to Peoria. I was in a parade down there. I was in the Pet Parade in La Grange. I went to a lot of nursing homes, a lot of schools giving speeches. And I know this one nursing home was kind of interesting I went to and the only person that came to talk to me afterwards was this little man, and he says, "What kind of material is this made out of?" It was my... fatigues and he wanted to know what kind of material it was. So he must have been, you know, I don't know. He worked with material, obviously, but that was the only question I had at that nursing home. [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] Okay.

PAPS: I always think about that, that was kind of interesting. He just wanted to know about the material of my fatigues.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: Yeah, I did a lot of speeches and finally after several months I said, "That's enough. No more."

TORNQUIST: Okay. So what kind of things did you speak about in these speeches?

PAPS: Oh, I gave them some idea of what Saudi Arabia was like, what our flights were like, you know, the people. Just about my experience.

TORNQUIST: And did you do any kind of Q & A as a part of this? Did people like to ask you questions?

PAPS: Possibly, but I don't recall any specific questions they asked. I'm sure it was open for questions at the end.

TORNQUIST: And so you said you worked at—you did these at nursing homes, but did you do schools like with a younger crowd?

PAPS: Junior high schools, senior high schools chil—you know, I went to my grandson's class, second grade, and talked to them too. Yeah, just whoever called them up and asked, you know, “Can we have a speaker?” And frequently the commander sent me out, probably because I wasn't working, like, forty hours a week like everybody else.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm. Okay. And so I know that your hometown has a memorial that's kind of like an active memorial for different military, is that...?

PAPS: That's true. They did—they did put that up. And I thought my name was going to be on it when they did it and General Vaught's name was there and I said, “Well, she got on, how come I'm not on it?” And they said, “Well, we're gonna add more names,” and so I got on the second—the second time they put, so my name is there.

TORNQUIST: Okay. [laughs] Do you like being on the list...?

PAPS: Of course!

TORNQUIST: ...on the stone, yeah?

PAPS: Of course, it's my hometown!

TORNQUIST: Right. [laughs] That's so neat. And so did you in like the—or maybe during, after your military though, did you join any kind of veterans' organizations or...?

PAPS: Oh yes. I'm a life member of the American Legion and I'm a life member of the VFW, Veterans of Foreign Wars.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: So I'm life members of both of those.

TORNQUIST: Do you do any kind of work with them, whether volunteering or more event-driven or...?

PAPS: I really don't.

TORNQUIST: No. [laughs]

PAPS: I get their—their, you know, when they're having meetings and things, but I really don't go to most of them. I'm just a life member, that's all.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

PAPS: And they were having trouble because we hadn't had any foreign wars and to be a VFW, you have to be in a foreign war. And from Vietnam until Desert Storm, we really didn't want any wars. So they couldn't get any new members and they were happy to have us come back and become members of the VFW.

TORNQUIST: Like a new—a new cohort. [laughs]

PAPS: Yeah, sure.

TORNQUIST: That's interesting. Uhm, so I have a few kind of reflection questions about military in general and I know that you wrote in your Operation HerStory questionnaire that you, uhm, you love the military. That's kind of a big question, but why did you love it?

PAPS: It was just exciting, the people you met, the flying—the flying part, I think I might not have loved it as much if I wasn't in the flying unit. I mean, I probably would not have put twenty years in if I had not been flying. But, yeah, it was just exciting, the people you met, the places you went.... And, you were a part of something, you know.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: It was just part of it, and it was just exciting.

TORNQUIST: And, uhm, how long did you continue teaching slash nursing after you came home? Like, when did you retire? How much time in between?

PAPS: I only worked about two more years.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm, okay.

PAPS: I retired from teaching at fifty-eight I could have taught many more years, but I didn't. And that's when I started traveling the world, was after I quit teaching.

TORNQUIST: Ah, okay. Yeah, that was my next question [laughs]

PAPS: [laughs] Yeah, I traveled the world. I'd play a lot of golf, I played bridge. I belong to book clubs. You know, I spend my summers in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, playing golf. I spend my winters in Florida playing golf and I spend some time in La Grange, too, which is my home address.

TORNQUIST: Do you talk about your experiences still with your family or your grandchildren?

PAPS: Not really. There's two other colonels and the three of us get together every year and they come up to my place in Lake Geneva and we spend a couple of days together reminiscing about our time together in the military.

TORNQUIST: Okay, and I know that you have gone back to the places that you've been stationed at, that's pretty exciting, at least to my mind. And so your post-service life kind of since you were traveling so much, it doesn't sound like it was too different from when you were working... [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: It's—I was pretty well gone all the time. [laughs] Yeah, so we'd take four international trips a year. So we really got around to a lot of—there's a big, beautiful world out there.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: I know some people will say, "I'll go to Europe" and I'm thinking there's a bigger world than just Europe out there. And I have loved everywhere I have gone...

COHEN: Wow...

PAPS: And you learn so much about how people are different and, you know, how they live different, and it's okay to live different, you know. It doesn't have to be the way we live.

TORNQUIST: Mmm-hmm. And do you have a favorite place that you've been?

PAPS: I loved every one of them.

TORNQUIST: Yep. [laughs]

COHEN: [laughs]

PAPS: Every one of them... Easter Island, Nepal, Tibet... Myanmar, you name it. I loved every place I've ever been because there's always something to learn.

TORNQUIST: Right.

PAPS: ... From every country.

TORNQUIST: [interrupts] I love—

PAPS: I always thought—

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: —if I went on one trip, I could just, you know, just hook up with another trip, then hook up with another one. I could just keep going and traveling all the time.

TORNQUIST: I love that philosophy. Do you think that that kind of thinking played into how you felt as a nurse and especially working with—you know, it's a war and you're working with enemy prisoners of war, as they're called. But you wrote in your questionnaire, as well, that you— as nurses, you treat everyone. But how is your philosophy on, like, the enemy and the concept of war? How has that been and how has it changed over time for you?

TORNQUIST: You know, the enemy, they're military just like we are. They're just fighting for a different president or dictator or whatever. But, you know, they're just like we are. They're fighting for whatever they're fighting for. So I don't see them as different, they just have a different goal than we have.

TORNQUIST: Right. And uhm, so... Let's see. A few more questions... So I know that you were in contact with the HerStory flight—Honors Flight to Washington, and that's in part how you found out about us. Will you be participating in the flight to Washington if it's gonna be going on still?

PAPS: Ah, I hope so. I was disappointed that I knew it had to be canceled. And so, yeah, I hope it's the time I can go, and I hope it happens.

TORNQUIST: Me too.

PAPS: Yeah, I've been to Washington many times, but I'd still like to be part of the Honor Flight. And... But, you know, things do get cancelled. I was supposed to go to Mongolia two years ago. It got canceled, I was supposed to go this year, it was cancelled. So maybe next summer I'll get to Mongolia yet.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: But, you know, things just get cancelled, you just have to go with the flow.

TORNQUIST: Well, I hope you get to go to Mongolia—[laughs]

PAPS: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: —and to the Honor Flight. Uhm, and how did you become involved with the HerStory organization and then what made you decide to share your story with us?

PAPS: Uhm, well, one of the gals that was in the Air Force with me, she said, “Betty, they're taking people on the Honor Flight if you were in during a certain time.” She knew I was in because she was in. I said, “Oh, that sounds great, another chance to fly.” And then, I don't know, I got to thinking, well, I guess I could share some kind of a story. [laughs] So I wrote it up one day and I didn't keep a copy, so I had no idea what I said.

TORNQUIST: [laughs] I understand. And then for the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, why did you agree to kind of sharing a little more in depth with us, and what does it mean to you to be a part of an oral history project such as this?

PAPS: Why did I do it? Because you asked me to.

COHEN & TORNQUIST: [both laugh]

PAPS: But mainly... Yeah, I think it's good to have the histories. You know, a year ago I started writing down, I don't know, I must have been bored, my life, my life story. And I don't know a thing about it, you know, I did for my kids more than anyone. But I only got halfway through and so there's a lot I haven't— and I just haven't been in the mood to do it again. But I did review, before today, the things I wrote down about the military and Desert Storm and things, you know, that I remembered at that point. And, yeah, it's kinda nice to have—and this morning a friend sent me an interview of an Army nurse that was in Vietnam, and I think that she's in Gettysburg, so it's a different museum. But I really enjoyed hearing her story.

TORNQUIST: Oh yeah, I was gonna ask, actually, do you—you're obviously in contact with a lot of your fellow Air Force and nurses. Do you like kind of discussing the times that you've had, the experiences or do you talk more about, like, more present things?

PAPS: Ah, both. A lot of them, “Oh, do you know—do you remember so-and-so?” and “Where's so-and-so at this point?” or—you know, we will talk about the different people that we were—or the experiences that we have, especially when the three of us colonels get together. And maybe we'll bring pictures from our days in the military, and we talk a lot about it.

TORNQUIST: That's nice. And so one thing that the Pritzker Military Museum & Library does is—or kind of their general mission, is to collect stories and artifacts of what they call the "Citizen Soldier." When you hear this term, what would that mean to you and what does that bring to mind, the Citizen Soldier?

PAPS: Well, it's you're a civilian that adds on a military component, such as we reserves. We have our civilian life, but we're also military. So that makes us a citizen and a soldier. And so that's what I think about, the citizen... I'm not strictly military, never even have been really. And so, they're both civilian and military at the same time.

TORNQUIST: And yeah, so it sounds to me just your whole career was kind of a combination of the two, because you're doing the reserves for so long, but you have this goal in mind of, you know, one day possibly going on a deployment and all of your nursing training leading up to that and then giving it back as a teacher and a professor. That's—it just sounds like a really exciting contribution.

PAPS: Yeah, I loved every minute of both of them. I loved my teaching too.

TORNQUIST: Yeah.

PAPS: Really.

TORNQUIST: Uhm, do you have something that you like about teaching in particular that—like, I know I've talked to a lot of professors in my own university, and they all have—they give kind of a different answer... But what's something that makes you like being a teacher?

PAPS: Well, besides the students, the students were wonderful. But I also like writing, curriculum, revising curriculum and writing new curriculum, that kind of thing. Writing the self-study so we could get national accreditation, so... yeah. My degree was in—my master's degree was teaching med-surg nursing and a lot of that had to do with curriculum and things and I liked that. But I—I loved the students; the students were just wonderful.

TORNQUIST: Awesome. And uhm, yeah, so and then curriculum writing, you were just kind of giving back to the structure of the program and helping that get developed, yeah. Wonderful. Well, that was all of the questions that I had. I would like to ask both you and Leah if you have anything else that you would like to talk about today that you feel hasn't been addressed in our conversation.

COHEN: I do have one question. I know that you served, as you said, in a way between the hot wars, like toward the end of the Vietnam War when it was winding down and then Operation Desert Shield, Desert Storm. But when you were in the reserves, was there a consciousness about the Cold War or a preparedness to, you know, you might have to fly to Germany in case of some Soviet attack. But, you know, with U.S. bases in Europe, was there any sense of preparedness of the—during the Cold War itself?

PAPS: I don't think we even thought about it.

COHEN: Okay. [laughs]

PAPS: I think we did get a—I think we did get a ribbon or something that we were part of the Cold War. Ah, you know, we got a lot of ribbons because we were in Desert Storm, too. But I think we had one that was for the Cold War, but we never really thought about it. I didn't think about the Cold War and I'm sure anybody else in my unit did. And... And I guess the only thing I would add is I'm really proud to have served my country and I love the military.

TORNQUIST: Okay and we thank you so much for your contribution to both the military and to the oral history program. And do you think there's anything else, uhm, Leah?

COHEN: I can't think of anything else.

PAPS: I think I covered all my notes.

COHEN: [laughs]

TORNQUIST: [laughs] I think I did, as well. Well, with that, I'd like to formally and sincerely thank you, Colonel Paps, again, for sharing your stories and your memories with us today and for demonstrating the dedication of nurses in the military. We're very pleased to hear another account of women in the Forces. And we thank you for your impressive contribution to both nursing and the US Air Force. And as a reminder, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library will be sending you a challenge coin in the mail as a thank you.

PAPS: Thank you.

COHEN: Yeah, thank you.

PAPS: Nice talking with you.

TORNQUIST: Very nice meeting you and hearing your story today. Thank you so much for your time.

COHEN: Yeah, very nice meeting you. Thank you, yeah.

TORNQUIST: Okay.

COHEN: Okay. Well, take care, everybody.

PAPS: [laughs] You turned us off, huh?

COHEN: I turned you—ah, I'm about to, about to. I was just trying to give you—but unless you have something to add, but really it was a pleasure and thank you, yeah. Take care now.

PAPS: Thank you, bye.

TORNQUIST: Take care, bye. [Interview ends: 01:51:04]