

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Phillip Abraham. This is track number three, and you were talking about working for Raytheon in Rhode Island.

Right. I worked there and problems that had to do with submarines, how to make sure that a submarine is not sunk by some missile or detected by an adversary, and this means that there is sound in the water. It's not like the sound that we hear in the air. But that can propagate through the ocean thousands of miles and in the process may hit an object, like a submarine, and reflect it. And if there is somebody there waiting with their own sensors, they say, oh, there is something there, and they can determine sometimes what that something is. So I worked on that, and in my opinion and others, they did good work.

But this was a little company part that I was working in in this, and it was actually given money for that research by the Office of Naval Research in Washington because it was an important need. But the company itself didn't put money into this, and suddenly, money that came from this part of the-- from the Navy stopped because, in other projects, they didn't provide what they were expected to, so they cut them off.

And the Raytheon decided to close this place, so suddenly, all the people who were there are out. They gave me two weeks notice and so on, and now I'm without a job. And as I said, this was like 1968, something like that, and I'm without a job. And I'm married, and I have two little babies.

When did you get married?

I got married in 1964, when I finished my--

Was your wife American or from Europe?

No, she was an American, yeah. And we met through other people. She was at the American University when I was at the University of Maryland, and somebody said, oh, you should meet this one and so on. And we met, and we got married. So we have two children now, a daughter and a son. Of course, my daughter is close to 44 years old, and my son is just 41, 42, something like that.

And so that was-- I was in a-- and at the time, I was living in New London, Connecticut because that's where-- Raytheon group was there, that particular group [INAUDIBLE] in Rhode Island. So I'm looking, and I'm looking trying to find a job.

Finally, I visited the University of Connecticut, the Physics Department, and I see something there maybe on the bulletin board outdoors that they were interested in something like physicist or something. So I knocked on the door, and I met somebody named like Paul Clements, Jewish guy actually born in Australia but had been in England, got his degree there, and so on. And he was the head of the Physics Department at the University of Connecticut.

So he said, well, we don't have a spot on the faculty, but I can arrange for you to be here as a research associate. Some salary is better than nothing, so I moved there to basically-- University of Connecticut is the College Park-- sorry, not College Park. What is it called? Something. It escapes me now.

In any case, I moved to that place with my family, and I was there for several years. And they didn't have a space for me to become a real--

--professor.

Yeah, and on the faculty, so I had to make do with jobs still with the University of Connecticut but not at that place. But in Hartford, they had a kind of a college or a branch of their, and I taught their undergraduates and some graduates. And ultimately, I escaped that because there was no hiring.

And finally, I looked around, and my friends were in Connecticut-- and they said, maybe you want to work for-- let's

see. What did I do there? I was in Connecticut. There is a place that can hire you in New London that is not the University. It's the Navy.

And I went for an interview, and they hired me. And I had to give some talks and so on, and they hired me. And I was there for eight years as a member, and I became, of course, not temporary but with the pension plan and all that. And then I decided to move elsewhere, and something happened, also, in my family. We got a divorce.

So I moved from there to right here in Maryland, basically, at a Naval Research Laboratory. You probably heard of it. And I arrived there, and I was a member of the Naval and so on. And they started doing research on what they were interested in based on the work I've done before, and I stayed there for seven years.

And one day, they asked me-- and there was a temporary vacancy at the Office of Naval Research in Arlington, Virginia, and somebody that has your background-- only for a month or something like that. Would you like to do that? Managing something-- I never managed anything, except myself and doing my work.

But I said, well, I'll take it. We'll see what-- I wasn't losing my position at NRL. I come there. So they give me a whole program with money to go, and the first thing I do-- I interviewed all these people who had already programs from this and so on. And I had to cut immediately a group at Catholic U. That was--

But what I found about myself-- I never thought of myself capable to do many managerial work. But I learned, and I became a manager as well, even though I continued to be-- my interest, and I never stopped learning. So I was there for the rest of my--

--profession.

--profession with them until 2007, so that was after 32 years of the work for the Navy. And in the meantime, that program that I started there that I was given at ONR-- but I mentioned the fact that I didn't know that Raytheon paid my salary because they got it from ONR. I never knew that. Suddenly, I am at ONR, and this is life going--

So one day, in my program, they decided that they don't want to continue to do-- it was still with submarines and stuff like that, but they had been doing so long with submarines, basically since the beginning, if one goes back, the First World War when the submarines appeared. And they were continuing at that.

And sometimes they reached a point where nothing new was done, really, to do better, so they decided, not because I failed or anything like that, that they're not going to put money in that. And so what to do with this guy, me, that I am an expert in that? They said, well, there is here a group that works in logistics, gives money to do science and technology of logistics, and right now it's headed by a captain who is retiring from this job. And we need somebody else. Would you like to take it?

Well, I'll try. So yes, I tried, and yeah, in the meantime, I had become also-- no longer belonging to NRL. I was belonging to ONR. So I'm entering this. I didn't know what logistics is, only some very primitive idea. I looked in the dictionary and so on.

And then I looked at what this captain had done and so on. He was a very nice man, but he was not a scientist at all, and what he did was OK. But it wasn't the science and the-- so here I was to try to find out exactly what other people have done who are being paid money and so on.

And the first thing that I do-- interview these people. I went, for instance, to Catholic U or there was a group there working with a program, and it's not logistics. And I wrote to my supervisors at ONR that this should be cut off. It was a million-something for three years. And they didn't quite cut it off because Congress intervenes in these things, and the people in Congress have the power.

And the people upstairs in the ONR-- unfortunately, instead of saying, no, this is not a good place to do-- so I didn't suffer from it, but so ultimately, I took over this logistics program. And it became, indeed, science and technology with

a lot of people that were doing in universities, and also industry, and Navy institutions themselves, so quite a large-- it had ultimately something-- a program of \$35 million per year that had to be-- and we'd travel a lot to see what they are doing and going directly to the people who were working on this. And they had to give me-- every time, what have you done, and so on, and discussing it. And I would say, go in a different direction, and all that.

And people, at least those who I didn't cut off, were happy with me. But I selected the people who-- and I had connections. Sometimes I would be asked to come and see what they are doing prior to, and in one case it was something in San Luis Obispo, and that's in California. And they have Cal Poly there, California Polytechnic, and they said they have a new method of dealing with certain things and what they called an intelligent agent, "artificial intelligence," so-called.

And they showed me when I arrived there-- they had three people with computers, and a task that they had was to load with the equipment a ship that can bring these things of the Navy into the ocean and to resupply and so on with all these things, whether it be a tank, or a truck, or everything. Now, to load something like that, it's not easy on a ship. A ship has all sorts of decks, and it has elevators. Can they do this or not? They have cranes.

It's a very complicated story, and they used to put two people to work for one single ship, maybe two weeks or more, to decide how to do it. So with this intelligent agent just on a computer, having all the data about what loads they have to put on the ship, they could do it in half an hour, and they proved it to me. And indeed that was one of the most successful things that I-- and with not a lot of money.

Some other projects cost millions of dollars and didn't perform this-- but this, with a quarter of a million dollars, they advanced. And nowadays, they have a company of about 200 people that work on this. And it's not only the US Navy, and the Marine Corps, and the army, but the British are paying to have this program.

And it was really something that-- and I also suffered from it, in one sense. When you are in the Navy or any government and so on, you defend yourself from anybody else by saying, this is no good for us. We don't do that. We don't want that. And indeed they refused to use something like that, and this is a long story in itself.

Well, it sounds like you've had a very interesting career. That's for sure.

Really, I did, yes, and these people from the university there are still in connection with me and send me what they are doing nowadays. And I started, also, much more-- and not only this thing, but I went deeper, myself, into what logistics should be about. And something that-- I'm saying this, and people say, you are bragging. But it's a true thing. It's the truth because I started studying and see, what is this logistics? What do we do?

It's all these supplies. Oh, I need water. I bring a tank of water. Is that enough to do-- is that logistics? No. I realized, by studying it, really, not just for the Navy, that it's much deeper than that. It goes all the way to the people in a mine for coal or all these materials that we do or people who grow food and so on. Everything is connected.

When you hear, oh, we'll do this or put this-- we'll send shovels-- Obama-style-- ready shovels. Who's making the shovels? Somebody. Well, what are they made of and so on. Oh, in the mine they bring. It's not a circle. You have so many routes to the final object, but even more so, even military philosophy and how to deal with the battle and all this.

So I wrote about this and so on, and only some people paid attention. And interestingly enough, after 9/11, what did they do? The Navy decides they don't need logistics. It was the stupidest, absolutely-- something that the public doesn't know. They cut it out. They no longer have anything in logistics. To me, it's a very sad thing because many people have died because of that.

Can we get back to your--

All right, but I'm just thinking because I feel strongly about that.

I know you do.

Not because my whole-- I had my career. It's OK. But it's how sometimes people refusing to accept something, and then later on I'll tell you a story.

Do you feel Romanian at all, any connections with the country?

Not really, no.

Have you been--

No, I have never gone back there.

You've never gone back?

No. My parents came from there in 1950 with my brother and my sister, who-- I have the roots there in the cemeteries, in the families, and so on, and maybe someday I may go in to visit where I was born and so on.

Do you think you would have been a different adult if you hadn't had to get up and move to a different city, and then leave the country, and so forth? Did that mold you into who you are?

Yes, I think so, and I will repeat the words of a guy that I worked with in New London. He was also a guy with a PhD, born here and so on. And he asked me about my history, and I told him. And he said, I really envy you of having all these experiences while I, he said-- I went to grammar school, then high school, then college, then I went this. I'm now working here. I never had any obstacles that challenge, but you had all this.

And I really felt good when he said that because indeed this is what happened to me. I didn't know that this is going to be, but somehow that's how fortune, or lack of it, or whatever made me into what I am so.

Are you proud of being a Jew, even though you had to leave your home country?

Absolutely, yes.

Because of the fact that you were Jewish?

Well, I'm Jewish because I know Hebrew. I know all these things that I've learned and more so than most Jews that don't live in Israel. Sometimes even those in Israel don't know so much about-- I read and so on. I always loved to read. And I think that what happened to me was a faithful sort of thing. It's fate, if you wish.

Do you feel that you still had your childhood? That was not taken away from you?

No, it wasn't taken that way because, as I said, I was not a child anymore when I was in the kibbutz. But we had--

No, but you were eight years old when you had to leave one town to go to another town.

No, because we still had-- we still had friends, and we did things together and so on in the snow and all that. And yeah, and so [? with that-- ?] for instance, I used to-- when I was still a child like that, there was a little girl my age who had some books that I wanted to read and said, oh, I'll lend them to you if you pull me on the snow, so I did that in order to get the book to read.

So my parents and my siblings said-- first of all, my parents didn't like me, at the table, to read at the table and stuff like that because I was very much involved-- when we lived in Tecuci, in this house, I and my brother slept in the room that had one wall as windows. So during summer time or something like that and the moon shined, you could actually read with this light of the moon. And I used to read, hiding my book under my pillows. My parents didn't know.

You talked about seeing a dead German. Did you see any other destruction, any damage from the war at all?

In Romania?

Yeah.

Yeah, there are things like that because they bombed the city and so on.

Did you have to go into shelters and things like that?

We didn't have a shelter. We would go down maybe in the--

--basement.

--basement, yeah, if you had a basement. And it was not a common thing. It was the basement that they cut-- they didn't put real walls or something like that.

And was there a lot of destruction in your area, in your neighborhood?

Not that much because it was-- the only thing that the American and British air forces did-- they bombed the airport, yeah. Sometimes, for instance, they did bad things in Bucharest that they shouldn't have done because they hit population. There were no military and so on.

But I meant what you yourself experienced.

No, I didn't experience that, no.

You didn't experience any--

No.

Do you get reparations?

No.

No. Do you think the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

Sometimes I think no because we see what's happening right now when you have people killed in Israel, and so on, and Israel reacts. And immediately, [INAUDIBLE] [? Russia, ?] a failed country, if any, and so on that committed such massacres everywhere they went in their history, the whole history-- and they are saying all this. And Belgium, and all these countries, and even here-- what is our so-called president in the-- it's not fair to react. So yes, definitely I think that we haven't learned yet.

What are your feeling when you go into the Holocaust Museum building?

Well, first of all, it's sadness, deep sadness that this happened because you cannot really go to it and not feel like crying when you see the youngsters, and the old, and the women, and the men, and so on for nothing, for just nothing. And I get mad. I get very mad. If I had been there and I had a gun, I would have shot.

And one thing that made me mad as well-- and the Jews-- they didn't react to or see in the beginning that this is so serious. No, the German Jews-- they believe that, oh, it cannot happen here. After all, such a cultural nation and so on-- and they couldn't believe that this has happened.

But even though your father was told to leave-- and he said, I can't leave because I have extended family.

That's right, exactly, right. But at the time, in Romania, it was so bad. That's why. It was somewhere else. But many times we talked in the family. We could have been born in the United States or something like that or living in the United States.

What are your thoughts about Germany today?

I don't know. I've met some nice people from Germany. One of them is a man that I supported at Cal Poly. He was actually born in Australia. He's of German origin, and he is a professor there. And he was the one who pushed this new thing that I mentioned, and he's a religious man. And he really is a man with standards, and we didn't talk a lot about the Holocaust. He is not guilty of having done that. So there are people like that that I respect, and I think there are-- but there are still groups there that are not.

Have you been to Germany?

No, and frankly, I don't want to visit.

Because?

I don't know. I would be-- I'd feel really-- not because I'm afraid of them. At this point, I'm not afraid of anybody. I will fight for my life, but I'm not afraid. So I don't like it. I don't like-- and to some extent, I don't like the French, even the Dutch. They didn't behave in a way that they should have.

People that had, actually, a tradition of helping the Jews in Holland during the Inquisition-- and here they are, and instead fully support this small minority of Jews, they did bad things, yeah, not all of them, not all of them.

You volunteer at the Holocaust Museum.

Yeah, I did.

What kind of work do you do?

Well, basically, to translate from Romanian people who have been interviewed, like you-- and I think my-- I'll try to take-- if you'll excuse me, please.

Oh, [INAUDIBLE].

Sorry.

So we were talking about what do you do at the museum.

Yes. Because I still know Romanian language, I can translate. And so I went in there, and I was given a task to get something like this that was an interview. Listen to it, and try to translate. And I started doing that.

But because I was busy with other things, I didn't quite finish it. I still have to finish it and so on. It was somebody in Romania who-- in the north of Romania on the border with Russia where the Jews were picked up and so on. It was a horrible thing and stories that are-- and that was done by the Romanians, the Romanian police and army.

And it's very-- in fact, one of my friends in Israel, the wife of a good friend-- she was there and survived. And she was hit with a bayonet in the back, and to this very day-- she is like 77 years old, and she still suffers from that. But she survived.

How do you feel being from Romania, knowing that others in the same country suffered war--

Yeah, well, I am suddenly very supporting for the Jews who suffered, yes. There is no question about that. And I was just lucky. We were lucky, those who didn't have that experience. It could have happened.

But it wasn't their fault. Yeah, I'm not saying that the German Jews are at fault for this Holocaust of theirs.

The Germans?

The German Jews, yeah, because they couldn't believe that people will do something like that.

Is there any particular part of the museum that you identify with?

Identifying in what sense?

Any exhibits that kind of strike you as--

Well, I admire and identify with when they started reacting with force against--

The resistance?

The resistance, yes, because I feel that, small or without powers, and so on, as I am or I was, still would have taken a stone and throw at them. That's my feeling. To this very day, if somebody would try to attack me, I wouldn't sit there and let them, whether they have a gun or not.

And I truly admire those people who defend themselves, and I believe in the death penalty. I think that a murderer should be executed. And I know people that say, oh, let's keep them 30 years, and then they say, well, he learned something. Let's let him out.

When I hear this, I just see red because all the time it happens, if you read the newspapers, what happens. Well, he was given for this-- he killed this, but after all, he is not-- psychologists say that this or that and so on. I don't believe in that. Frankly, I will say it in public and--

Has your experience affected you religiously in any way? You were a child, obviously, during the war.

As a child, actually, until my bar mitzvah, I was still a believer.

But now, as an adult who lived through this and experienced it--

Also, being a scientist has something to say. When I hear that people talk about this spirit that created the world and so on, if people believe, I'm not laughing at them, no. I'm saying, that's fine. You believe in that.

But what I believe in-- it's a mystery whose answer or solving will never happen. So when you look out in the sky and you see the stars and all that, and if you are those who can actually look through a telescope and see much more than we do, how can you say there was some spirit or some somebody who created all this? Can we understand this-- absolutely not-- and why it exists?

There is a mystery in looking at an ant. And you try to pick it up. It turns away from you. It knows you are there. It's a mystery. How? I know Darwin said evolution, but that's a mystery, too, a big mystery. And sometimes even our rabbi at TI, Tifereth Israel, sometimes says that he doesn't know what to believe. He has the courage to say that to a congregation.

So you are observant in the sense of holidays and things like that?

The holidays, yes, because that's a tradition. In a way, it's not so much the religion as being a nation, being a nation that-- it's another thing that we should really respect ourselves, a people who suffered so much in their history, and they

survived.

One can say it's God's doing, but can they say it's God's doing the Holocaust, the six million Jews killed? It never happened to other people in such way. No, never, in all the history of mankind.

Are you more comfortable being with people who are born in Europe than those who were born here in the United States?

No, no. I don't-- I can be-- one aspect, though-- I would say, the American Jews-- there are a lot of them who are really not in connection with their history as a nation. No, they feel themselves Americans and so on. That's a major thing.

And I feel that that is missing something. While those Jews who were born in Israel or who came to Israel-- they know. That's a different story. And indeed, some Americans when they became Israelis-- but when I see in the synagogue, for instance, what are they doing many times?

They are very active in things that are done in Somalia to people, or other places and so on, or in the district and so on. They never talk about poor Jews, or let's give to Israel. Yes, in the prayer book there is a whole thing about Israel and so on, and we pray and read this. Fine.

But what about-- yeah, many times they send their children to this new thing that youngsters can go to visit Israel.

Birthright, Birthright.

Yeah, and that's fine. And in fact, my wife's youngest grandchild, Samuel, Sam-- he's going, actually, in a few days for nine months in Israel. And, oh, I like him very much. He is really for Israel and a great youngster, really. And I knew them from when they were born, OK. I don't have--

So you remarried?

Yes.

Oh, you did remarry.

Yeah, right. And my children are not married. I have no grandchildren of my own, and Naomi has five grandchildren. And I've been there. So one of them is already in college, in their second year in college, and the others are still-- there is only a young one that is only 14.

When your children were very young, did you tell them about your childhood?

Yes, I did. I did, yes. And my first wife was not Jewish.

So how were the children raised?

Well, actually, I tried to raise them-- but when I was a professor at the University of Connecticut, I met-- there was a synagogue there, and I would go there with them. But somehow it didn't work out, but my children now-- one thing, of course, that is always told to them, since their mother is not Jewish, then they are not considered Jewish. So they point this out. But they are certainly for Israel and so on. My daughter has visited quite a few times.

Have you gone back to Israel?

Oh, yes.

Do you consider yourself Israeli, or American, or both?

This is interesting. Both. And I feel I'm Israeli, and I'll give you some examples of that. When I came here, I was not a citizen. I was a foreign student, so to speak, and I was-- when I became a citizen in 1968, they never asked me, meaning, have you denounced your Israeli citizenship? Nobody asked me, and I thought that just by leaving-- and I lived, by that time eight years here-- I'm not a citizen anymore there.

And I became a citizen. So I visited there in 1973. I took my children-- they were very and a time-- for my parents to see-- my mother actually had died, so only my father saw them and my relatives there.

But when I-- [? I never said-- ?] nobody, when I came back-- I visited to Israel. I had my American passport. Nobody asked any questions. I went again later on a few times. Nobody there asked. The last time that I was there, in 2007, as a matter of fact-- that was not the last time, but that's when something happened.

They looked up, when I came to-- on the computer, they had my name, that I'm an Israeli citizen. I had a passport once, which I still have a copy of that old passport. And they said, you won't be let out from Israel if you either renounce your citizenship or you have an Israeli passport.

So I said, well-- I said, OK, I'll get a new passport. And I had to go through and so on, and I was lucky because I and Naomi-- she was with me at the time. We had a flight back in a few days, and the bureaucracy in Israel is such that it may take you a month and so on.

Luckily, I have a friend from the kibbutz. So we've been friends from all these 60 years, almost, and he knew somebody in Haifa, at the place of the passports. And we went there, and they did it on the spot for me, particularly because they saw I served in the army and all this. So I said, I'm not going to do problems to just-- so I have an Israeli passport, so I'm a dual-- it's legal.

Right, it's legal.

One thing happened-- before I finished my work and I retired in 2007, they wanted me to continue to work, not at ONR but at NRL, by being a kind of contractor with a company. And they would pay me and so on and work as much as I wanted.

And I said, OK, but for this, they said, you have to fill out this form. And this form asks you, are you a citizen of what countries? And I said, the United States, and they asked, do you have any other passport? And I said, yes.

And they said, OK, we can give you a-- what do you call it? A security clearance and so on and work. And I said, how is that possible? I had secret clearance, and now you're telling me-- and then they came back and said, OK, if you give us your Israeli passport-- and we'll cut it off into pieces-- you can still enter the laboratory and around there.

And I said no. I had enough of that. I don't want people to tell me what to do anymore. So money-- they were going to pay me, basically, \$1,000 per day. That's pretty good. So I never had that when I worked a regular-- and so on. But I decided, no, there is a point where it's not--

So that's how I feel. I feel for America and Israel at the same time. Why? Because? I feel these two countries are so connected. Even many people don't realize, including the Jews, how come. If you look at the history of the United States-- and I've learned a lot from the history and reading books. I collected books and so on, from biographies and all this.

And when you read about the founding fathers, what did they depend on? They went to the Old Testament, which is the Hebrew Bible, and all this. So there is no other country that has that and believed in that, and the two are basically-- the one invented this God and so on. The others invented how to behave as a nation, how to do it, liberties of human beings. That's what's the connection.

And there is no other country in the world that has done that, neither Israel as a nation or the United States as a nation and as a-- it will be a tremendous tragedy if one of these two countries will disappear, and sometimes I feel very

strongly about the United States, that it goes in the direction that, to me, is extremely dangerous, becoming something that it shouldn't become.

When I hear about illegal immigrants-- and this is, oh, no, these poor people. Well, they have their lands. When you talk about South America-- and you can call me a racist or something like that, but I feel, they have a land, rich lands, Mexico and so on. They have natural resources and so on. They don't know how to conduct themselves as nations.

And in a way, I remember in the time that I've been here-- I arrived in 1960-- the Americans were Americans. Really, when I looked at people they-- suddenly we see groups of people that don't look-- they looking differently. I'm not saying bad, differently, different.

And to claim that-- I even wrote an article-- not an article but a letter to the editor-- in The Wall Street Journal because there was a man who was in a consulate from Mexico here in the US. And he wrote, oh, he doesn't understand why people are against immigrants, illegal or not. We are giving you the best of us.

And I couldn't stand it because-- they are giving us the best of themselves? How many scientists are coming here who are illegal? Coming people that don't have jobs, that they have the worst jobs there, and they come here. And so I felt very strongly about that.

And that's only one thing, that there are so many other things that are happening. The freedom of the people in this country is in danger with the government, what it's doing, taking over things that it's not-- it's unconstitutional. That's how I feel. That's what I am, and I'm not ashamed to say that.

For instance, when people talk about-- I hope you will not be-- I have some views about those same-sex marriages. I'm totally against that, to force that on the rest of the country, no matter what. If they want to call me a bad guy, fine.

But many people have this view that this is freedom. I'm not sure that this is freedom. I'm against hurting anybody like that. I don't want to do anything, in jobs or anything like that. But the truth is that-- and that's my view, that they go beyond this tremendously, and that's bad for America.

Well, thank you for telling the story of your life and expressing your views.

Well, I was asked-- I didn't want to talk, really, about-- if my wife heard, she would have said, oh, Phillip, what did you do?

Why did you do-- let's just end up by you telling me why you did this interview, why you're willing to do the interview.

Well, frankly, I never thought about looking back at my life, and so on. Yes, I have a lot of material, the things that I've-- papers that I published and so on. But I decided, maybe I'm going to organize myself and so on and leave it as a memory for my children, yeah.

And they know some of it but not really everything because when they were very young-- they were very young and so on. And so I decided, yes, it's interesting, and if this can help other people make some decisions or whatever, it's up to them. But I'm not going out and shouting it in the street and so on because I know people-- they have their own ideas, and they don't have to accept mine, yeah. That's freedom.

That's freedom. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for doing the interview.

All right, thank you.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Phillip Abraham.