United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Charles Stein
June 8, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Charles Stein, conducted by Esther Finder on June 8, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Rockville, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's volunteer collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

CHARLES STEIN
June 8, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is an interview for the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Charles Stein** conducted by **Esther Finder** on June 8th, 1999 in **Rockville, Maryland.** This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is a follow-up interview that will focus on Mr. **Stein's** post-Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview I listened to the interview you conducted with the Survivors of the **Shoah** Visual History Foundation on February 27th, 1997. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview, instead I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences. This is tape number one, side **A.** What was your name at birth?

Answer: My name was **Karl Robert Stein**. The only thing that is different from – from present time is the first name. **Karl** was changed to **Charles**, but it – actually, I didn't change it. It was changed by the authorities in **Luxembourg** when they issued me a passport. They simply wrote in there, and my name in – in that **Luxembourg** stateless passport on which I traveled after I left **Austria** was – they

translate it into the French, **Charles,** which is the same as – same spelling as **Charles** and that's remained that way.

Q: Did you ever consider going back to the original spelling?

A: No, no. Actually, when I was – even as – in **Vienna**, my friends, since I – I was – well, I was the only one in the group who – who spoke eng – en – of my friends that spoke English, knew English. I'd studied English. And so – I'd seen, you know, American movies and all that. So my – they called me, and – **Charlie**. Actually, th-the way it sounded then, as they pronounced it, it sounded more like **Sharlie**. So, it was nothing really new to me, and I remained with that.

Q: Can you just tell me also your place of birth and your date of birth?

A: Yes, I-I was born in **Vienna, Austria** on November 28th, 1919.

Q: What languages did you speak in 1945?

A: In 1945 I spoke English and German. German because I was at the time a prisoner of war interrogator in the army.

Q: Where were you on **V-E** day?

A: On **V-E** day I was somewhere on the **Elbe** river, facing the Russians on the other side, that's where we had to stop. I was with the ninth infantry division, 60th infantry regiment and I was at the time a captain in the **U.S.** Army and commander of a military intelligence unit, a prisoner of war interrogation team.

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Q: By **V-E** day, how long have you been in the service?

A: By **V-E** day, I've been in the service for just about four years. I was – originally I was drafted on October 7th, 1941, two months before **Pearl Harbor**.

Q: Had you seen combat in **Europe**?

A: Yes, I saw combat. I got into – I was in the **Normandy** landings on the day after **D-Day** – I – after **D-Day** on – on June seventh. I was up on the beach, and my duties then were, again, I – I had a – an interrogation team and we were interrogating prisoners of war. But under the – at that point, of course, it was combat. It was combat and interrogating and shooting some more and so forth. Everybody was in combat then.

Q: On your way through **Europe**, did you – did you encounter any concentration camps that had just been liberated?

A: Through **Europe**? Yes, the only one that I encountered on the way through the – in the campaign was **Nordhausen**, concentration camp **Nordhausen**, which we came upon not knowing where we – that there was a concentration until we – til we ran into it. It was a – it was a horrible experience. Knowing that my parents must be in one of those, I – I sort of instinctively started looking around to see if I could see my parents. It wa – it was a – an impression that stayed with me for a long time. It was the – bodies lying around, people wandering around in a daze. We tried

to, the little time that we had, we were moving pretty fast at the time, chasing the rest of the Germans in the direction of the – of the Russians. And we were there for about a day or two, I did interrogate some of the guards. They – some of them, as I recall, were Ukrainian guards that the survivors of – of the camp – many of them by the way in **Nordhausen** w-was one of the camps that had a lot of slave labors from eastern **Europe**, a lot of Yugoslavs that I encountered there. They wanted those guards. And if I lost any of them on the way, I – I-I can't remember. But they – the guards were scared. I recall one guard, who absolutely refused to talk. And we had ways of, you know, interrogate – ways of interrogate – this – this was not a friendly interrogation, so we made them talk. Not by physical force in any way, but by – oh, various things. Like we have him take off his clothes. And when a man stands there in front of you without his clothes on, he'll start talking pretty soon, we found out. That's an interesting thing we learned over – over the – we sort of picked up as we went through the war and – interrogation techniques that they didn't teach us in school. But he f – he talked and I got – I got his story, of course, I can't remember the details now. But I did get a – the story of some of the atrocities that the – they were – they committed. I turned the people over – the – the guards over to the military police that picked them up and took them back to prison camps.

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Q: The guards that you said you – if you misplaced them along the way, you – you don't remember, do you know what happened to those guards?

A: No, I don't. I have no idea.

Q: You also said that you employed techniques that you didn't learn in school. Can you tell me a little bit about your training in – in some of the techniques that you were trained to use and some of the ones you learned along the way?

A: Yes, well, in the military I was – I was – I went to – I was originally in field artillery. I went to officer candidate school and became – I was an artillery officer. And then I was, shortly after graduation at Fort **Sill, Oklahoma** where the artillery school was, I was tapped for intelligence because of my background in languages and so forth. I was called one night – one evening I was called in and was told that **Washington**, in quotes, at that time wanted me to go to – wanted me to go to the intelligence school, which was at Fort **Ritchie**, right in – in **Maryland** here, then called Camp **Ritchie**. That was the military intelligence school and we went through interrogation training and all kinds of intelligence training. Oh, we learned all kinds of things like **Morse** code, which I have never used in my life. Don't know anybody who ever did, and **folder** interpretation, map reading of foreign maps, which was important because some of the captured maps we had to – to know what we saw, and we had all kinds of field training with those. These were

Maryland – Maryland maps, maps of the – of the **Ritchie** area, but printed in various languages including Japanese. I remember one night that they dropped me off someplace at a place and gave me this – this map. And from landmarks and all that, you identified where you were and which way you were going. Well, that was important but in – basically for me that was not a problem because I was fluent in German, of course, my native language, I also knew French. And that's the direction we went in, so once we got there, I could easily read those maps if – if necessary. We were trained in order of battle, identifying – we learned everything about the German – we knew more about the German army, their uniforms, their – their insignia. That was all part of – of the training and the units, the organization of the German army, what units looked like, what they were, how ba – how strong they were, etcetera. That was all part of it because that was all part of – of the interrogation process. And so when we – when I got into – to the combat are – zone, interrogating the people was simple. One thing, for example, was that every German had what was called a **soldbuch,** a paybook. Now that **soldbuch – soldbuch** had all his military a-assignments listed in there. And it was easy to figure out who he was and what he was. So the first thing we'd ask them is, give me your **soldbuch**. And they would hand it over and you had them right there, that was – now you knew. And so then you would say, oh you were from the 338th

Füsilier-Batallion(ph)**,** yeah? And he'd say yeah, and take it from there. Most of the interrogations were actually not difficult. Most of them talked. Now you ran into some, officers mainly, who said name, rank and serial number, that's all they would give you. But again, you – we – all of us, I think, found ways to – to break them. For example is one thing, a German, regardless of whether you were friend or enemy, respected rank. So you made sure that the insignia you were – you were wearing at the time, and we had a complete collection of it, were at least one rank higher than the man we had, and we could read that. So we – we played that game, it was – if you had time for it. Now a lot of – most of it was right up in the front lines, so you didn't have time to – to play games. And at those times we would just play tough, yeah. Threaten, all kinds of things, you know, we would – we – we'd say – we'd tell them, okay, we'll let you walk back home, right through the front lines. Of course they wouldn't do that cause they'd get shot. And things like that, and they would – I don't really recall anyone I could not break in an – in an interrogation, and I've interrogated thousands of them. Now, what we did with the information, and we – we – in my case, being in the front lines, I would – my targets were who was opposing us, how strong are they, where are they located, what kind of weapons do they have, where's their artillery. And I would immediately call in to artillery to give them the coordinate of locations so that they

could fire on it, and my infantry units that I supported would get all the information – the – the intelligence officer of the unit would get all the information that was relevant to who – who was on the other side of the line, what was their morale, how – how strong were they, what kind of weapons did they have. And that went – well, we had a lot of good results. One of the things that I and my team always did was when we had specific targets that we could identify, after we had pushed through the area we checked those targets to make su – to see if they had been hit like we – and I think most of them were. So, it was – in **Normandy** it was – is rough, cause we were going from hedgerow to hedgerow, you know, one hedgerow at a time, and you know, a hundred – a hundred yards a day, things like that. But after that, of course, on the run, that was a little different. Once we broke through, it was – it was a different story, it was easier then.

Q: You mentioned in your interview for the **Shoah** Foundation that British intelligence was superior to American intelligence. Can you clarify that point for me?

A: Yes, I – I went to – I was shipped to **England** in December of 1943. I was in **England** until – until **D-Day**, so that was six months from – in **England**. And at the time I was sent to – from where we were out in the near – in the country somewhere, I was sent to **London** to study with – with British intelligence. They

had some schools and they – they took us into – and gave us some – some information. The British had a lot more experience. We had absolutely no experience, we were new. We were – all of – not – I'm not just talking about the – the front line type intelligence, but the **OSS** didn't exist until just about that time. And they had never, the people in the **OSS** were not what the British had trained for years and years as intelligence officers. We all learned fr – by – by doing. The – I had some contact with **OSS** people afte – on – well, on – actually still in **Europe**, but on the way home. They were going home at the same time, and I listened to some of their stories. They were dropped – one particular I remember, who was an artist, or at least that is what he – he faked. He was of Italian descent, a New Yorker who spoke Italian. He was dropped into **Normandy** and he sat around painting. He was – to the Germans he was an Italian painter visiting here, and was friendly right, to – **Italy** was a friendly country. And that's the way he collected intelligence. But he said he had absolutely no idea what he was doing when he first got in there. He got in by parachute, got – the French helped him – French underground helped him. And then he – he sat aro – he tha – he started painting and reporting and they had equipment to – to report. And he was around **Normandy** and the **Sherbrooke**(ph) peninsula doing this artwork. Course na – he brought nothing home. He all gave that to – to his French comrades there. But again, no

experience. Everything was – whatever we did was done for the first time, on the **U.S.** side. And now, as I said, the British, of course, had been doing their in-intelligence work, collection of intelligence all over the world with the – with the colonies and all that. So – a-and in World War II, of course, they'd been in the war for three years before we came in, or almost three years. That was wa-why I said that their – their intelligence was better, they were better organized. We were just learning, but we got there. We – just like everything else, I think, in the – in the **U.S.** Army. That army had absolutely no experience, we came from all over the place. Nobody – there were no real soldiers at th – in 1941. By 1944 we did the – the biggest – biggest job ever done in any – any invasion. And it was successful. So I guess as Americans, we're – we're quick learners. We picked up an awful lot from the British. They were very helpful. They taught us then. The schools that I went to in – in **London** during that period were very informative, because we talked to people who had been there, who had been there, done that and told us how – how they did whatever we were doing later on. That's – that's about – that's about it for – on that.

Q: You mentioned that you learned some things on your own and you were successful in – in your interrogations. And you mentioned one thing that they didn't teach you was to have your prisoner –

A: Strip.

Q: – get undressed, right. What other kind of things did you improvise?

A: Well, there are – there were – for example, the – the – what they didn't teach us, they taught us that e-every soldier has a **soldbuch**, but didn't tell us what to do with it. That is we picked up ourselves. I – I picked up the first one I looked at and I said, there it is. And I asked the man ha – you were up with – I told him, I didn't ask him, I told him, you were up from this and this regiment, or this – and they said yes. And before that you were something else. One of the things that we did was when – when time allowed, was engage in some small talk. Small talk about, well, you got your family back home, and that would open up suddenly, and then you lead into other things. I had some interesting interrogations. I had – and this is – this is one in a – in a – in a billion, probably. Had a prisoner, this – we were about – we were in **Germany** at the time. And he had very little information, but he was willing to talk. He said tha – actually, he deserted he told me. I'm not sure that that was right, but it didn't matter. But I noticed in papers that he had on him that he was a medical student at the University of **Vienna**. And so I asked him a – whether he was – took anatomy from Professor **Bernkopf**(ph) **Versowzer**(ph) and his mouth opened and he se – di-di-ta-ba – how – but how did you know? I said, I'm an intelligence officer, I know everything. And he just couldn't understand why,

and then he started opening up and told me all kinds of things about what happened to his family and others. His mother-in-law was mentally incompetent and she was in – in **Vienna** in a place that was known to me, that was the insane asylum in **Vienna**, there was one big one. And she had been killed, and he told me that they were killing these – well, handicapped people, mentally handicapped. They didn't need them, so they killed them. And you know, he was mad and so he said he deserted. Well, took him a long time to desert. But th – it-it's that kind of thing that – that those are interesting little things that happened. There were many of them, of the different nature. For example, in the Battle of the Bulge, the unit I was with was holding one of the – you know, the corners of – of the thing. We were not penetrated, but we – we – we went in there to hold it, and that was in the famous Battle of the **Hürtgen** Forest. And there was a German lieutenant colonel in there with his troops, holding out. And we could – it's a dense forest and we just couldn't get him out. And one day one of – a couple of Germans came out with a white flag and said that they're currently – name I – I can't remember the name, but it was a rather, later on, well known in – in – in the history of the war. What was his name? Well, can't remember. Anyhow, so who was sent in to bring – yeah, he was sick. He was very sick and he wanted to surrender. And so who was sent in to bring him out, of course? The only one who spoke German. And in I went and I got him out

and we had – the man had pneumonia very badly. But – and, you know, interrogating him at this point was really not necessary. There was nothing he could tell us in the – in the present situation. But he was on his own, just started talking as we carried him out. His own men carried him on a stretcher. And we came out of the forest and then we waited until he was evacuated. And he just told us all kinds of war stories, was just great. Good information. Not necessarily tactical information, but strategically important of how decisions were made and all that. Well, we took that down and got it back to higher headquarters and I don't know what they did with it, but at least the information was there. So these were the kind of things that you fell into occasionally.

Q: Did any people that you interrogated know you were Jewish?

A: Yes. Some of them, I told them. Particularly the **Waffen SS**. I wanted them to know, because I – I knew that the – well, it put some fear into them. Although, I'm not sure that they were anywhere near any of the atrocities or anything like that. But the **Waffen SS** was a tough outfit, in the beginning. Not in the – t-towards the end of the war, they filled in the blanks in – in the – the blank spaces in those organizations with just about anybody, including, I think, I'm not sure whether I told that – told you that story earlier about the boy, about a 17 year old kid who told me that he was an American. I said, oh yes? He said yes. He said, take off my

boot. Took off his boot, took out an innersole and came out with a green card with a baby's picture on it. His family had gone – had come to **America** and his parents were in – in **Los Angeles**. Yeah, came to **America** in the – sometime in the late 20's, early 30's, I guess. He was a baby then, and was a small – small – small child. They applied for a – they became permanent residents and probably, his parents later, citizens. But he was sent to his grandmother in **Germany** to go to school, they wanted him to go to school in **Germany**. Well, he did, he went back, and war broke out and when he got to be about 16 or so they pulled him in, this was towards the end of the war. And there he was in a **Waffen SS** uniform. That thing made the newspapers, by the way. I had – happened to have somebody when I – I called the thing in. I said – I said, I've got – I've got an – an American **Waffen SS** guy here. And I told my **G2** about that, and apparently there were some – I think Associated Press newsmen there, they wanted to see us. They say, hold him there, we – we'll be right down. They took a picture. I still have a clipping at home of that and talking about Captain **Stein** talking to – to this kid, whose showing his – that he was an American. Well, he was still a prisoner of war in a – I guess we – we had to process him that way, cause he was a German soldier.

Q: When did you realize the full extent of the genocide?

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A: Not really until the end of the war, until about **V-E** day. When we – when I talked to some people in – well, some Germans at that point, we were at the Czech border – no, that was afterward. We were still on the **Elbe.** And we had some communication with the Russians, who had come across many of the concentration camps in the east. And they were telling us what they had found. Millions of people killed and although we had interpreters, Russian interpreters, we had a meeting ta – even before **V-E** day, it – it was in late April, we were on the **Elbe** and we stopped, and the Germans stopped on the other side, that was agreed that we would – that **Elbe** was the – the – the border between the two zones. And we had arranged and I was invol – I was included in that with our general – meetings with the Russian general. We got together and we spent a couple of days of just talking through interpreters. And that is the first time that I really found out what had happened. And of course, my parents were on my mind, and not only my parents, the rest of my family, too. That's when the search began. Of course, after **V-E** day, I could not – I wanted to go to **Vienna**. Figured that – I knew – I had known that my parents had been deported to **Lódz,** because in – it was two weeks after I went into the army in – in October '41, I got a postcard that is – it came to **New York** and to my – the second cousin who lived in **New York,** or – was my – my address that I had. And he brought it to me and saying that a postcard had come saying that my

parents were being deported in October of ’41, to **Litzmannstadt, Lódz**, to the ghetto. That’s the last information I had. After that, nothing. And so I wanted to go to **Vienna**, but the army wouldn’t let me. As an intelligence officer, the Russians were in – had – had **Vienna** at the time and that part of **Austria** and they wouldn’t let us go into the Russian zone. So at that point I decided I’ll go home, to **New York** at that time. And by October – the war was over in March – in – in – excuse me, in May, May the ninth, excuse me. And we were – my team was pulled out in – in July and sent back to **Paris** where our headquarter – military intelligence headquarters was. First to – to another place in – in **Germany** and then to **Paris**. And we stayed there for shipment home. There were lots of things at that point, we could have signed up as a civilian to civil government and all the things that were going on, but I decided my best bet was to go home and start looking from – from that angle, and if necessary I’d come back as a civilian and of course, I intended to get out of the army, which I did in 1945, and I was separated in – in the 14th of December, 1945, and signed on as a reserve officer. I stayed on in the reserves.

Q: What was your rank when you – i-in December ’45.

A: Captain. Yes, I started out, of course, in ’41 as a private. In ’43 I went to **O.C.S.,** became second lieutenant, was promoted in **Normandy** to first lieutenant

and later that – a little later in the campaign to captain on two battlefield promotions.

Q: In your previous interview you mentioned that your father had been in the military. Did his military career have any impact on your career?

A: No, none, none whatsoever. I have a few photos that were given to me by relatives after the war, who had survived. Was my father in uniform, wa – one of them with – with him in uniform and me in a – in a baby carriage, and my mother, of course there too. So those – those are – that's about the only thin – we talked about it, but that had no influence on me.

Q: After World War II, did you ever consider going to **Palestine**?

A: Yes. Yes, there were a number of things that I was just thinking about in – in the end of 1945 and early '46. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about going to **Palestine** when I was still in **Vienna**. I was signed up for a transport, one of those youth transports in – back in 1938, immediately after the **anschluss**. But when the opportunity came to get away to **Luxembourg**, I couldn't wait, that – that was a long s – a long, drawn out process. They weren't going anywhere. We met periodically, all the – well, some of us, but nothing happened. As a matter of fact, my – one of my cousins, about four years younger than I, who stayed on then, didn't get out until about a year later. It took that long before the transports went,

that's just about 1939, in the fall of 1939 they finally got them out, then through **Yugoslavia** and then on a ship and in-into a – well, the – the **Exodus** story. But – into **Palestine.** I couldn't wait. I was – I was too old. I was 18 and I was in immediate danger so I left. Yes, I wanted to go and I – and grew up in a Zionist idea. A-After the war I was – yes, I wanted to go, I – I thought of going. I also thought of going back to medical school, and I was accepted in 1940 – 19 fift – '46, it – in **Switzerland**, in – both in – in **Zurich** and **Basel**(ph).

Q: I'm sorry, I have to pause to change tape.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: – for the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Charles Stein**. This is tape number one, side **B.** And I had asked you about if you had considered going to **Palestine** and you were telling me that you did have some Zionist thoughts and you were considering going to **Palestine** and also you were considering medical school.

A: Right. In early '46, I was considering both of these things. And in – I was accepted. I had written to and sent my – my papers to – o-of my previous studies to **Basel**(ph) and **Zurich** and I was accepted in both of them, provisionally, if space was available in later years. I was accepted for the first year, but for one year only

and depending on space available, whatever. And at the same time, I had – this was now early 1946, and I had talked to a lot – lot of people, you know, after returning and I found out how all these people made all this money, in all kinds of things. And I said maybe I ought to do – make a little money, I had none. I had whatever I had saved from my army pay, which wasn't very much. I wasn't working, I had not found a way to – to do anything and so I said why, why don't I do something else first? So I – I dropped **Palestine** and I dropped medicine and I went into the export business. Opened my own busin – I took – well, first of all I had to learn something about the export, and that was the big thing then that I – I found out. And I had to learn something about it. Fortunately i-in the newspapers I found a two week course that would teach me all about it, and that's exactly what I did, I – I went – I mean, this is strictly an amateur performance at the time. I went and took a two week course and I knew all about it, I knew how to – what kind of documents you needed, and how – and all I needed now is to find out what I was going to sell and where. Well, I and a fr – a – a wartime buddy of mine, friend, we'd been through the war together, and I, decided we'd go into the export business, and we did. And we si – decided that the electrical appliances were a good thing, we – I guess we liked electrical appliances, so we went into that and we decided that we would do **South America –** Latin **America** as – as our target. That, we had read was good

place to do, and we did. Went into business, we – we got in contact with some manufacturers of appliances, and we went to various embassies and asked for their importer – lists of importers, which was available. And we started writing let – by that time, by the way, I had taken, soon as it came back, I started taking a Spanish – I don't know why, but the **G.I.** bill was there and I didn't know what else to do with it until I went to medical school, which would have been – so I took Spanish and I was fairly fluent in Spanish by that time, it was now middle of 1946. By that time we – we got to the point where I n – I needed. And so I wrote up a catalog in Spanish, we put that up and a – a letter to all the customers and began working. Pretty soon we were making a little money, not very much. Not enough to live on, but there was still a **G.I.** bill that helped us out with that. And it lasted for – until early 1948. In early 1948 there was a sudden stop of dollars. The dollar was no longer available for payment to foreign countries, there was a shortage of d – of dollars, there was – there were – there were exchange restrictions. And so the big com-companies could give, you know, six months credit to – to compan – the little companies, like ours, we couldn't give any credit, we worked strictly as letter of credit. They sent a letter of credit in dollars to our bank and as soon as the ship – we could turn over the shipping documents, that the merchandise had been shipped, the bank would release the money. Well, that stopped, there were no more dollar

letters of credit and so we went out of business. And then started an interesting period. I didn't know which way to turn, I – I'd never even looked for a job, I didn't know how to look for – well, I – I knew how, but th-th-th – I didn't know what. I – so I went around and went to an employment office, one of those employment agencies and they said yeah, as a matter of fa – it was on 46th Street and **Fifth** Avenue, I remember. And they said yeah, we have a job. There's – there's a job opened right across the street here at a place called **Nancy Studios**, hat makers. Feather hats. You know, pasted feather on – on the thing. And – I mean, I – I found that out when I went to – to **Nancy's.** And so I went ik – went over there and they needed someone to run their office. Apparently whoever had the office had quit – was running the office had quit. So I went up there and there're two ladies running the shop and I said, here I am. They said oh yes, you'll do. We – you know, told them who I was and what I had done, I had my own business and all that. And they – they – they thought that was – that was good, so my major job was making up the payroll and invoices and making sure that money got to the bank and so forth. But the environment wasn't for me. This was a – a – the two ladies was **Nancy** and her sister were the designers of these hats. Their clientele was – were all name designers. **Hattie Carnegie, Lily Daché**, a-all kind – you know, th-the – well known names in the fashion business, and they would

design special things for them, and others. Had about 20 or 30 women doing the work, so it was not a small place. But I started dealing with the clients and that's – it was something I couldn't take. I-It was a strange – you know, being called darling by these floating characters who were dressed in diff – i-it was not – not my – my cup of tea. But I worked, I – I had to make a living and I was looking around. And – and I worked there during the summer. I came home one day in September, it was September of '48, and I looked at my mail and there was a letter there from the Pentagon. I opened it up and it said, dear Captain **Stein**, we want you back. We have a special project here which is right in line with your experience during the war and please call this number. So I called the number in – in the – in **Washington** and talked to a major and he said – he told me what it was. It was in the office of the chief of military history, translating the experiences of the German general staff that apparently the **United States** had under contract of some sorts, in and out of jail in **Germany**, that were writing their heart out about their experiences on the eastern front in **Russia**. And I said that sounds interesting, yes, I'm available. And in Novem – early November, starting in nove – as a matter of fact, the third of November, I – I came into **Washington. Harry Truman** and I came at th – came together. That was the day **Harry Truman** was elected. I came into **Washington,** back in uniform, and I was in the Pentagon, became chief of the

translation section of milt – o-office of chief of military history and I spent the next three years there translating and – and writing. And by that time, of course, in 1950, summer of 1950 the Korean war broke out, and – ’50 or ’51 – yeah, ’50. Well, I still had some – a year to go and – on my – my three yea – it was a three year appointment. And when the time was up, my time was up, I was told that nobody gets out, there’s a war on. And I was told that I was – but I was told I was going to **Germany**, to the German side of our project. And two weeks later I got my orders saying report to **San Francisco** for shipment to **Korea.** And there I was, not exactly going to **Germany**. Well, I went to **Korea**, and went, checked in, was received by the officer in charge of – of that unit and – who said, do you speak – is it – you came here as a prisoner of war interrogator, which was one of my specialties. Oh, let me back up for a moment. While I was still in **Washington,** when I got my orders and I read this thing, that I – I was going over with the **MOS**, the specialty as a – as a prisoner of war interrogator, I went down to what we called Korean man – what was called Korean management, we called it Korean **manglement**, and was talking to some old colonel who’d been there since world – since the Civil War, I think. Looked like it. And I said look, I have – you’re sending me to **Korea** with a 93-16. I don’t speak any of those languages. And he said, well, we didn’t asked for no languages, they just said they wanted 93-16s.

And I said, yes, sir. I knew there was nothing – yeah – well, I talked to this major and he said, do you speak Korean? I said nope. He said, Japanese? The Koreans in the – in the army at that time grew up under Japanese occupation, so most of them spoke – still spoke some Japanese, too. I said nope. He said, Chinese? I said, nope. He says, you're another one. I said, you mean you have more? He said yes. They've been sending us 93-16s and we have – none of them speak Korean. Okay, they said, but never mind, we'll – we'll have an assignment for you. And I was assigned to eighth – eighth army headquarters and research and – and – yeah, and research, intelligence research. And later on, couple of months later I was reassigned as chief of the order of battle, a division of – of eighth army headquarters. But the experience there was again, this now is December, end of December 1951. Cold, ice cold, bad weather and all that, and the chief of intelligence, Colonel **Bump**(ph) when I reported in, I and two other reported in at the same time, said well, I've got an assignment for you, I want you to go up to the second infantry division up in the hills and observe the air support for our infantry, and I'll call you back when the time comes. So we sat up there for about three weeks in the foxholes, on top of these ridges, watching air support, getting shot at. We didn't do any shooting then, infantry did. Watching the patrols go out and all that. Anyhow, we got back three weeks later and came in and I was this – the

senior of the three of us and so I – I reported. We came in and we saluted and said, Colonel, we have a report for you on the – on the air support. We had put our notes together and whipped up a report. He said, oh, I don't want your report, I know all about what's going on up there. I just sent you up there because nobody works for me who doesn't get his feet wet. You know what the war is like, now you can start working on it. Was a good idea. Not for – for – not while we were up there. Okay, so we – I – then I – I started working and th – stayed there for – until January of 1953, by which time I have had enough of the war and of the army and well, there – there happened to be a – a – there happened to be something that no – none of us knew. In the fall of 1952, all the reserve officers got a letter saying that your – th- the – you were extended, your – your fi – your army still had a five year dur – as – of reserve officers, five years at a time, you had to renew every five years. The other services had already changed to permanent. And so we did th – by executive order, ba – ba – the president, and when the Korean war broke out all reserve officers were frozen, they had to stay in the – a-all commissions were extended. But the law expired on the first of April 1953. So all of us who were in **Korea** in 1952 had to be home and out of the army by – by the first of April, and the army decided that they were going to get us out by January to give us a chance – to give us time to get back to the **United States** and get processed out. And so we got this

letter saying we'd like you to sign up for the permanent and you'll go on and all that. And statistics later on came out that said 66 percent of all the reserve officers said thank you but no thank you, including myself. And then in December of 1952, I happened to be – I still had an **R** and **R** leave, five days in – in **Tokyo**, I flew over to **Tokyo**, and I ran into some old friends of mine and one of them said, wa – when you – where you going? I said well, I'm going home in January. By the end of January I should be on the way home. And he said, what are you going to do? And I said I have no idea. I have no place to go, I have no – no – no connections anywhere. So I'll just go home and I'll – I'll find something. Well, in the – he said, the – oh, this – this friend said, well hey, I've got a job for you, a civilian job here in **Tokyo**. I'm heading up a new office in – on the first of January. There's a new command being formed, the United Nations and far e – and Far East command, a combined command and I'm head of the intelligence policy division and I have one civilian slot, a senior civilian and you're – you're it, if you want it. So I went down to personnel and they explained what it was, and they explained to me what it – what it pays and it paid more than a captain. And all the perks with it and I said yeah, why not. And I signed up right there and they say yeah, you're – you're qu – I told them – I had to write up what I was doing and for – fill out a form. And they said yeah, you qualify. And so there I was, and I stayed on in **Tokyo** as a civilian

intelligence officer until 1955, when I returned home. That was also the time a little later that same year, '53, when I met this air force lieutenant, female, who showed up there and about a year and a half later we were married. And **Barbara Kinney**(ph) became **Barbara Stein**. We were married in **Tokyo.**

Q: I have several questions, but first let me start with your getting married. What did you tell your wife about yourself and about your past when you met her and you courted her?

A: Well, first thing I told her was that where – where I had come from, and I told her that I lost my family and I still didn't know where they were or what happened to them, which is something previously that I had tried all the time. I tried the Red Cross and the **HIAS** and the **jayce –** the **JDC**, the Jewish community in **Vienna** who in 1946 did send me a – a little form letter saying your parents were deported through **Litzmannstadt** and did not appear on any survivor lists. That's all I had. But where and what, I – I didn't find until much later. Well, anyhow, I – I told her just the basic things. I – I wa – I – I couldn't go into details. Those were the things that I talked about, oh, later on, bits and pieces, not – not the whole thing. I – I don't know what it was, but I just couldn't. Of course, there was still, and I think now thinking back of tha – to that period, and I've done this for some time now, there was always that, why did they have to die and I – I survived? And that was –

that was certainly in – in – in my subconscious mind, sometimes very much on my conscious. And it – th – it was – it was just difficult and unless I was asked, I didn't tell. It was that way. There were many people that I worked with that didn't even know, that they thought oh, this guy's from **New York.** Fortunately I had no particular accent, and so they knew I'd come – I'd started in **New York**, and I was a New Yorker, that – that was – that was all they knew. And over the years bits and pieces – I told a little story here, when – when something happened that had a connection with some, but not until – well, the 80's, when I finally sat down and wrote my whole story.

Q: I'd like to pause for just a second and ask about some of the events that were going around in the years before the 50's.

A: Okay.

Q: I wanted to ask you about first the **Nuremberg** trials. Ho-How closely did you follow the **Nuremberg** trials?

A: Oh, I followed them very closely. That was something that I – of course, there were newspapers, the magazines. I had a couple of friends who were involved in that, one was at the **Nuremberg** trials and we corresponded, and he would write to me. Another one, a lawyer in the **Washington** office of the – the judge advocates office in the army, who was involved in the – in the trials o-o-on this side, getting

the reports in and all that in the – we talked about it all the time. I – I was looking for – for the death penalty for anybody who just walked through **Nuremberg.** Not all of them got it, but then again, the – the trials went on for a number of years. When I was at military history in 1948, we had a British contingent, three British officers. Two of them people like myself, Europeans. As a matter of fact, the – no, one was German, one was Austrian. And one that their chief was a British colonel, but they were all British army, and they were working with us, because they were going through the same documents and the same background. We – we also searched documents that – captured documents that we had here – in connection with that. And we were looking at the same documents and they were working on background for the trials that were still going on, and so we had close contact and we followed that all – followed that all the way. There were not enough that were punished.

Q: Did you follow the **U.N.** debate on the partition of **Palestine**?

A: Every word of it, absolutely, yes. As a matter of fact, I was – I was watching the – I was listening to the – that – the final votes, I was counting votes at the time, on radio. I didn't have a television. No, no, I guess not, didn't have a television then. I – I was – I was listening and on the radio and I was – kept keeping a – a pad. And when the final vote was tallied – again, this of course now is 1950 – 1947. I was

thinking of still again going to **Palestine.** But there were many things that – that held me back, you know, personal things that were happening and I – it was always, you know, next week, I'll think about it next week or I'll – I'll look into it next week. By that time I had taken up – I had contact with my cousin ha – at – and meanwhile his mother and father, who had gotten away out of **Vienna** to **England**, his father was – came out of **Dachau,** they released him. Mother had gotten a permit to go to **England,** and so they went to **England**, some went to **Palestine.** And I had seen them in **England** when I was in **England**. They had gone to **Palestine** so a – a – we had correspondence then, and I thought that I might join them, but I didn't until many years later when I did go over and I've been there quite a few times now.

Q: You didn't reflect one way or the other on your personal feelings about the Korean war. Did you have any personal objections?

A: The Korean war? I theti – I thought it was a waste and I think many of us thought that. It was – it was just everything went wrong. We – we were fighting – we – we were fighting a war, but we weren't. I see the same thing going on right today in – in **Kosovo**, where we – we're talking about fighting a war, we're fighting something. We're not going in and cleaning it up, and that's what happened. The troops were ready, we were ready, but the command, the – the

politics weren't – weren – the pol-politicians weren't. It was a politician fought war. And that is probably why two-thirds of us, of the officers quit. That was not the ti – particularly those of us, and probably most of us at that time still – that had fought the – the war in – in **Europe** or in – in the **Pacific** for that matter, where you fought a war to – to win. There we didn't fight to win, we fought to – to sit around and let somebody do the talking. And so now I – I-I did not think kindly of what was happening there.

Q: What did you think about the developing Cold War?

A: The Cold War, of course that was somehow predictable, that having met the Russians, we knew we weren't going to be friends, although we were friendly and the vodka flowed freely, but that was not it, and then of course when the Russians dug in and said – and dictated to us practically what – what we – what we could do and what we couldn't do, that was pretty much the beginning of the Cold War, and **Churchill** saw it and – and it happened. But there were – there were many things that – well, it was a political war, it was – and political wars don't lead to anything, never have. And there should have been some accommodation someplace, but nobody would give, we didn't give, they didn't give. And I think the only thing that – that – that could have ended – the way it ended was – it was completely unexpected, I think. The only other way would have been a – a hot war.

Fortunately, it didn't happen, but it was a bad time in history, I think, that whole period of the Cold War, because it had an influence on – on everything, on – on the lives of all the people in the world, on the economy and – so that it was – it was a bad thing.

Q: I'm going to ask you clarify the t – the term hot war.

A: The – the missiles. The missiles were ready on both sides, we could have fired, they could have fired. Any mistake could have triggered an annihilation of – of half of the world, and that was a great fear, I think o-of myself and I'm sure of most of the people, that some nut would push the wrong button, even by accident, not – it could have happened. That it didn't happen, was a miracle.

Q: What comes to your mind about the time that you spent in – in **Tokyo,** other than that you met your wife and got married?

A: In **Tokyo**? Well, I had gotten out of the army, I was a civilian in a culture that was strange to me, and so I – I soaked it all up. I took it in and it was an interesting experience. And after about two and a half years there, I decided it was enough. Well, we both decided that was enough and let's get out of here. But it was – it was interesting. There was nothing that stands out, just learning and looking at the ways of – of the mysterious east. **Korea** was a loss, there was no – no – nothing there to look at, there was total devastation and – but **Tokyo** and traveling around **Japan**

was interesting, see how people lived, how – how they – how they managed, really, with their – their culture, the way of – of life, the way of living in – in **[indecipherable]** paper houses, and it was interesting, but nothing outstanding.

Q: Did anybody there know you were Jewish?

A: Yes, yes. Yes, they knew I was Jewish. I had no problems with that. We had a – actually the only Jewish services we had in – in – in **Tokyo** were the holidays. And in the chapel center, we'd go there and they brought in a rabbi from someplace, not sure where he came from. And I went to services, and I took time off and my office, all the people I worked with knew where I was. So, no, there was no problems there.

Q: You left **Tokyo** and then what?

A: Left **Tokyo** and came to **Washington** after cruising around the **United States** for about oh, a good two or three months. We landed in **Seattle** where **Barbara** has an aunt and cousins and we stopped there for a few days. Then went to **San Francisco** where she has another aunt, we visited there and I got introduced to the family. And then we went to **Iowa**, to **Webster City, Iowa**, a great metropolis of about 8,000 people and I met the parents. Parents knew who I was, I had written to them. As a matter of fact, just very recently I went through some papers that when – her mother died some years ago, but we had never looked through that file of

papers that – that we had taken from her, and I looked through some paper and there was the letter I wrote to them when I first met **Barbara –** or wh-when we decided to get married, and I wrote to them and told them who I was, and got to – to **Webster City** and well, had parties and met – met the whole town. And stayed there for awhile and then went to **Washington**. In **Washington** I was then for the first and only time – no, I ca – I – was not the first and only time, my first job in **–** in **New York** was, course, I had to look for a job. But coming to **Washington** was the first time that I really had to – really had to look for a job. There was no – no **HIAS** to – to help me out. And I had a – well, in – while I was in – in **Tokyo,** in – in – in my capacity as – in my job, I had very close contacts with the **CIA** people out there. And so before I left the chief of the **CIA** group asked – said, why don't you – when you get home, why don't you just stop in and talk to the people in **Langley** and come with us? And I said, well, that's nice and he gave me a letter of recommendation. And so I did and they offered me something that was not for me, they – they offered me a job in – in – a – a temporary job in **Germany** and I wasn't ready to go out – out again, I wanted to stay awhile. And so I didn't take that. And then again, by continuous luck, ran into a friend who said, well oh, I know of a new outfit that they're forming at the – in the Pentagon and I've applied for it. He was working somewhere in the Pentagon. He said, to transfer into it and they've got

slots open, why don't you try that? And I tried it and I got the job, became his boss. **John** has never forgiven me that, but we're still friends. And there I – I got the job with Air Force Intelligence and worked with them for oh, several years. Got several promotions, I was doing well. Then our organization was taken over into the Defense Intelligence Agency when that was formed, and that took in units from all the military agencies. Stayed with them from '62, I was involved in – in the creation of the new organization, was on that committee, and stayed with them until '65 when once again I was invited by the State Department to transfer to the State Department. It happened during a – a meeting. I was presenting a project that we had – a worldwide project of intelligence handling that we had, I was involved with through an inter – through an interagency committee. The State Department representative said, would you be interested in coming to our – we have nothing like that. And I said, well, make me an offer I can't resist. And he said the – about two weeks later, he made me that offer. And I transferred to the State Department in the foreign service and became a foreign service officer, coming in on top, which, much to the – in the foreign service that – yo-you're – you're not liked if you come in on top because everybody else came in on the bottom. So I had in-interesting experience.

Q: I have to pause to change tape.

Interview with Charles Stein
June 8, 1999

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Charles Stein
June 8, 1999

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Charles Stein**. This is tape two, side **A**, and you had been telling me about your changes in your professional life with the Air Force Intelligence and Defense Intelligence and then the State Department. Could you walk me through some of those jobs and what your role was, your duties, responsibilities?

A: Yeah. In – I – I mentioned that this was a new project that my friend told me about in the Air Force Intelligence. What happened was the air force was the, in 1955 was getting into the – the technological age of information processing. They were the leaders in the thing. They had come up with a project that was worked up with **IBM** and **Eastman-Kodak,** a combined project of information processing where the information, that is documents, would be photographed on microfilm, and at the same time, there would be an encoding placed on the microfilm and the coding was then read electronically from the film, and would – and when you – when you got the right – right thing, looking for a specific document that contained a subject matter, th-the subject matter was coded. And that was on there, and that would – that then would print out the document that pertained to whatever you were looking for. That was a – a new way of doing it, you didn't have to have any

– any input, typewriter input that you had until that time. We had to type punch cards and whatever, or type it into the computer and then it would come – you – th – this way you could just photograph it. Well, it was a novel thing, and that is what they – they were hiring people to do that. My job, I became a – I was hired as the chief of the coding section, and I worked with the tech – technical part, the – the contractors on what they were doing and to make sure that we're do – and we developed – and again, we did this with the **CIA**, a – a code – a code dictionary, sort of. An intelligence code, that for everything that was of interest to intelligence, would have a code number. And then we would have – this was my section then, readers read the documents that were coming in, intelligence documents, reports from all over the world, and numerically code what was in that document. That document would then be photographed with the code input also onto the film, and it was available for – for retrieval. We had gotten that thing, it took a number of years to – to do this, we worked from '55 to about – by '58 or '59 we had the first installation, and it worked. We then expanded that to the rest of the air force, and I went out to help the installation of the thing at – in **Omaha** at the Strategic Air Command. And in **Ohio** at the Air Force Research and Development command and several other places, and we started sending out copies of what we had made the film into those. And those were little chips, photo chips that ran through just –

similar to – to punch cards running through when you're searching, but these were photo chips and when you got a hit it would extract it and make a full copy of it. Or you could view it on a – on a microfilm viewer. That was the main project. Now, it – we got into – more into different arrangements. That unit then was taken over with a lot of the other air force intelligence into the Defense Intelligence Agency when that was established. And I was still in charge of that, but I was working on new developments, now we were into computer information, handling a computer. It was all intelligence handling. I was not, at that point any more directly involved with the intelligence, but with the technical operation. And it was that, and **DIA** just a follow on to the same thing. And it was that thing that State Department got interested in. And when I got into State Department, again, they formed a separate unit to start an information processing operation in the State Department, they didn't have any. As I found out later, they didn't want any. The foreign service offices, they didn't want to have information. He wanted to have what he had, his pieces of paper and he'd make up his own mind, they didn't want anybody else to – to shove stuff at him that he didn't see – had seen – hadn't seen before, to change his mind possibly. Anyhow, that was an – that's an interpretation. But I got to the State Department and we started, there were about four or five of us that had been – some from the State Department and a couple of people from **CIA**, myself from the

IAA, and one from **USIA**, and there was one other – a couple from the State Department, and we all sat and we started looking at what is it that the foreign service – tha-that the State Department needs in the – getting information. Where do they get their information from and how could we put this into a system? In other words, we were systems development. And we then got money through a – probably my most grueling and demeaning experience in my life. I had to testify before Congress, before a congressional committee. It – the man, my immediate superior in that particular thing, was lost. He and I were sitting there, I was in the left hand seat. The left hand seat is the – when you're facing the committee is the – the secondary. I was the one with the information, he was the one that answered the questions. And a certain congressman from **Brooklyn** destroyed my buddy. The man was so confused he didn't know what to say and the chairman of the committee excused him and said at this point you're not answering any more questions, but your sidekick answers the questions, so let him answer it and you're excused, and he wal – had to leave the – the committee room. I sat there for the rest of it and I got through it and I got the money. So – however, was an interesting thing. I was noticing that the chairman's assistants, the – not a congressman, one of – his – his office manager, wi – whoever he was, had an interesting head movement. And being a good observer, I had noticed that when they asked first

questions and I was watching that, and I noticed that when he expected a positive answer to something, his head would go this way. And when the congressman asked a trick question, the guy went this way. So my eye was on him, and I got through the thing, it worked. I was right, that that was the way, that he knew – these people know the answers. When they ask a question they know the answer. And so – they want confirmation of their knowledge, and well anyhow, it – that – that was – it was – it was a sad thing. I came out and poor guy outside, I asked him to go home. He wanted to go back to the office, I said, you should go home. I'll call you later, I'll tell you what happened. He said, but di-di – do you know what – I said, yeah, we got the money, we're all – you're all right, go home. He went home and I called him later on and he had calmed down, and he said, he-hell, I – I can't even remember what happened. And very shortly after that he left the State Department, you know, fortunately there was some higher up sitting in the back listening to this thing and they weren't happy with him, so anyhow. Well, we got the money and we had the department hire contractors, some of these big information processing firms. They came in and they started working on a program. The program was, oh about half way through, and we got more money, because we showed that it was good. This time we didn't have to testify any more, it was done in the higher-ups. And they – let's see, after about – it was about two and a half

years into the – into the program, that there was an internal thing. Again, there's a political thing. The assistant Secretary of State I worked for and another assistant Secretary of State, who wanted that unit, the other one, th-the – the enemy there, the other one was the assistant secretary for administration, who had the computer operation of the State Department, the payroll, in other words. Payroll and personnel and whatever, but never anything subst – substance – substantive in-information, they'd never handle it. But they saw something that hadn't – that got money and all kinds of possible – and they wanted it. Well, it was a time when my assistant secretary wanted another job. He wanted to be a – what do they call that? A diplomat in residence at the university. We had – the university, they have a diplomat in residence, that a – that's a cream puff, absolutely. And usually that led to an ambassadorship. People who were s – who were selected for that. Well, he was pretty close to that, he wanted an ambassadorship eventually, and he want – but there was a job that he could have had, but they kept him because he had things going on in his o-operation that were not finished, they wouldn't let him go. So he changed. He sold us a – he sold my – my organization to administration. And I said, I'm not available for that. You can transfer it, but I'm – I'm out. I – I wouldn't work for those people, I – well, I knew them, I had worked with them before. Well, he was friendly enough to say – he was Jewish, by the way, the only other Jew in

the area. And he said, I didn't think you would, but I've got another job for you, if you want it. We have a new inspector general and I've told him about how you go about doing your investigations and how you can do these things and – and he's interested in you, because you've reviewed, you know what this whole department is doing, you've done a survey to – to find out what they need, and he wants to talk to you. And he's – he's brand new, he just came an – an ambassador who just came back and got the job as Inspector General. So I made an appointment, went to see him and he said, yeah, I want you. And I became a senior foreign service inspector. Now again, I shifted jobs without try – even trying, you know, I – I – I was asked to. And when I got into the Inspector General's office, that I hadn't used before, cause they were not in the substantive area, I found that I was in – in very good company, because most of the senior inspectors were former ambassadors for whom there was no other assignment, there was a limited assignment. And so they became inspectors and they traveled around from one embassy to the other, to make sure that everything was all right, and they were doing, you know, reviewing the embassies, mainly. The idea I came up with, that sold m – sold me to – to the inspection corps was that there ma – are many things that are overlapping that are not being looked at in **Washington**, th-the various bureaus, each one working as an independent thing, each one working with all the embassies that their – you know,

the European bureaus, working with all the European embassies, but there's no – no connection between them. They're doing all kind – I said, I would like to look into that. He said that's a great idea, you got it. So I started out on that and I became – I was doing – what'd we call that? Well, the organizational reviews. And I did some of those. As I went on, I did all the – the bureaus, and particularly those that covered in substance more than an embassy. The scientific bureau – scientific and – and technical bureau, for example, had these technical attachés out there that weren't talking to each other. So, there – it was a question of – of getting information to them and – I mean, getting information between them and not just reporting back to the bureau and the thing gets lost in the bureau. And the consular offices, for – of course, there are consulates in every country and more than there are embassies, and they're not talking to each other. They're reporting in, it's all a one way flow, nothing goes out – oh, excuse me – to – to all the others. And so I started working on that and I usually got a couple of other officers assigned to me, some of the junior officers that were also working with the inspectors and we sat down and we ju – started interviewing and looking into the records and all that, we find out how things were and sort of rewrote the – the – the job descriptions. The – the job **[indecipherable]**. I had one particular one that was of great interest to me, having been a refugee once, and that was, I came across, while I was looking at

these various organizations in the department of a special assistant to the Secretary of State for Refugee Affairs. When I looked into that I found that the man was a political appointee. He'd made big contributions to somebody and he had a few people in **Washington**, but his work was being done in **Geneva** at the **U.S.** mission to the United Nations. In the process I also found that there was a special assistant to the Secretary of State for international Red Cross affairs. Now here we have the international Red Cross, a British a – a Swiss organization, and they have a one man office with one secretary who's a special assistant and who handles contacts with that. But the international Red Cross is in **Geneva** and who handles the – the br – the work? The office in **Geneva**. And this is a large office in the united na – in the mission to the United Nations. The **U.S.** mission. And I found a third one, a-a-another special assistant for a humanitar – for – not for humanitarian, for disaster relief affairs. Again, all of them political appointees. Well, I went – so I went to **Geneva** and talked to the people there and looked and see what they were doing and they were hardworking people. They were doing the budgeting for – for these various operations. They were representing the **U.S.** before the United Nations and before all the various organizations that physically handled refugees and disasters and so forth. And I came back and I wrote a – oh, about a 200 page report. This was about a six months affair. I wrote a rit – I wrote a report and I said, reorganize

the whole thing and my s – my recommendation was that – to get another position as an assistant Secretary of Affairs for Humanitarian affairs, all this comes under that subject heading and abolish these special assistants. Have **Geneva** do the work and have **Washington** have a – a regular office doing whatever is necessary in the **United States**, such as you know, budget – getting – getting money and so forth. And that was finished in 1990 – in January of 19 four – four – 1974, I finished that particular report. And then I went on and was doing – I think the next one was consular affairs and I was just about finished with consular affairs when one day I get a phone call from the refugee office. The deputy to this political appointee was a regular foreign service officer whom I knew, I had contact with. And he calls me and he said, I have a problem. We've seen your report and I think it's great. They thought they were getting to be the assistant secretary job. They were – they were the biggest one, of course. Anyhow, we tha – we thought we – we have a – we have a problem, our man in **Geneva**, our – the head of the office just informed us that he is retiring in August. This is about the fifth – I think it was the day after the Fourth of July weekend, I'd just come back. And he said, you're the only one who knows what's going on out there. How would you like to go to **Geneva**? And my answer to that, and I remember that to this day and will always remember it, was don't bother me with details, send five tickets. We had a meeting after that, he explained

to me what this problem was and I said yes, I'll – I'll – I'll accept and I'll go. And six weeks later we were in **Geneva** and I was running that office. And I'd gotten, of course, I was at the time – this – the main job of that particular office really, was handling the Russian refugees that were coming out by about 20 or 30,000 a year. That was the beginning of the – the major exodus from **Russia**. What they were doing, and I was doing for the next four years was dealing with the voluntary agencies, **HIAS, Tolstoy** Foundation, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the World Council of Churches and many others. The – the Polish American refugee, or Czech American. All of those, all over **Europe**. They – tho – they were physically receiving these refugees, most of them, of course, Jews. All of them, probably. And were trying to resettle them in **Israel,** in the **U.S.**, in **Australia**, wherever. And my job was to make sure that the **U.S.** money that went to these agencies for handling that, was properly used, that they were doing their job, and make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to do in the resettlement process. And I learned a lot about Russians during that period, and others, but mainly the Russians. Went to one of my jobs and the family was in **Geneva**, the kids were in international schools, which was a good experience for them, and my job was making – reviewing the budgets, reviewing their budget requests and changing them where it was necessary. They were all inflated, of

course, the usual thing. I was the first – first stop. And – and actually, physically looking at them, periodically. So every month I would be in one or – or two, I'd be in – in – in **Tel Aviv, Jerusalem,** and I'd be in – in – in **Munich**, where many of them were. In **Rome,** which were the main parts and occasionally in **Moscow** and then **Bucharest**, behind the Iron Curtain then, talking to our people. And **Turkey** is – it was another place. **Italy.** Several places in **Italy** where they – these people were, and working with them to expedite the process. I had one critical, really critical thing. That was, the **Kurds** in **Iran, Iran** would not let them out and it was a long process and finally they wouldn't let any – finally they decide that yes, they could leave and so we would – wanted to send in a plane and they wouldn't allow us. And the international Red Cross, I involved them in it, and the international Red Cross was going to send in a plane and they wouldn't let them. And finally there was a – a charter from – **Lufthansa** had a charter service and the international Red Cross managed to get one of their planes, and they gave in. Now, these people were to be brought out, the – they – ere – ira – ara – Iranians gave in and let them go. The people – the – the law, there was a special law that Congress enacted to let these people into the **United States** but it expired on a certain date, which was about – we were one day away from that date when the thing – when the Iranians gave in and the Red Cross took the plane over, got the people up and got them to

Frankfurt. I went to **Frankfurt** to work with our consulate to make sure that these people get their visas. It was just – they had to get their passports stamped. That was it. What ha – when they got to the **United States** was unimportant, but before that date – oh, this was the day. I get to – to **Frankfurt** and they're processing it, doing a good job, and they still got about a – about a hundred people at five o'clock in the afternoon, the consul – the **U.S.** consul says well, we're gonna have to continue that tomorrow, we're going home. I said no, you're not. He said well, yeah, but you know, the day is over. I said, the law expires at midnight and as far as I'm concerned it's midnight in **Washington**, not in **Frankfurt**. And it is five o'clock and it's noon, we got 12 hours to go, you've got to finish these people. He says no, I can't do that. I said, I want a line to the assistant secretary for consular affairs, whom I knew well. I had done a job for her before I left and we had good – good relationship. And he got – he says okay, so he got the line through. He couldn't refuse me, so he got the line. And I talked to the lady and I said, I've got a reluctant **[indecipherable]** I'm – we're doing the **Kurds**, and she said yeah, yeah, how you doing? I said we – there's still about a hundred left that have not, and – been visa'd and your man here wants to go home, he wants to close up. She said, let me have him. I said – handed him the telephone and I notice his face getting longer and longer and he hung up and he said okay, we'll work until it's finished.

Interview with Charles Stein
June 8, 1999

Well, by about 10 o'clock that night we were finished. Everybody had their visa, stamped with today's date – with that day's date and the next day we got them on a plane and sent them to the **U.S.** But those are the kind of things that you – the troubleshooting type things that – that you had to do every once in awhile. Had to intervene in **Rome** with the Russians. The Russians in – in – in **Rome** were treated very nice, they had them out on the – on the li – li – just like they have in **New York**, in **Brighton Beach,** they all live out there. In **Rome** they had them out on the – on – near the **Lido** someplace – not **Lido,** whatever the beach is. Nicely quartered. Then you came into town to – and **HIAS** was handling most of the Russians in th – **Rome.** And they walked in and he said – and their – their – their questions were, where is my money, where is my house, where is my servants, where is my wi – the Russian way. The Russians were used to asking for some – the government. The government gave them. They were still in that mode. And we had some serious problems there, the people were intimidated by them. And I told them, don't be intimidated, you've got – they had Russian speakers there, and they were – I – I – I told them how – how to talk to these people. Just yell at them. Tell them to go away, they get nothing. One more word out of you and you're out, you get nothing, you go wherever you want to go. And it – it worked. It worked, you know. Again, something they were used to. The **KGB** wasn't going to be – talk to

them friendly like, so we weren't either. They had something coming to them. We told them that no, you don't have anything coming to you, we're giving it to you because we're good people. And in that particular case, and there were a lot of them there, the word got to all of them, I was the **United States** government. I represent – see, those were just an organization. When I came, I was the **United States** government. Well that – that made – that – that – that did it. When the government says you gotta be quiet, you're quiet. So we're – you know, it was game playing, but – it was – it was acting. I did not go to **Hollywood** after that. That's – you know, experiences like that, that was – that was my job. And of course I saw a lot of misery too, people coming out and having to sit in those camps in some areas, they were not too pleasant. Some intellectuals, people with – who had status and – and now were begging, in effect. I felt for them, but on the other hand, I was there too, once, and I knew how they felt. So, you know, you treated them accordingly. You talked to them, and particularly in some cases when I talked to them, I told them who I was, and I said, I was in your position once, and look at me now. It's gonna happen to you, just take it easy. It'll be done. We're doing it, but it takes time. And it helped a little, some cases, I – I hope it did.

Q: I want to go ask you a few questions about the 60's. I know you've taken me professionally in your career through the 70's, or through the mid-70's at least. I

would like to go back to the 60's and ask just some other questions. First of all, wanted to ask you about the **Eichmann** trial. Did you follow the **Eichmann** trial?

A: Oh yes. I followed that again, with a vengeance, and I read everything there was, anything from the **"Washington Post**" to the "**Jerusalem Post"** and anything I could lay my hands on, because it was of great interest. I had known of **Eichmann** of course, like everybody else did. By that time I had read most of the things that had been written about the Holocaust and about – about that. And I was hoping that it would lead to where it did. And when they executed him, I – I was happy. It's the wrong way to be happy, but I was happy. Not, in that case, that was the exception. Just like I did for the **Nuremberg** people.

Q: The 1960's were very turbulent years in this country, a lot of changes. I'd like you to reflect back on some of the things from the 60's, like the – the **Vietnam** war an-and Civil Rights, and Women's Movement. Did you get involved with any of those, or are any of those of particular interest to you?

A: No, I was – well, put this way. In 1965 – no, '66, I'd just gone to the State Department. No, no, no, fift – '65, I was still with the **DIA.** I received a letter from the army, saying that the Secretary of Defense has declared your job an essential – a civilian essential position. Therefore, you can no longer remain in the active reserve. I was still a reserve officer. By that time I was a lieutenant colonel. And I –

i – i – well, let me just quickly here, when I said I left **Korea** and we said no thank you, we don't. When I got back to **Washington** I applied for commission again. I decided I – I want to stay in, mainly because it – that pays, at the end. I had never known until 1957, approximately '57 is when I came back in, that reserve offices who had active duty at age 60 would get money. And I said well, why not? Somebody talked me into it, really. Somebody told me about that, one of the people I wor – I worked with. They said, why don't you come back in, and I went down to **Fort Myer**(ph) and said, can I come back in? And they said, of course. And I – I came – I-I was reassigned on the non-pay unit. We met once every two weeks in the Pentagon for a couple of hours, get a lecture from somebody or gave a lecture. And that was it, we got points, that's all. So anyhow, in 1965 I got this letter saying that your – you're essential now and you can't be in the reserves any more, in the active reserve, but you have over 20 years, and so you have a choice to go in the inactive reserve or into retired reserve. And **Vietnam** was just brewing and I said, I don't want to get caught in another war. Even – even then I might – this – this thing ad – ba – my civilian job might end, and I've had two wars, two is enough. And **Vietnam** didn't look like anything that I should get involved in. And I said – I wrote back and said no, put me in the – in the retired reserve and I retired at that point. And at age 60, the checks started coming, which are still accepted. But

anyhow, now **Vietnam** I did not like what was going on. I couldn't see it. There was – I didn't think we had any business there. And I had friends who were still in the service who went over there and they came back and they told me what conditions they – that they had, under what conditions they were there, and it was not what I – I felt that I was right, we shouldn't be there. And I had – I felt for all the people that – that were against the war and all that, although you know, I was sort of a military something or other, nothing serious. But that wasn't it and many of the people I knew who were in the military and in the reserves and retired in the reserves all felt like I did, so I-I wasn't alone. And I – I – well, we were right, it came out the wrong way at the end.

Q: I'm going to pause now and change tape.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Charles Stein**. This is tape number two, side **B,** and I wanted to ask you about the Civil Rights movement and if you had any thoughts about it, especially in light of your experience in your earlier years.

A: You know, the Civil Rights moved me, I followed it very closely. I didn't do anything, I was not involved in anything, but it was on the right track, and I was

very much sympathetic to it, because I'd been there and I thought that all the segregation an-and thing were – was – it was awful. I had seen it, I'd – in – in the military, and I – I'd seen it in the south. Most of my early army posts were in the south and I saw how the blacks lived, or were forced to live, and they were forced to do whatever, were not allowed to – not really allowed to live. And so yes, I was, as I said, sympathetic and I watched it and was happy to see that it developed into finally the – the schooling and the – the desegregation of the schools particularly to start with and – and then the other things that followed.

Q: By the 1970's, **Israel** had already been involved in several wars. I wanted to – to have you reflect on – on that aspect of it – Israeli history. The '48 war, '56, '67, '73, the – this – the wars.

A: I was very much concerned and watching it very carefully, all the wars, the whole history of **Israel**. It was – well, it – it was the homeland for all those who didn't have a land and a place any more. And what was left of my family was there. My cousin, his mother and father. And then a little later on, another cousin who had survived in **Bucharest** that I didn't know about then for – for some time, til after the war, quite a bit after the war. She came to – to **Israel**. So I had direct connection. I also had some friends who had gotten to **Israel** early in the – well, some left actually with their families in the 30's, before the **anschluss**. And others

had gotten out in the tra – in the various transports or in the illegal migration. And so – and of course, they were my people. I watched those wars and I followed them very carefully and was overjoyed with all the results, because each one of them was a victory. I almost got involved directly in – well, I did get involved in a way, in the Yom Kippur war in '73. I was at the synagogue in '73 on Yom Kippur, when the thing – th-the news came. I remember it was in a Sunday, I believe. And I had airline tickets to **Israel** for Monday. On – as a job, I was supposed to – I was still an inspector then, and I was to inspect the immigration policies of **Israel**, again ka – that was still during the – the time when I was working on the – on the refugee and the humanitarian affairs study. And I was headed for **Israel**, I was headed for **Israel, Lebanon** and **Jordan**. I had two passports in my pocket, one for **Israel** and one for the other countries, because you couldn't have a stamp then, and th-that – in the State Department we did all kinds of things, you know. Two diplomatic passports and I just hoped that I remembered which pocket I had which one in when I pulled it out. But I was to – to be in **Israel** on the – on the f – the following – well, I was leaving the following day, the day after Yom Kippur. And of course when I came home that night, I called the State Department. War had broken out and there was no way to go there. And I called the – the – the duty officers, and I asked them to get a telegram to our embassy in **Tel Aviv** that – and – and also to

Lebanon and **Jordan** that because the situation that I was not coming and I'll let them know when I'm coming, it would be a little later. If I had left a couple days earlier, I would have been right in the middle of – of a six day war. But I – the Yom Kippur war, I mean. But I – I was just saved by – by one day. I did get there again, oh, about the following month. It was an interesting thing, I had to go to – to **Jordan** and there was a – when I got to **Israel** I said, well, I'm going to have to go back to **Greece** and then fly into **Jordan**. And they said no. Said the **Allenby** bridge, which is the famous bridge where the crossings occurred, the – the exchanges and all that. They said, we have a deal with **– Israel** really has a deal with **Jordan**, war or no war. We can get you to the bridge, and on – it was a certain day, like Tuesday or Wednesday, but the – one of the officers from – from **Amman** is coming to **Jerusalem** across the bridge, and he – the embassy will take him in their car to the bridge. They will cross – he will have to walk across the bridge and we have a car at the bridge to pick him up. So we'll just tell the embassy in – we'll just call **Jordan, Amman**, and we'll tell them that you'll be crossing the bridge at the same time, you'll be in the car that – pick him up and they co – they'll pick you up on the other side. You're just gonna have to carry a suitcase by yourself across. I said, well that's no problem. And so that's how we went a – went across that bridge. And it was interesting, I got a trip through all of the – the territories there,

the new territories. Well, they weren't new any more. But anyhow, got there, got to the bridge, went across. Said hello to the guy who ca – came in from – from **Jordan**. Went across and got in the car and got to the embassy in **Jordan**. And from there I could go to **Lebanon** and finished up my trip and then went home. So that was an interesting experience. I didn't expected it to be that way, but I did get to use both of my passports.

Q: I want to get back to your professional life now, you had taken me up to the year 1974. What happened after 1974 in your professional life?

A: Okay, 1974, I was – I had finished the report on the refugees and so forth, and I got a phone call in my office asking – telling me – from – from the refugee office that the – their man in – in **Geneva**, who was really running the whole operation for all these different groups, was retiring. He had just informed them that he was retiring and the man called me, said you're the only wa – you've – you wrote the – the book. We like your report and would you – how would you like to go and take over in **Geneva**? And my answer to him was, please don't bother me with details, send five tickets. And fi – six weeks later we were in **Geneva.** I took over that office and we had oh, about 20 or 30 people working in there. There's a lot of bookkeeping – well, a lot of it was ha-handling the – well, okay, th – my – my duties were representation to the United Nations, to the appropriate offices of the

United Nations, the high commissioner for refugees, the **U.N.** high commissioner for disaster relief, the international Red Cross and all the other international organizations that had any dealings with – with refugees or dis – or any of the human – humanitarian affairs, including the human rights. I had one officer assigned to me who was specially doing human rights work. I concentrated on directing the **United States** refugee program, as it was called, and my job was to see that the **U.S.** funds that were going into the program were being properly used by the people who were actually operating the program. And now those people were voluntary agencies, as we called them. **HIAS**, International Catholic Migration Commission, World Council of Churches, Polish American, Czech American refugee organizations, **Tolstoy** Foundation, in – in – International Rescue Committee and others. They had places in various parts of Europe, where they would receive the refugees, they would come m – and those – this is the period when we had the Russian refugees coming out. They were coming out between 20 and 30,000 a year in those years. They would house them, feed them and process them and help them get to their final destination. We tried to get them to **Israel** but not all of them went. Some – some went to **Israel,** others made it to the **United States** and **Australia** was another major point. Others stayed in **Europe** or some in **Germany**, and various other places. But with all these people there was

the need – the – needed money, and the **United States** supported that. We also supported **Israel** in the settling of the Russian refugees. We supplied money for the building of housing and teaching them language, teaching and whatever was necessary to ink – to get them into – into the main stream. So my job took me to – to these – to various places where the – where the people were being actually processed. And I saw to it that our money was used properly, that it wasn't wasted on administration or whatever it was. We had all the – all these organizations also had their own funds, but you had to watch them, of course, you know, money – money is available so you use it any way you – you feel like it until somebody looks over your shoulder. Also, I had to look at their – their annual budgets when they – their budgets would come to me, I would check it to see if it was justified and then pass it on to **Washington** to present to Congress. I made the first corrections and then **Washington** cut some more, and whatever. These – these things happened, of course, it's the usual with the budget process. But the – the best part of that was I traveled and I – I saw a lot of these people and my points of travel were what – **Paris, Rome, Vienna**, all hardship points – ports. **Munich** was a very heavy place, lots – many of them came through **Munich** because many of the organizations had their headquarters in **Munich** for some reason or other. Some came through **Frankfurt.** And occasionally I would go – **Istanbul** was another

one, and occasionally I would go to – to **Bucharest** and to **Moscow**, because – to talk – to work with our own people, the embassy people, to find out what the governments are up to and how they are handling – because they were handling some of the guarantees to the local government that they would be going to the **United States** and once they got out we tried to get them to – to **Israel**. But anyhow, most of that, it was – was a very interesting job. And having been a refugee once, I – I could – I knew what these people were going through, and wherever we could help, I – I helped.

Q: How long did you continue in this position?

A: Four years. I was there for exactly four years. My family was with me and the children went to an international school in – in **Geneva**. And it was – it – it – it was a dream assignment. I had planned on retiring, I wanted to stay another year, and so I asked – I put in a request for – to extend me for one more year. And they came – **Washington** came back and said, as a matter of fact, we've just cut this down to a three year as – for your – your – the next. There are too many people who want to go to **Geneva**, so from now on it's going to be a three year assignment, not a four year assignment, and – and we can't extend you for the fifth year. I told them that I would retire, one more year and I retire. So in 1974 in September s – in – well, we came home in – around the first of August. 1974 I had some leave – '78, excuse

me, ’78. It’s been a few years, but ’74 is when I got there. Okay, we came home. I had leave and when I got back to work, I was assigned a – well, I was told that I had a choice of assignments, but my – my first as-assignment would have been with the new office that I had originally pr – created in that – the inspection report that I’d written. The assistant secretary for humanitarian affairs, and I would have been a deputy in there. But I didn’t – I rejected that because the other person who was in the deputy – in the assistant secretary’s job, we’ve had some differences, major differences and I wouldn’t work for that person. And so I said no. As it happened, someone else had found out that I was on the way back and had said if possible, could I get assigned to that office, and that was the Office of Consular Affairs, which was the last report I did in – as a – an inspector, and – someone I had dealt with also on refugee affairs and other things. And the – so I went to that office, and they told me that they had – wha – wha -- what my plans were and I said, I plan to retire, I had decided I retire the end of the year. December, I’m through. Got three months, that’s it. And they say well, we just have a job for you, exactly for that. There is a presidential commission on the rewriting of the immigration laws. And we have to send a State Department representative to that. It is – it is a – in – physically located in the Justice Department. And how would you like to represent us? And I said, do I know anything about the immigration

laws? They said, of course you do. I said, in that case I'll – I'll go. I took that assignment and I spent most of my next two and a half months over at the Justice Department with – oh, the Justice Department, the Immigration-Naturalization Department, we went over all the immigration rules and laws and all that to see what would happen, what should be done, and I put in the State Department and put – which I got from – from my people, I went back to state, but whenev – whatever questions came up, I checked with the department, see what their position was and brought it up and we wrote that report, went in – it was supposed to be finished and to Congress by the end of the year. We finished up and it was going into the typewriter on about the middle of December, at which time I said goodbye and I left, I never read the report, I never saw it afterwards. I knew what was in there, but it didn't go anywhere anyway. It was a – it was as a lot of these reports go, Congress does whatever they want to do. I went back and went through the process, out-processing thing, and then the last day of December, the 30th of December, last day was a Saturday, I think. So on that Friday I said goodbye to everybody and got a plaque for the wall and hung it on it – went home, hung it on the wall and it's been catching dust ever since there. I retired. That was the end of my – my government career.

Q: Tell me about your children.

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A: My children. I have three sons. **Jeff** was born in 1978, and well, having once been a medical student, I had an opportunity to read the book again and brush up, because a week before he was born, and he was about due, we had a snowstorm in – in – we lived in – over in the **Alexandria** area then. And our street, there was a six foot snow drift at the end of the street, we were completely snowed in, there was nothing that could go in or out, and we were waiting. And so I was reading the book and said well, if it happens, I think I know what to do. I remembered as a young medical student, as first year medical students will do, sneak into other classes, I went into one class once where there was – this was an obstetrics class and they were observing a birth. And so I saw that everything that was going on and I figured I can do that. Of course, I was scared to death, but **Jeff** was kind enough to wait for another week and by that time this – the road was cleared. Then four years later **Jim** came along and **David** a couple of years after that. I had – when we went to **Switzerland**, **Jeff** was going into his third year of high school, **Jim** had just finished elementary school and **David** was going into the fifth grade. No. Yes, yeah, fifth grade. Anyhow, so they went to – no, he was going into the third grade, excuse me, he was going into the third grade, **Jim** was going into the – into th – **Jim** was going into the fifth grade. I c – yeah, gotta figure this out, yeah. I said it went backwards. And they went to an international school, which was very

useful, learned French. Had an interesting one with our youngest one **David**, who was 10 years old when we got there. And after the – oh, about two-thirds down the first year, the French teacher called me at the office one day and said, you know, I can't get anything out of **David**, he doesn't do his homework, he doesn't do anything, he won't say anything. I don't know what he knows. I said, well, let me talk to him. I came home that day and we lived in an apartment building, it was a – a block, four buildings around a big park. Was a – a beautiful thing and the kids were playing soccer down there and all that. And I came home and **David** was playing down there, they're playing – they were playing soccer and I went down into the park and I listened to – I was looking for **David** and I hear him talk. And this kid is talking French to his buddies like a native. And so aft – I let him finish the game and then they – when he came upstairs, I said, hey, your French teacher says you're not doing any work in French. And he said, yeah, well you – th-they have all this – this grammar and I don't know anything about that. I said, well, you have to study it. And he said well, but I don't need it. I can talk French. I said yeah, I – I just noticed that. I didn't know you could I had not noticed that at all. So next day I called the teacher and I told her what he had – what I-I observed. I said, please engage him in – in a conversation outside of the classroom and see – see what he comes up with. She called me that afternoon and she said, forget

everything I said. He's ok – I don't care whether he knows grammar or not. So that was an interesting experience. The other two of course, also learned French and enjoyed – and first they were a little apprehensive when they got there, because they were in a strange country and it – this was something new. When it was time to come home, they didn't want to leave. They were at home there and they had a – whenever I could – I told you that I had to travel quite a bit. Whenever I could arrange my travels when the kids were out of school, I would take the family along. And so they got into a lot of places. We got there and I let them go sightseeing or take a tour or whatever and I would be doing my – my job. And then we'd come back and they had seen another place. We d – we traveled a lot, they traveled a lot and of course, what they – what got them about skiing, maybe I – did I mention that before when I – when I came home the day when I got the assignment in **Switzerland**, I – I called my wife and told her, **Barbara** this – we're – we're going to **Switzerland**, she said, great. And I said, don't tell the kids, we'll tell them tonight. So at dinner we're sitting around the table and I casually sort of mentioned, listen, how would you like – how would you guys like it if we got assigned to go to **Switzerland**? And **Jeff**, of course who was a – all – all the kids were skiers. I was a skier so I – I taught them early. And I said – **Jeff** said oh yeah, yeah, skiing, **Switzerland,** yeah, that's it, let's go. And the other two chimed in, yeah, let's go.

So, it was no problem. But then when they got there, of course, they were a little apprehensive. We – when we got back they – they went back to school. **Jeff –** oh **Jeff,** we bro – took **Jeff** back in '56. He graduated in 1956 – '76, yeah, 1976.

Q: What year was he born in?

A: '58. He graduated from high school in '76 and we – we had – we were on home leave, we had two months home leave, so we came back and we traveled all over the **United States** for a couple of months, and then dropped him off at the University of **Virginia** in **Charlottesville,** where he had been accepted earlier, and we went back to **Switzerland** and he then sort of became a jetsetter. About every three months he was in – in **Switzerland**. And the way **UVA** works, we dropped him off en – end of August when school started. In early December school was out and until about the latter part of January, and he was back in **Switzerland**, he was off skiing someplace with his friends and girlfriends and whatever. And in January went back. In early May school was out and he was back for the summer. So that was for a couple of years and he – he was very unhappy that we came back. He liked that.

Q: What are your children doing today?

A: **Jeff** is in real estate, he has his own real estate firm. He is doing mostly commercial real estate, shopping centers and big complexes all over the east coast.

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Jim is an aeronautical engineer, works for **Naval Air Systems Command.** He is right now in the – has a special assignment in the office of the assistant Secretary of State – o-of the Navy. And **David** de-decided after high school he didn't want to be like his brothers, to get – he's the youngest – go to college, so he went into the air force. He spent about nine years in the air force, got out, and then he decided he wanted to be a police officer, and that's exactly what he is now. He's a police officer in the town of **Vienna**, right in our neighborhood, and we see him almost every day that he works, he – a cruiser comes around and he says Mom, what's to eat? All of them are married. **Jeff** has two children. **Aaron** is now 11 years old and has started working on his **Bar Mitzvah**. **Michelle** is nine – yeah, **Michelle** is nine. And **Jim** has two. **Joshua** is four and **Kayla** will be one year old on the first of July. And **David** has twins who were one year old on the 30th of April. That's **Katherine**(ph) and **Rachel**. We just celebrated about four weeks ago, celebrated their first birthday. A delightful couple of twins chattering away, talking to each other in their own language. But all of them are doing well.

Q: What did you tell your children about your childhood?

A: For many years I wasn't talking about anything about me, except when they asked a question, I would answer it. Did you – did you go to school? Yes, I did. And that was about it, or a little more. But is not until about the middle 80's is

when I – one day it sort of dawned on me – that wa – it came from some questions that I – a discussion we had with – with the kids, that they really didn't know me. They knew bits and pieces of – they knew who I was. They knew where I came from, they knew what I'd gone through, a little bit. But just bits and pieces, and I decided that I needed to write this thing down. I was not consciously ever holding it back, it was just not – I just – somehow I couldn't. It was – I don't know what – what it was, but I won't speculate on that. So when the time – at that time there was an immediate action. I went out and I bought myself a word processor and I hooked it up and I sat down and I started writing. And I started writing every day from then on until I had it all on paper. And so I – I wrote my – my whole history up to that point. There isn't much after that anyway, they know me since then. And I made copies and they all have a copy of it. And then when I did the **Shoah** tape with you, s-soon as I got that in the mail, I immediately went down to the copy place and had them copy me – make me three copies and th-they all have copies of that. And since then, they have – they have asked a lot of questions. More detailed. That has gotten them to – on the track to ask questions.

Q: In what ways did the **Shoah**, the Holocaust influence your professional and personal choices?

A: Well, it interrupted my dream of becoming a doctor. That of course, was dead. And there's still a little nostalgia in my mind every time I think about it, I said, I – I shouldn't have gone for the money, I should have gone back to **Switzerland**, I should – well, should have, would have, could have, it didn't happen, of course. But it is – other than that, of course there is – there was the – the pain. The knowledge that I survived and my family didn't, has always been with me, it's never left me in – not in – in **Korea** and not in **Tokyo** and not of course in – in – in **Europe.** I've been looking for the answer, and of course there is no answer. But also I've been – I've spent an awful lot of my waking life looking for my parents. There was a big gap there. My parents and – and the rest of the family, but my – my mother and my father, of course. And of course that's – didn't come until about three years ago, when I was doing a – a study on – on – in the museum – in the Holocaust museum, and I was talking to the then head of archives, in a casual conversation, and you know, mentioning that I had – who I was and that family was – was taken to – deported to – from **Vienna** to – to **Lódz** and that's when I lost the trail. And he s – he told – told me that, he said, we have just gotten these five volumes of – a register of all the people that were in the ghetto, have you seen it? I said no, didn't know anything about it and we interrupted the – my interview with him and I went to look at it and I opened it, I asked for the – there – it was

alphabetical thing. Apparently the Germans had registered all this. Had it in alphabetical order and it was found after the war, the Polish government had it, and finally got to **Yad Vashem** and – and – and to the museum. And I opened it to the **S's** and went to **Stein** and there was my mother and my father and the rest of the family. And I found a – there was a date when they ar – who they were, their profession, their date of birth, when they arrived in the – in the ghetto, and when they left the ghetto. Now, the leaving of the ghetto for most of them was later dates, and to my knowledge that was before the – that was after the **Chelmno** death camp had been closed, that was the ausch – they were mostly to **Auschwitz** then, or other concentration camps. But my parents and some others, I noticed the – the final depr – disposition there is a – it said **TR7.** I remembered from my readings that there were certain time periods when there were transports to – to **Chelmno**. And so right after that I went to looking into some of the other books that I had read that had this thing and then I remembered the first one was **Gilbert** and I read in there, there were seven transports from the 21st to the 28th of February, 1942 to **Chelmno,** transport seven was on the 20th of February. That was closure to me. I knew on the 27th of – 27th – 28th, excuse me, 28th of February, they had died at **Chelmno.**

Q: I have to change tape.

End of Tape Two, Side B

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Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: – continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Charles Stein**. This is tape number three, side **A.** And you were telling me about finding what happened to your family in **Chelmno**. Is there anything you wanted to add to that?

A: Well, I found – well, my parents, as I said, died at **Chelmno**. Uncles, aunts, cousins were there until about August and were shipped to **Auschwitz**. I think pretty much all of the Austrian contingent was gone by that time. I – I – there's a certain amount o-of peace that – peace that it gave me when I found out, particularly about my parents, because I had been searching, what, for almost 60 years, and with no results for fift – 50 some odd years. And i-it – it was a relief. It was – it was definitely a relief to me to – to find out finally. And I think it – the relief really came when I sat down a-and wrote letters to all – what relatives I still have, a couple of cousins and – and some other more distant relatives, ti – and told them about it. I now had something to tell, and that ended it. So that was about the end of – of that. I don't think I – I can add anything to this.

Q: With what Holocaust related groups or organizations are you affiliated?

A: Well, with the – mainly with the **U.S.** Holocaust Memorial Museum. I've been there for over six years now, since before it opened. I started on – to work on

opening day in a hospitality suite at the – at the **[indecipherable] Plaza** where some of the **VIPs** were quartered and we had a suite there where we – a – a – a gor – a room there where we gave them tickets, gave them directions, told them where to go and so forth. Then I had to wait a little while until I got into the business services training program. I'd missed the first class, so I got into the second – the next class and – later that year, '93. And I been there – I been there ever since. I worked at – two years on the volunteer advisory board, one year as its chairman. And have done a lot of, well additional things like studies in addition to – to my regular duties there. And it's been – it's been a useful thing. It gives me a chance to talk to people and maybe add something to their knowledge. When people ask a question, I give them just a little more than they asked for, usually. Except, of course, the main question, where's the bathroom. I don't do any more of that, I just point them in the right direction. But on the others, if they want to know about where an exhibit is, I know they also want to know what it is about, and I find that most of them don't. So giving them that little extra information, satisfying to me, and from what I can see, to – with people, they like it. Th-They – I get a special thank you. So th-that has been a – the other organizations, oh, I – I'm a member of the Friends of the **Yad Vashem**, but that's strictly a – you know, a supporting thing. I send them my donation and I get their newspaper. And the same for the

American gathering of – of – what its – American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors. I'm not anywhere involved – not – not involved in any chapter of what – if they have any. I contribute to them, and I think it's a worthwhile thing. I give them some money and I read their publication, but that's about it. I am not a joiner. I'm – I'm very selective in what I join.

Q: Have you had some special moments or special experiences at the museum that you can share?

A: At the museum? Oh, many, many. I had – one of them, I was doing groups, which I – I do mostly groups now, because nobody else wants to do them. Now, I had a school group from **France**, a – French high school students, most – all girls, as a matter of fact. And one little girl said to me, with her teacher, they all spoke English very nicely. And she said that her grandfather had – was in the resistance, he was Jewish, her grandfather was in the resistance, he had survived. He had a gun, a rifle, something, that he gave to the **Smithsonian** and the **Smithsonian** had given it to the museum, and would I know where she could possibly find that? I told her, I said, when you get down to the second floor, when you make – go around the first bend, there are the resistance movements, you find the French resistance there, take a look there. About two hours later, the girl came back with tears in her eyes, saying thank you, thank you so much. I found not only my

grandfather's gun, with his name on it and all that, with a label, but also some papers he had apparently given, some pa – passport – well, I don't – I'm not sure what it – what it was, I can't remember. I looked at it afterwards, but I can't – but some documents that are also sitting right there. So she found her grandfather there. It was – it was a heartwarming thing. I had another one, I was loading the elevators, and it was a quiet period, and I had a family coming in around – what looked like a husband and wife and two grown children, children in their 20's. And I directed them to the – to the **I.D.** cards and said, pick up an **I.D.** card. The man picked up an **I.D.** card, and the next – I was looking at him, next he said, oh my God. I said, anything wrong? He said no. We are from **Holland** and I picked a card, this is a person from my town in **Holland**. I didn't know anybody was in the Holocaust in **Holland**, in – from my town. Some small town he lives in. They looked like professional people. But, and I-I-I said, well, th-that's very unusual. And he said, oh, when I get back I will – I will give this to the mayor. We will – I will – will tell them that we – we have to do something, you know, a plaque or something for a person ah – we didn – I don't think anybody even knows or remembers that. I said, that's wonderful, please do that. And there were several other things like that that happened that are very nice to know. I read – oh, well, an amazing thing. One day I – I was – I was the information desk, and a man walked up to me. And he looks at

me and I looked at him and he – some **[indecipherable]** looked familiar, wasn't sure what it was. He said, you're **Stein.** I looked at him. I said, I've seen you somewhere, way back. He says, yeah, in **[indecipherable]** he started speaking German. Somebody I knew in **Vienna**, and as a matter of fact I also knew him in **New York**, but we – he had – he changed comple – I-I don't know, he – I guess I didn't change much, but he recognized me. I didn't recognize him, but I had known him in – in **New York** and – about 1939 – 1940, I guess, and then sort of lost track, I hadn't seen him since about then – since then. So we – we had a long talk. Those are some of the things. Vis-Visitors, I have a – I have my own personal policy in – in – in – in visitor services. There's no German or Austrian that comes to the museum that does not go and see it, I don't care whether there are tickets or not. I always have some – my own tickets in my pocket. I always save some for just those. And I've had many cases where I – I think they need to go see, see their own history. Not mine, their history, now. And I've had some of them come back, f-find me again, look me up and – and thank me for – for letting them see. They says, you know, we read a lot about it, we heard a lot about it, but not like this. I said, that's right. It's all there. I enjoy working with groups, school groups mostly, where we go a little deeper into the – the subject matter, and I'm particularly i-interested in the questions the kids ask. And some of them are good. And then I have right now

still – still there from last year, so I guess two years now, the artwork down at the elevator, the basement – the concourse elevator. The first thing as you walk in on the left hand side is that large picture of the police station in **Vienna**, the one I lived next door to. The one I've been in. And so, after we – I tell them all about the museum, I say, well while you're waiting for the elevator, take a look at this one. It might give you something a little personal. I was in that police station, I lived right next door to it. I been in there many times before the Germans moved in and after the Germans moved in, I was in there asking for permission to leave the country. And then I get all kinds of questions. Oh, were you there, oh. And, you know. The elevators, fortunately take a long time to come down to – to the concourse and so we got – have time to answer those questions. Makes an impression, and it gives them one more dimension to **[indecipherable]**. I also – I s – I – excuse me, I started this program, which they are n – are now continuing, o-of the – when I was on the – on the **[indecipherable]** of taking people through and having survivors telling their stories at certain places that they're particularly – that they're – were involved in. And I just saw in those latest – you may have seen that – that they – **Pete Philips** is now going to do it this fall again for th-the paid staff of visitor services. And they need it. Paid staff is, you know, they're – they're the most temporary employees – o-of visitor services, are the most temporaries i-in the

museum. They come in, it's their first job after college and they can't wait to get their one year in to get status to apply for another job somewhere, because they're not paying them. The pay is – is ridiculous. And so they're not putting heart and soul into it like we do.

Q: Tell me about the exhibit of the 1936 Olympics.

A: The what?

Q: The exhibit from the 1936 Olympics in **Berlin** and what significance that had for you.

A: The 1936 Olympics, that was in – oh, that was interesting because I found a picture in there of two – there was a picture of two Jewish swim – swim champions – Austrian swim champions that refused to go to the Olympics and they happened to be teammates of mine, I was a member of the same club and the same swim team. And that was a real surprise when I walked by there and took a look at that, and here they are. Interestingly, I had seen one of them on an Austrian video of former Austrians' interviews, during an interview in **Israel.** And I saw one of them on that one. Of course, now I wouldn't have recognized her cause she's, you know, 50 years o – 60 years older than when I last saw her. And then about a few weeks later I go down there and I see the way I did recognize her.

Q: What do you make of the resurgence of interest in the Holocaust?

A: What?

Q: The resurgence of interest in the Holocaust.

A: Well, all I can say is it's about time. But it's understandable that it wasn't until some of the major institutions like re – **Yad Vashem,** and the **U.S.** museum came into being. That's brought it – and of course that – that led to all the things that are now going on, the – o-of payments and – and restitution and all that. It was dormant too long, and of course in my own case, in **Austria**, the Austrians never considered themselves as the first victims until what, 1992 or '93 when Chancellor **Vranitzky** said hey, let's forget about that, we're just as guilty as the rest of them. And then all of a sudden they said oh yeah, yes we are. I-I mean, it – it took a long time and it is good because those of us who were there or were directly involved, we're not going to be around for too long. And now there's a whole new generation coming up who will know about it. And I think that is important.

Q: What do you say to Holocaust deniers? How do you answer them?

A: I haven't had a chance to talk to one. And I been thinking about that, what would I say to them? And my first impulse is violence, do some violence. But I think the best thing I can think of is to ridicule them, say oh, you know all about that? Well, I was there, so don't you tell me it didn't happen, because I was there it did happen, I saw it happen. And walk away. But th-th – yo-you can't engage them

in – in conversation really, because I think that is what they want. Don't give them a platform.

Q: Recently there have been some events that have echoes of the Holocaust and I was wondering if you would comment, or if you want to comment on the – the **Columbine** shooting, which was scheduled to take place on **Hitler's** birthday.

A: I-I don't see a connection.

Q: What about **Kosovo** and what's happening with the ethnic cleansing?

A: Well, there you have another Holocaust going, and I think it's a – it's awful. I don't, now that it's almost over, I don't see how these people are going to go back into what used to be their homes. And from what I understand, many of them don't want to, and I don't blame them, just like we didn't want to go back. We could have gone back, I guess, and some few did, but not – not – not many. The same with them. Those who go back, it's gonna be hard to – to live with – with the people that – that kicked them out. I don't see it. You see, it's a very, very difficult situation that they will – they are facing now. Then again, knowing how it feels to take off and run and leave and – and get helped in a camp or – or – or another – or get a bed someplace, or – or – it's difficult.

Q: I wanted to ask you to elaborate on one or two things from the **Shoah** Foundation interview, so this is from the war years, from the ho – the years before

World War II and – and thereabouts. You mentioned the violin and – and how the violin was significant. Do you still play the violin?

A: Well, let's put it that way, I still have one. I dust it off every once in awhile and I play, only it's – the fingers aren't working right any more. Oh, I play, I'm – sometimes I'll – I'll – I'll – I'll put on a record and I'll play along with a record, but not what I used to play, not classical. Now I'll do jazz. Or I'll do st – I'll try an imitation of **Stephane Grappelli** and find out that I can't do it. No, I still have the violin, and I – I – well, the mandolin, which is the same fingering, but it's a little easier to play, cause I don't have to play all – what I used to play. I – I still play that. I have one. I picked one up in **Moscow** one day, when I was in **Moscow.** Got it for about six rubles, or something like that.

Q: You also mentioned in your **Shoah** Foundation tape that you had attended – attended a lecture given by Dr. **Freud.**

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

A: Well, there was something – I was what, about 16 or so. He was giving a lecture at one of the people's university, there was a – one of those things like – like the extension course type operations **[indecipherable]** and I just had to go and s – listen to him. I was at the time in school, taking psychology, that was one of the

courses we were taking one year, and oh, the – had to see that. And so I went and I saw th – I was – I was – I was awed. Probably didn't understand a word he said, but I – I – I was awed by be in the – being in the presence of the man. And it was – it was a-an experience, but it was a youthful experience. I – I don't – I am – I have no idea what he – I can't remember what he – what he was talking about, what the topic was. And I pretended to understand everything, of course, like a 16 year old does, and told everybody that I went to see a lecture of **Freud's.** I saw – I saw the man, I listened to him, and oh yes, he was great. And I don't think I even admitted to myself that I didn't understand what he was saying. But that's about the extent of – of that particular experience. It was a one time, about one hour thing.

Q: On a much – much more serious note, you mentioned that you had a grandfather who was killed in a pogrom.

A: Yes.

Q: What impact did that have on you?

A: I don't know exactly what impact it had, but I ha – I had found out about that, oh I was – oh, probably about six or seven years old when I was told about it. He – he died before – long before I was born, about 1912, I think it was. And it – it was a sort of a nostalgic thing. Think – I – I – I thought of my grandfa – I wan – I wanted to know him. I never knew any of my grandfathers. My other grandfather

had gone to **America**, and he died before I got here, so I never saw him. And it was something missing in my life. I – it was a sentimental thing. But in a – the history of my – my mother's family, it had a lo – a lot of impact, of course, on – on my mother, and her sisters, and her brother, too. They never talked about it, except, a-at least one time or a few times when – first when – when I heard about it and then when – when I asked a question, my mother would say something about it. My mother was, at the time, she was about 20 years old when he – he was thrown into the – into the well. So I'm – I'm not sure that there was any real impact on – on my life that I – I know.

Q: Tell me about tomatoes and why tomatoes are significant to you.

A: Tomatoes. For some reason or other I would never eat tomatoes when I was a child, until I was in **Luxembourg,** and one day when I was hungry and this friend of mine and I had about a franc between us and we passed by one of those grocery stands and there were tomatoes. And he said, let's get a couple of tomatoes, we've got enough money for a couple of tomatoes. And I – I looked at it, and I was hungry, and I agreed. And we took the tomatoes and – and I'm – he ate it like an apple, you know, he bit into it and it tasted good. And I've been eating tom-tomatoes ever since. I love them. It was – I don't know why I didn't eat them when I was a child. We had them at home, and – but for some reason or other, I – I – I – I

didn't like them. And I guess it took a – a hungry day to – an-and nothing else to eat in – in sight and that tomato looked good and it tasted good, and as I said, I love them. Even grow them.

Q: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to mention before we conclude today?

A: I can't think of anything offhand. I think you've done a great job again, as you always do. Have to get that on my tape. No, you – I think you – you've guided me through my life very nicely. Couldn't think of it any better. I appreciate it, because this tape, I assume I get a copy of that, I think my children will – will appreciate it. Thank you.

Q: I thank you very much for speaking with me today. And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Muveu – Memorial Museum interview with **Charles Stein.** Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview