A. James Rudin at Iwakuni Marine Corps Air Facility, Japan, 1962.
(Courtesy A. James Rudin)

Two Years of Service: My Time as An Air Force Rabbi

by A. James Rudin

For nearly twenty years, from 1950 until 1969, there was a significant practice in American Jewish seminaries and rabbinical associations, a practice whose memory is quickly becoming enveloped by the mists of historical forgetfulness. During these years, newly ordained rabbis were systematically "drafted" into the United States armed forces to serve as military chaplains. Unlike the Selective Service draft, these were self-imposed policies developed within the religious communities. Because of church-state separation, legislation could not be used to draft clergy into military service; in fact, a 1917 federal law specifically provided for clergy exemptions. As a result, many religious communities were compelled to develop policies and strategies to ensure that a sufficient number of clergy served in the military.

The first American Jewish chaplain served on the Union side during the Civil War. There were 23 rabbis who served during World War I, and that number rose to 311 in World War II when, it is estimated, more than 600,000 American Jews were members of the U.S. armed forces. However, few rabbis made the military their career following demobilization at the end of the war in 1945. Therefore, when the Korean conflict began in June 1950, it necessitated a rapid buildup of military personnel, and the U.S. government responded by broadening the Selective Service process to include physicians, dentists, optometrists, lawyers, and members of other professions. As a result, an increased number of clergy was required to meet the needs of a larger military force, including 150,000 Jews on active duty during the Korean War and, later, 30,000 Jews during the Vietnam War.

In 1950 a joint committee whose members represented the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Rabbinical Assembly, and the Rabbinical Council of America adopted a policy that required newly ordained rabbis to serve as chaplains for a minimum of two years. In some cases it was a three-year commitment if wives (there were no female rabbis back then) and children accompanied the chaplain to an overseas base. The Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

(HUC-JIR), the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), and the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) of Yeshiva University agreed that its graduates must serve in the Army, Navy, or Air Force. However, exemptions were made if a rabbi had previously been in the military or if he failed a basic physical examination.

The self-imposed "draft" created in 1950 was highly successful, and by 1969 more than four hundred rabbis had served. However, opposition to America's involvement in the Vietnam War had become so strong that in 1968 the Rabbinical Assembly and RIETS ended the practice of requiring Conservative and Orthodox rabbis to serve. In June 1969 the CCAR met in Houston and followed suit, voting 123–108 to end the program for Reform rabbis. Since then, the military chaplaincy has remained a voluntary program. The Selective Service program itself officially ended in 1973.

As one of the four-hundred-plus "drafted" rabbis, I served as an Air Force chaplain between 1960 and 1962 in Japan and Korea. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union that began at the end of World War II was especially intense during that period. In May 1960, a U-2 American spy plane was shot down over the USSR and its pilot, Gary Powers, became a household name; in February 1962, he was exchanged in Berlin for the Soviet spy, Rudolf Abel. In October 1961 the Soviets erected the Berlin Wall, which divided the city. It was a deadly physical barrier that became the ultimate symbol of the Cold War until it was torn down with the collapse of the USSR in 1989. Finally, the Cuban missile crisis took place in October 1962, and for thirteen frightening days nuclear war between America and the Soviet Union seemed a distinct possibility.

Of course, every Jewish military chaplain has a different story to relate about the nineteen-year period in American Jewish history when *s'micha* frequently meant not only the end of rabbinical school studies but also the beginning of active duty in the U.S. armed forces. I believe my experience is not atypical and will resonate with other Jewish chaplains from that era. However, unlike many of my colleagues, for whom life in the military was a new experience, I was raised an Army kid. My father, Major Philip Rudin, joined the U.S. Army Reserves in 1932 and was called to active duty in the summer of 1941, serving as a dental officer for the next six years. Our family, originally from Pittsburgh, lived in

Alexandria, Virginia, near Fort Belvoir, where my father supervised several clinics. Almost every Sunday during World War II and the immediate postwar period, we drove the short distance south on U.S. Route 1 from Alexandria to Fort Belvoir, where my family and I enjoyed the facilities of the post's Officers Club. The club provided enormous fun for children because it had wonderful food, a snack bar, a large swimming pool, and a number of billiard and ping pong tables. On some of those joyous Sundays, my older brother Bert and I were allowed to visit one of the dental clinics my father supervised. Because they were closed on Sundays, we had free rein to play dentist. Perhaps that was one reason my brother followed in our father's professional footsteps.

During the 1950s, Bert also entered the Army Dental Corps and was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the home base of the famed Eighty-second Airborne Division. So in 1960 when I joined the Air Force chaplaincy, I was, in fact, following my father and brother into uniform—a kind of family tradition. The only difference was that I wore Air Force blue rather than Army khaki.

Basic Training

Newly inducted Air Force chaplains and lawyers in those years trained at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. On Tuesday, 9 August 1960, the two professional groups reported for active duty, and together we began six weeks of general instruction, including military history. There was great emphasis on the rules of personal conduct we were to follow as Air Force officers. We also attended separate classes on the chaplaincy and the military justice system.

On my first day at Lackland, I put my childhood knowledge of the military to immediate use teaching a new Christian chaplain how to correctly pin the officer's silver bars on his uniform. Two HUC-JIR classmates, Ralph Kingsley and Philip Schechter, were at Lackland with me, along with JTS graduate Marvin Labinger and RIETS graduates Paul Laderman, Julius Mandel, Samuel Press, and Benjamin Samson. The eight of us constituted about one-third of the total class—all males—which included both Protestant and Catholic clergy. Other 1960 HUC-JIR graduates who became chaplains that year were Cyrus Arfa, Martin Siegel, and Harvey Tattlebaum of the Navy; Neil Brief, Army; and Matthew Derby, Air Force.

For some new Air Force chaplains, both Christian and Jewish, it was the first time they personally encountered clergy of other faith communities. Some of the Catholics had never interacted with Protestant clergy, and the six weeks at Lackland was the first time some of the Orthodox rabbis in our class had an opportunity to interact with Conservative and Reform colleagues. The rabbis at Lackland often compared the curricula of our three seminaries and the teaching styles and qualities of various faculty members. While we had much in common, there were differences in Shabbat observance and maintaining laws of kashrut in the military. However, by 1960 the leaders of the Air Force chaplaincy were well acquainted with the special requirements of Jewish chaplains.

Liturgical languages had an interesting effect on our diverse body of chaplains. The Catholic priests in our class conducted daily services, and in those years prior to Second Vatican Council, the Mass was in Latin; and, of course, Hebrew was central to Jewish worship. I remember the impact that both the Hebrew and Latin languages had upon many of the Protestant chaplains, whose services were conducted totally in English. One of the Protestant chaplains expressed interest in Hebrew because, as he told me privately, "I feel closer to Jesus hearing the sound of the language he was familiar with."

The Texas summer of 1960 was a combination of high temperatures and energy-draining humidity. Even though chaplains and lawyers had no weapons instruction, combat training with live ammunition, obstacle course drills, long marches, or other physical components of military basic training, each morning we did assemble as a unit and march under the blazing sun from our barracks to the classrooms in tight formation, albeit poorly and out of step. Because of the heat, we were provided salt tablets to prevent fainting and to replace electrolytes. Back then we didn't know that ingesting salt tablets was a bad idea because they can thicken blood and cause clotting.

In our classes we heard numerous lectures about U.S. Air Force history, the proper way to wear a uniform (e.g., when outdoors, always wear a cap, and when walking, carry nothing in the right hand so one is able to give or return a salute), and the need for military discipline and protocol. We were repeatedly told which information we were permitted to give an enemy if captured: name, rank, and serial number. But ominously, we were also told that when chaplains were captured during the recent

Korean War, the communist captors killed or tortured the military clergy first because it was assumed they would be positive morale models and offer spiritual strength to American prisoners of war.

The audio-visual "treat" of our Lackland experience was the requirement to watch all twenty-six episodes of CBS-TV's Air Power, narrated by Walter Cronkite, with music by Norman Dello Jolio. The Air-Force-centered programs conveniently minimized or often omitted the roles of the Army and Navy, and to allay the glassy-eyed boredom the series created among the chaplains and lawyers, some of us wagered money before each screening whether "we"—the Allies in World War II—or "they"—the Axis Powers—would emerge as victors in a particular Air Power episode.

Weekends provided a needed break from marching, classroom lectures, and Walter Cronkite's mellifluous TV voice. Happily, Temple Beth El of San Antonio, led by Rabbi David Jacobson, a Navy chaplain in World War II, provided hospitality, including a Shabbat dinner prior to Friday evening services. Because the city is the site of other large military facilities in addition to Lackland, it was a long-standing Beth El tradition to warmly welcome military personnel.

There were two highlights of chaplaincy school as the six weeks of training came to a close: receiving our orders for where we would be stationed (stateside or overseas?) and graduation, when each chaplain was presented with an official certificate and a class photo. I was assigned to Itazuke Air Base (IAB)—for political reasons the word "Force" was frequently dropped from the names of U.S. overseas bases—on Kyushu Island in southern Japan, the proposed site of the 1945 American invasion of Japan. After spending so much time as a youngster at Fort Belvoir, I was especially pleased to be going to an overseas base. Ralph Kingsley also drew an Asian posting: Clark Air Base in the Philippine Islands, which, along with Bataan and Corregidor, was made famous during World War II. Phil Schechter was sent to Walker Air Force Base in Roswell, New Mexico. Sheldon Lilker (HUC-JIR, 1959), my seminary roommate, was sent to Korea during the early 1960s, as an Army chaplain. Following his two years of active duty, Shelly made aliyah to Israel, where he and his family live on a kibbutz near Haifa.

A New Home

Chaplaincy school ended in time to return to Alexandria and celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot with my family. In mid-October I traveled to Travis Air Force Base near San Francisco, where I flew by Military Air Transport Service (MATS) to Tachikawa Air Base, near Tokyo. Today's jetliners make the long, nonstop trip in less than ten hours, but in 1960 my flight by propeller aircraft took twenty-nine hours. It included one refueling stop at Hickam Field in Hawaii, scene of the 7 December 1941 Japanese attack, and a second refueling stop at tiny Wake Island. During my layover, a crew member recounted the details of the intense battle for Wake that coincided with the attack on Pearl Harbor. The outnumbered U.S. Marines on the island fought bravely, but on 23 December 1941 they were forced to surrender to the Japanese forces.

While fresh flight crews boarded our plane at Hickam and Wake Island, the weary passengers remained the same as we covered the 6,725 miles between Travis and Tachikawa in a military version of the Lockheed Constellation, the same type of plane used by Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower for their presidential travels. However, traveling on a MATS Constellation with its loud, four-propeller-driven engines was a no-frills experience. There were few windows for the passengers, who sat in uncomfortable seats facing the rear of the aircraft for safety reasons in case of a crash. On that long-ago, memorable flight, the cruising altitude was only 10,000 feet and our average speed flying against the prevailing wind was about 250 miles per hour. Of all my many flights before and since then, the journey to Japan was the noisiest, bumpiest, and longest trip of my life.

My arrival in Japan began with a welcome two-day respite in Tokyo. Fifteen years earlier, the city was almost totally destroyed, but Emperor Hirohito's Royal Imperial Palace, the Imperial Hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Dai Ichi office building (General Douglas MacArthur's postwar headquarters) survived the American bombing campaign. By the time I arrived in 1960, there was enormous reconstruction going on in the city, much of it in preparation for the upcoming 1964 Olympic games.

I loved the neon glitter, large crowds, and constant excitement of Tokyo, but, alas, my home base for the next two years was 550 miles southwest of the dynamic Japanese capital. Itazuke was located near the

city of Fukuoka, about 50 miles from Nagasaki, famous as the setting for Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera "Madama Butterfly" and infamous as the target of the American atomic bomb attack on 9 August 1945. Most U.S. bases in Japan were once used by the Japanese military during World War II. This was true of Tachikawa and Itazuke, as well.

The Itazuke military complex was split into two locations. The air base with its single runway had all the necessary support facilities, including a control tower, fuel depots, hangars, firehouse, radar and weather stations, medical unit, armament storage areas, and a small chapel housed in a Quonset hut. Itazuke, a key base during the Korean War, was the home of the Eighth Tactical Air Wing with F-100 Super Sabre fighter-bomber jets and F-102 Delta Dagger interceptor jets. I arrived at Itazuke seven years after the Korean War ended with the establishment of truce lines and a demilitarized zone (DMZ) that divided Korea and made the peninsula into one of the world's most volatile regions. In 1960 the United States had two communist enemies in Asia—North Korea and mainland China—and Itazuke, with its close proximity to both Pyongyang (456 miles) and Shanghai (545 miles), put the base in the frontline of a not-so-cold Cold War.

Several miles away from the flight line was the sprawling Administrative Annex, which contained the following: Itazuke's headquarters building; base chapel (the site of my office); a housing area; a large, well-equipped hospital; an elementary and high school for "dependent children" (a bureaucratic euphemism to describe civilian family members of military personnel); service and hobby clubs; recreational facilities; a base exchange ("BX"); food commissary; a movie theater; library; athletic fields; and other features of a huge overseas American air base.

Following my arrival at the base, my predecessor, Rabbi Arthur Langenauer, briefed me about my duties and responsibilities. I quickly found out that I would be doing an extraordinary amount of traveling "to service" (an oft-used Air Force term) the scattered Jewish personnel stationed throughout southern Japan and South Korea. Langenauer was especially pleased to see me because, as his replacement, I was his ticket back to the States. (He was a 1958 JTS graduate who later changed his name to Asher Bar Zev. Once back in civilian life, he earned a doctorate in molecular biology.) During the briefing, I learned that while Itazuke was my home base, I would also be making monthly visits to the U.S.

Naval Base at Sasebo and the Iwakuni Marine Corps Air Facility, as well as spending five days a month at two remote air bases in Korea: Kunsan, near the Yellow Sea, and Osan, about thirty miles south of Seoul, the South Korean capital. Another monthly visit I would make would be to the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) facilities at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The U.S. government established the ABCC in 1946 to study genetics, pregnancies, and other effects of radiation on atomic bomb victims, and the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) staffed the two research centers. Many USPHS personnel, including physicians, were Jews who fulfilled their military duty by working at the ABCC.

Langenauer told me the heavy travel schedule was necessary because the Itazuke-based Jewish chaplain was the only rabbi stationed in Japan south of Tokyo and south of Seoul in Korea. I learned that, as an itinerant rabbi, I faced two years of extensive travel in planes, trains, helicopters, trucks, and cars. My job would be to serve a diverse group of American Jews. At three of the bases—Iwakuni, Osan, and Kunsan—there would be no dependents, but I would be working with families, including school-aged children, in Itazuke, Sasebo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. In addition, unlike Japan, where dependent families were the norm, the unaccompanied (without family) military tour of duty in Korea was thirteen months and, because of the constant threat of combat, wearing uniforms was required during one's waking hours. In Japan civilian clothes were the norm when we were off duty.

Diverse Colleagues, Meaningful Influences

My Itazuke boss was Base Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Thomas E. Hepner (1914–1993), an Evangelical and Reformed Church minister from Pennsylvania and a career Air Force officer. Hepner served with distinction during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. He was a superb commander and exemplified the best in a military chaplain. He embraced a respect and knowledge of other religious traditions and a strict policy of not permitting any form of proselytizing or conversionary tactics to take place on our base. Hepner maintained an equitable schedule for the clergy under his command, who were required—much like physicians, nurses, lawyers, crash and fire crews, and other first responders—to serve on a rotating schedule as the base chaplain of the day. Like many other rabbis in the military, I regularly volunteered for emergency duty on Sundays, allowing me to observe Shabbat.

Hepner was a strong buffer who shielded us from any outside pressure, and he encouraged my Christian colleagues and me to do our thing without worrying about obsessive oversight, interference, or control by the base commander, the hospital commanding officer, or anyone else. He demanded hard work from his chaplains, including detailed monthly reports that charted the number of people attending religious services and other programs. In addition, I prepared a weekly bulletin that was given out at Shabbat services and edited a monthly newsletter that was distributed to all the bases I visited on my regular monthly itinerary.

Another remarkable career Air Force chaplain colleague was a member of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC): Earl Minor (1920–2009), who was stationed at Osan Air Base. Minor and I immediately hit it off during my first visit to bleak, war-torn Korea. Because my hometown of Alexandria, Virginia, was dominated by a Southern Baptist religious ethos, I was eager to learn more about the SBC, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. I discovered that Minor was equally eager to learn more about Jews and contemporary Judaism. He had long ago jettisoned the wildly erroneous belief held by some Christians that the Jewish religion "had not changed since the days of the Old Testament"—a phrase I heard from a Southern Baptist chaplain stationed at Itazuke. Minor wanted to learn about Jews and Judaism, and I quickly discovered he had no hidden conversionary agenda. He was especially impressed that I grew up in a city with a pervasive Southern Baptist presence and atmosphere. Until I met him, I had not given much thought to a rabbinic career in interreligious relations, but Minor's obvious interest in exploring what Jews believe compelled me to describe in detail many aspects of Judaism, including how we perceive Jesus and the New Testament. I vividly remember several long discussions—never debates—specifically about Paul's views of Judaism, kashrut, and circumcision. I also spent time addressing Jewish holiday observances, the meaning of modern Israel, the horrors of the Holocaust, the root causes of Christian anti-Judaism, the importance of religious pluralism, and a host of other questions. He was intrigued by the teachings of Martin Buber, who was a popular religious philosopher in the 1960s. Minor was surprised when I described the various religious streams of Judaism and the centrality of the State of Israel in Jewish life

and thought. He was also struck by the similarities in both the Jewish and SBC congregational structures—that is, the independence in ritual and liturgy that each congregation is able to maintain despite being part of a large national convention or union. In return, my dialogue partner explained basic Southern Baptist theology to me, including the central belief that each person, clergy and lay, is capable of interpreting the Bible. Minor also stressed the historic Baptist commitment to the separation of church and state.

Minor's genuine interest in Judaism provided hours of serious conversation and good-natured banter. He was a welcome intellectual partner during my monthly visits to dreary Korea. Our in-depth conversations often took place during shared dinners at the Osan Officers Club during some bitterly cold Korean winter nights. In retrospect, I recognize that my encounters with a sincere inquiring Christian chaplain in a place where we were both strangers in a strange land sparked my initial interest in interreligious relations. Years later, I was not surprised to learn that Minor had achieved the rank of full colonel and served with distinction as command chaplain for the United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE).

At Itazuke my closest colleague was a Catholic chaplain with an appropriate first name: Fedelis. Fedelis Connolly (1921–2014) was a warm, funny Irishman from Massachusetts (and it didn't hurt that he was a fellow Democrat, since most of the officers I worked with, aside from members of my Itazuke congregation, were Republicans who strongly supported Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election). Connolly's infectious good humor and Boston accent added to his charm. He served as an Air Force chaplain between 1957 and 1963, before returning to civilian life.

The three-year-long Second Vatican Council that culminated with the historic *Nostra Aetate* (Latin for "in our time") Declaration on Jews and Judaism began in Rome in 1962. But Connolly did not need *Nostra Aetate* to validate his own strong commitment to build human bridges of mutual knowledge and understanding between Catholics and Jews. In effect, he was already a Vatican II priest. His personal friendship and his obvious respect for Jews and Judaism left an indelible mark on me.

In years to come, when I served as the American Jewish Committee's interreligious affairs director, I encountered hundreds of Christian

clergy throughout the world, including prominent Vatican and World Council of Churches leaders. But I trace the beginnings to this time in Japan and Korea, when I was a freshly minted rabbi and experienced such positive interfaith relationships. Hepner, a mainline Protestant, Minor, a Southern Baptist, and Connolly, a Roman Catholic, represented some of the significant differences that exist within the total American Christian community, especially in the areas of biblical study, theology, religious authority, and church polity. Because I worked closely with each of them, I learned the nuances, beliefs, vocabulary, history, and traditions that both unite and separate Christians from one another. But more than that, there was a bond that formed between us. Perhaps it's because Americans Jews and Christians were small minorities in that part of the world, or because Air Force chaplains all wore the same uniform and worked in close cooperation with one another—whatever the reasons, I still count Thomas Hepner, Earl Minor, and Fidelis Connolly as important influences on my rabbinic career.

Challenges

Although many of my Jewish and Christian classmates at Lackland were "drafted" into the military by their seminaries, I soon discovered that this was not so for my Itazuke chaplain colleagues. In fact, during the early 1960s, a significant number of rabbis, priests, ministers, and pastors made the military their career. Many remained on active duty for twenty years or longer, until they retired from the armed services with full benefits. Marvin Labinger, a chaplaincy school classmate at Lackland, remained in the Air Force and ultimately achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel upon his retirement from the military. Unlike reservists like myself, they were considered "regular" or "line" chaplains. One such career military rabbi was Hungarian-born Herman Dicker (1914–1997), who in 1960 was stationed with the U.S. Eighth Army in Korea. Upon retirement, Dicker served for many years on the JTS library staff.

Toward the end of my tour of duty, Hepner strongly encouraged me to become a career chaplain. He stressed some of the benefits: After twenty years of active duty I would be only forty-five years old, young enough to embark on a civilian rabbinic career. I would be eligible for a lifetime military pension, access to military hospitals including Bethesda and Walter Reed in the Washington, DC, area, and full use of commissaries

and base exchanges. Hepner wryly noted that as a career military chaplain I would be exempt from the many trials and troubles that frequently bedevil congregational clergy. And, of course, there would be the opportunity to travel throughout the world while on active duty or on recreational military leave. (It was the spring of 1962 and the American involvement in the Vietnam War was just beginning with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution still two years in the future, and the horrific effects of that conflict were then unknown). Despite my base chaplain's positive entreaties and my father's years in the Army (he retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1957 after twenty-five years of service and is buried with my mother in Arlington National Cemetery), like most rabbinic "draftees" of that era, I opted for civilian life. But it was not an easy decision. My many positive experiences provided enough reason to think seriously about remaining in the Air Force. However, a career in the military chaplaincy presents a particular set of problems for rabbis. Leading the list is professional isolation, a common complaint of rabbis who are often stationed at bases hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles from vibrant centers of Jewish religious, cultural, and academic life. Unlike today, in the early 1960s there were no cell phones, text messages, emails, Internet websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Skype, or other forms of rapid communication. I stayed in touch with my family, friends, and fellow rabbis by mailing them the voice recordings I made on small reels of magnetic tape. But even with trans-Pacific airmail, communications were slow, and I made but a single telephone call to the United States during my two years in Asia.

To help overcome the lack of regular contact with other rabbis, the Department of Defense and the National Jewish Welfare Board (NJWB), the sponsoring agency of Jewish chaplains, brought rabbinic leaders from the States to tour overseas military bases. The visitors presented public lectures on Jewish religious thought and current events; they also conducted religious services, offered study classes, and provided professional news (as well as gossip!) for Jewish chaplains, who frequently felt cut off from their civilian rabbinic colleagues. But the visitors' most important role was to compile the names and home addresses of the Jewish personnel they met. Once back in the States, the rabbis contacted the families of the men and women they encountered at military bases far from home. It was a personal touch that was deeply appreciated and was perhaps more important than formal lectures and classes.

I was fortunate that two prominent American rabbis, both World War II chaplains, visited Itazuke during my time there: Conservative Rabbi Max Zucker (1898?–1972) from Passaic, New Jersey, and Orthodox Rabbi Israel Miller (1918–2002) from New York City. Zucker and Miller were my links to rabbinic life, and for other Jews in uniform, the two civilian rabbis represented a human bridge connecting them to family and friends living in what the Air Force officially termed "the Zone of the Interior"—otherwise known as the United States.

The military also provided for regional Jewish chaplains' retreats that brought rabbis from the Air Force, Army, and Navy together for joint study and fellowship. A 1961 retreat took place at the Hakone National Park in Japan. Edward T. Sandrow (1906–1975), a World War II chaplain and Conservative rabbi from Cedarhurst, New York, was the guest retreat leader. The retreat provided us with a chance to personally swap ideas and experiences about our work as military chaplains, participate in worship services with a keen sense of *kavanah*, and study Torah together with colleagues. It was a valuable experience, but for me, those periodic touchstones would not have been enough to keep me from feeling isolated as a career military rabbi.

Another challenge I faced is something every person on active duty faces: physical danger. There is a false belief that clergy in uniform are not in physical danger because all they do is conduct religious services in secure locations far from combat. But the sad reality is far different. During World War I, twenty-three Christian chaplains were killed; eighty-three Catholic priests were killed in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. At least 134 Protestant ministers have been killed since 1917, including one in Afghanistan. In October 2011 a special section was dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery to honor the fourteen rabbis killed while serving in the military: eight in World War II, two during the Cold War, and four in Vietnam. The best known is Alexander Goode, a 1937 HUC graduate. In February 1943, Goode, along with three Christian chaplains, died on the USS Dorchester in the North Atlantic after a German submarine attack. Tragically, there were not enough life preservers on the crowded troop ship, and the four clergymen gave their own life jackets to others. Then, standing together, the doomed chaplains died on the deck of the sinking ship. That image has become an iconic part of American history.

I had two life-threatening incidents of my own while in Korea. The first happened in late 1961. Instead of flying from Japan in a regular military transport, I hitched a ride on a C-124 that was carrying supplies from Itazuke to Osan. That plane long ago earned the apt nickname "Old Shaky." On such military flights, parachutes were required even though most passengers, myself included, never received actual training in using them. But like commercial airline flight crews who stress safety, including the use of life preservers, the crew chief on my flight instructed us how to exit an airborne plane. Our task, once we were falling to earth, was to count to three and then pull the ring with our right hand to open the chute. I had heard these instructions many times, but on the C-124 flight to Korea that dire possibility almost became a reality when the aircraft lost power in three of its four engines. Fortunately, we were very close to Osan when the third engine went out and we made a scary but ultimately safe landing. I later learned the official cause given for the near catastrophe was "fuel exhaustion"—that is, the inexperienced crew somehow failed to check a weather report about severe headwinds and they miscalculated the amount of fuel required for the flight. I remember that experience whenever I read about a fatal crash of a military aircraft and the cause is listed as a "military training accident."

The second incident was even more frightening. When I traveled from Osan to Kunsan on Korea's west coast, I sometimes flew in a small, two-engine, ten-passenger Beechcraft plane. On one of those flights, a test missile zoomed up in front of our little plane, almost hitting us. The rocket was close enough for me to see a painted American flag and read the words "United States Air Force" on the side. When the shaken pilots landed at Kunsan a few minutes later, we were told there had been a mix-up, and the rocket-launching team had not received our flight plan. Another "training accident" barely avoided.

Providing Pastoral Care

Being a military chaplain sharpened my teaching, preaching, organizational, and counseling skills. Jews stationed at overseas bases offered me an opportunity to explore in depth their varied backgrounds, particular needs, unique fears, and personal ambitions in ways that I could not later replicate within a large civilian congregation. The intensity of the shared military experience thousands of miles from home offered a young rabbi

an excellent training ground that included working closely with Christian colleagues and developing constructive interreligious relations.

The actual work of a Jewish chaplain was not unlike civilian congregational life: officiating at Shabbat and holiday services, supervising a Hebrew school for children at Itazuke, developing Jewish lay leaders at the various bases I visited, leading adult education classes, providing kosher food from the States for those who required it, and performing rites of passage, including bar/bat mitzvah training and *brit milah* ceremonies in conjunction with a Jewish physician.

The centrally located Itazuke base chapel on the Administrative Annex was a large, white, churchlike structure (without any permanent religious symbols) that contained my office and those of several Christian chaplains. The building had a movable "Lazy Susan" platform in front of the large sanctuary space. The platform was easily moved for Jewish, Catholic and Protestant services. It had a permanent Ark with a sefer Torah, a Ner Tamid, and many other objects required for year-round Jewish worship services. The main Shabbat service took place on Friday evenings and, following the service, members of my Itazuke congregation walked a short distance from the chapel to the nearby service club for the Oneg Shabbat, which included wine and other refreshments. Everyone dressed in civilian clothes, and it provided a weekly opportunity for Jewish officers to socialize with enlisted personnel and their family members, not simply as Air Force personnel, but as fellow Jews stationed thousands of miles from home.

During the early 1960s, the NJWB provided Jewish chaplains with a pocket-sized siddur that contained material for both traditional and Reform services. The organization also sent chaplains other ritual objects as well as books on Jewish themes and subjects. During Passover the Itazuke commissary manager made sure our base had a good selection of holiday foods and wine.

My visits to the other bases I served were always on weekdays. I frequently conducted a brief service followed by a shared meal and discussion of a Jewish theme. On such short visits, I also provided time for individual one-on-one conversations that usually centered around a host of personal problems. Not surprisingly, the problems frequently concerned loneliness or other emotional problems. There were few complaints about acts of antisemitism within the military.

A great deal of my time overall was spent on pastoral counseling. I served both Jews and Christians in this capacity, and the counseling often focused on complicated sexual relationships with Japanese women, including possible marriages or marital infidelity. I spent many hours with American men and their Japanese fiancées. In most of these cases, the Japanese family of the prospective bride was upset, often angry, about such intermarriages. They feared, quite correctly, that if their daughter married into the Air Force family, they might never see her again. Typically, she would first return with her husband to the United States and then in later years accompany him to many USAF bases throughout the world, perhaps never returning to Japan. In such counseling sessions I felt obligated to point out that the Japanese wife might face intolerance and prejudice from those Americans who disapproved of such marriages.

Another major concern of my military congregation was worry about the well-being of parents and other family members living thousands of miles away in the States. The unaccompanied married military personnel in Korea constantly expressed anxiety about the well-being of their wives and children, who had to remain behind during their thirteen-month tour of duty.

It was also my duty to reach out to the Japanese community. In 1962 a Japanese-American friendship society in Fukuoka requested a program on the Adolf Eichmann trial, which was then taking place in Israel. In response to the request, Michael Lyons, a military lawyer and a member of my Itazuke Jewish congregation, and I presented a joint lecture about the trial. Lyons focused on international law and I described the Israeli and/or Jewish position on the trial. Speaking to a Japanese audience was a long and complicated process. Lyons and I would first make comments in English and then wait while they were translated into Japanese. Our presentation lasted nearly four hours, but the Japanese audience was patient and attentive. They expressed both anguish and pain when we described the catastrophic events of the Holocaust. But they reminded us, not for comparison or competition as to who had suffered more, that they had endured two atomic bomb attacks. I remember one particular comment from that night: "Why did America, a white country, drop two A-bombs on a yellow nation, the yellow race, and not on Germany, a white country?" I responded by noting that the U.S. nuclear weapons were first tested two months after the German surrender in May 1945,

but the Japanese questioner remained convinced that America practiced racism in bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Tokyo was the home base for the NJWB's representative in Japan, Dorothy Brickman (1916–2006), a gifted social worker from Martha's

Photo of the Douglas C-124 Globemaster II, nicknamed "Old Shaky."
(Courtesy A. James Rudin)

Vineyard, Massachusetts. Brickman was also in charge of the large USO operation in Tokyo, and in that role, she was a warm-hearted "Jewish mother" for countless American servicemen and servicewomen stationed in a strange country far from home. No account of the Jewish chaplaincy in post-World-War-II Asia is complete without mentioning Brickman's extraordinary work.

While there was no civilian Jewish community on Kyushu Island, I did spend time with members of the Jewish Community Center in Tokyo, many of whom were European Jews engaged in the export-import business. They fled Nazism in the 1930s by traveling eastward on the trans-Siberian railroad and then worked their way to Hong Kong, Mukden, or Shanghai. Once the communists took over mainland China in 1949, most Jews fled the latter two cities and moved to Japan, often carrying

Cuban or Israeli passports. Hong Kong, with its longtime Jewish community, was still a British Crown colony in the early 1960s.

One of the hallmarks of my military chaplaincy was the creation of

Rabbi Rudin with USAF Staff Sergeant Stuart Shebroe (left) and Staff Sergeant Norman Rothman (right). (Courtesy A. James Rudin)

a unique project during Passover in 1961. It was common for military chaplains to have a favorite program they personally developed—a special event that brings them a sense of pride even years later—and

mine began taking shape each time I made my monthly visits to air bases in Korea. I became more aware of the difficult physical and psychological conditions military personnel in that country faced. Those conditions included the bitterly cold winter of 1960–1961, warnings from the erratic and dangerous North Koreans who continually threatened a new outbreak of war, doubts about the military capabilities of our South Korean allies, and the grim living conditions at U.S. bases. Little wonder why Korea was such a depressing place in the early 1960s. The contrast between the comfort of Itazuke and the bleakness of Korea was palpable. Indeed, the Kunsan Air Base Officers Club, a shabby building, was sardonically dubbed "The Bottom of the Mark," in contrast to the famous San Francisco "Top of the Mark" bar and restaurant in the Mark Hopkins Hotel. It was not an accident that the most popular song among Americans stationed in Korea in 1962 was Tony Bennett's wistful "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." I quickly learned a chaplain could achieve some good things for his troops. Indeed, Thomas Hepner's guiding principle became mine as well: "Your first duty is to take care of your troops in every possible way—spiritually, emotionally, physically. The chaplain's personal needs always come second."

With that principle in mind, during the spring of 1961, I contacted the American Embassy in Seoul and gained the use of Ambassador Samuel D. Berger's (1911–1990) C-47 aircraft, the military version of the reliable civilian DC-3, which held about twenty-five passengers. The ambassador, a brother of Graenum Berger (1908–1999), a prominent American Jewish communal leader, happily lent his plane so some members of my Korea-based congregation could fly to Itazuke and celebrate Passover at seders and religious services. There were enough Jewish families living on the base to provide home hospitality for the visitors from Osan and Kunsan. Japan was also a place where civilian clothes were permitted, and the country provided extraordinary sightseeing and recreational opportunities.

I dubbed the program "Operation Matzah Ball," and it was a great success. About twenty-five years later, my wife Marcia and I visited our daughter Eve at the Union for Reform Judaism's Camp Eisner near Great Barrington, Massachusetts. While there another visiting father called out my name. It was a former Air Force physician who participated in Operation Matzah Ball, and he thanked me for the warm and welcoming holiday reprieve from his difficult duty in Korea.

Experiencing Asia

One of the pleasures of being stationed in Asia was the opportunity it afforded me to see that part of the world. During leave time, military personnel were permitted to fly on MATS aircraft throughout Asia on a "space available" basis. During my time there, in addition to the Philippines, I visited Bangkok, with its myriad Buddhist temples, and Hong Kong, a shopper's paradise with its custom tailors and low-cost cameras and electronic equipment. In the early 1960s, the British Crown colony of Hong Kong was as close as Americans could get to mainland China or, as we called it, "Red China." I also traveled to Taiwan, the home of Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China and a U.S. ally, which provided a window into Chinese culture and tradition; and I spent a brief time in South Vietnam. My visit to Okinawa took me to the scene of horrific fighting in World War II, but it was also a chance to visit with HUC-JIR classmates Cyrus Arfa and Matthew Derby, who were both stationed on "Oki." And, of course, I toured throughout Japan, including Tokyo, Kyoto, Mount Fuji, and Nara Park. Japan, a country filled with Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, was a tourist's delight.

An unanticipated benefit of serving in Japan during the 1960s was that it, like Hong Kong, offered superb and affordable shopping. The merchandise included single-lens reflex cameras, tape recorders, movie cameras, Imari porcelain dishes, china dinner sets, wood-block prints and lithographs, silk lounging robes, elegant women's dresses, custom-made men's suits, monogrammed shirts, and many other items. I remember that a bottle of Scotch whiskey at the Itazuke base exchange cost $1.80, and a carton of American cigarettes was ninety cents, or ten cents a pack. Upon my arrival at Itazuke, I purchased a tiny green Fiat for $75, and two years later I sold the vehicle for the same price.

As I neared the end of my tour, I felt a sense of sadness leaving East Asia, a fascinating region of the world that was not part of my ethnic, national, or religious DNA. Jews in the United States are accustomed to being a religious minority within a Christian majority population. As a result, it was quite easy for me and other American Jews to live as a minority in Japan and Korea, countries with large non-Christian majorities. While some Japanese were infected with antisemitism as a result of

popular Western anti-Jewish culture or as a residue of the Japanese alliance with Nazi Germany during World War II, I generally found a positive interest, a curiosity about Jews and Judaism on the part of many Japanese. I constantly received queries from Japanese who sought information about the "key" to Jewish survival or how Judaism differed from Christianity.

But living as a religious minority for the first time in their lives was difficult for some American Christians in the military. I recall one officer complaining to me that a golf course near Itazuke did not allow him or his friends to play there simply because they were Americans; he was told the golf course was for Japanese only. My friend was insulted and indignant and denounced the anti-American prejudice. I laughed and said, "Welcome to the 'minority club.' Now you have experienced but a tiny taste of discrimination based not on your merit or your character, but simply because of who you are." I urged him to remember this rejection when he returned to the States and work to oppose all forms of stereotyping and bigotry.

For some Americans, it was a culture shock to be in Japan, a country of ninety million people where the overwhelming majority was neither American nor Christian. Incredibly, there were military wives at Itazuke—none of them Jewish—who rarely if ever ventured off the grounds of the familiar and comfortable Itazuke Administrative Annex. Because they remained physically and psychologically trapped in their "Little America" village, they missed out on the remarkable things Japan and other parts of Asia had to offer a visitor. It was their loss, since Japan was not a dangerous place for Americans to move about freely, unlike those stationed in recent years in Iraq or Afghanistan.

My successor at Itazuke was Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, a 1962 JTS graduate. While my Air Force years sparked an interest in Christian-Jewish relations, Tokayer became an expert on Jewish history in Asia, including the location of a long-lost Jewish cemetery in Nagasaki. After his military service, he became the rabbi for the Jewish Community of Japan.

Closing A Chapter

My time in the Air Force ended after two years, and in July 1962 I boarded a military version of the then-new Boeing 707 jetliner to return to the States. Unlike my grueling flight two years earlier, my MATS transport back to Travis AFB, from Japan to California, took less than ten hours.

In the years following my return to civilian life, the escalation of the Vietnam War created great pain and division in the United States. As a result of that lengthy conflict, military service was often denigrated in the American public arena. In the years following my time in Asia, I noticed that any mention of my military service was usually omitted whenever I was formally introduced to speak at public gatherings and meetings during my years as an American Jewish Committee senior staff member. But that antipathy began to change after Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001. More recently, my service as a USAF chaplain is frequently highlighted when I speak publicly—a sign of the changing image of the American military.

Today, rabbis, both men and women, continue to volunteer as chaplains. In 2016 twelve rabbis were on active duty in the Army, twelve in the Navy, and seven in the Air Force. Some were stationed in Afghanistan, Korea,

Operation Matzah Ball, Japan, Passover 1961.
(Courtesy A. James Rudin)

Germany, Qatar, Okinawa, and Japan. In addition, Jewish chaplains serve at the military academies at West Point, Annapolis, and Colorado Springs. Philip Schechter's daughter, Sarah Schechter (HUC-JIR, 2003), was the Air Force's first female Jewish chaplain, and she is currently a career officer with the rank of major.

Since the Civil War, Jewish military chaplains have provided spiritual leadership for the nearly one million American Jews who have served in the nation's armed forces. And while their primary goal has been to serve, they have also been personally affected and sometimes transformed by their military duty. They have been active participants inside the armed forces—a major sector of the general American society—and this has deepened the historical impact of the chaplaincy. Their experiences equip them with a level of understanding they never could have gained as civilian rabbis. Although they have sometimes encountered antisemitism—latent and overt—they have also had positive experiences. Many Jewish chaplains have gained a clearheaded, fair-minded respect for the important role the military has played and continues to play in the life of the nation.

Military service can provide a realistic view of the armed forces, warts and all: the heroism and courage as well as the inefficiency and waste; the brilliant leaders as well as those men and women who hide their inadequacies and bad behavior behind the uniform, even a uniform decorated with rows of colorful medals and ribbons. In other words, keen-eyed Jewish chaplains are able to see the good, the bad, the beautiful, and the ugly within the military, which is, of course, a microcosm of the total American society. Rabbis in uniform have helped Jews—themselves included—to become proud, fully participating partners in all phases of American life and society. And that is no small achievement.

A final note: Itazuke as a U.S. military facility was officially closed in 1972, and the air base's single runway is now part of the Fukuoka International Airport, the fourth busiest in Japan. The Administrative Annex, which in the early 1960s resembled a good-sized American town, is long gone. All that remains today are rusted fire hydrants, some neglected asphalt streets with pot holes, grass-covered foundation outlines where many buildings once stood, and the memories of thousands of American men, women, and children who called Itazuke their home between 1945 and 1972.

The Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission facilities in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were both closed in 1975, thirty years after the U.S. Air Force dropped the two nuclear weapons on those cities, which forever changed human history.

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