

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN R. THOMAS
Chaplain, Navy, World War II
Chaplain, Navy, Korean War.

2008

OH
1197

OH
1197

Thomas, John R., (1918-2008). Oral History Interview, 2008.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John Thomas, a Beloit, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II and Korean War service as a chaplain in the Navy. Thomas touches on junior ROTC in high school, his theological training at Carroll College (Wisconsin) and McCormick Theological Seminary, marriage after graduation, and naval chaplain school at the College of William & Mary (Virginia). Assigned to Kinston Marine Corps Auxiliary Airfield (North Carolina), he explains he also had duties at Marine Corps Outlying Landing Field Oak Grove (North Carolina) and relates that one of the pilots transporting him between bases gave him a wild ride. He describes two of the base officers, Major Jones and Colonel Christiansen, and recalls having an argument with the colonel, who got angry about Thomas taking a Jewish soldier to a local synagogue. He recalls officiating the marriage between a second cousin and a Marine sergeant and writing an amusing letter home about it. Thomas talks about his wife spending three months with him in Kinston and critiquing his sermons. He mentions marrying a couple that the other chaplain had refused, being invited to wear a Marine uniform, organizing a Christmas party in 1945, and going on an active duty training cruise in 1946. He details giving marriage counseling to a young woman who had gotten impregnated by a Marine and keeping in touch with her. Living in the Chicago area (Illinois), he talks about finding housing with his wife, specializing in clinical pastoral education, and resettling in San Diego (California). After volunteering for active duty in 1950, he was assigned to Destroyer Squadron 7 and later went through twenty-three different transfers over fifteen months. Thomas recalls having just one bad captain, drinking too much coffee while making his rounds, and taking Dramamine for seasickness. He describes some photographs in a scrapbook. He states his career kept him too busy to join veteran's organizations, but he did attend a couple ship reunions.

Biographical Sketch:

Thomas (1918-2008) served as a Navy chaplain during World War II and the Korean War. During World War II, he served on Marine air stations in North Carolina, and during the Korean War he was assigned to several different ships. Thomas held supervisor and president positions in the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education and eventually settled in Madison, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by John Driscoll, 2008.

Transcribed by Maggi Matousek, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2009.

Format corrected by Katy Marty, 2009.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Driscoll: This is John Driscoll. And today is July 2nd, 2008. And this is an interview with John R. Thomas. John is a veteran of the United States Navy in World War II and Korea?

Thomas: Um-hm.

Driscoll: Okay. And we're doing the interview at John's home in Madison. And, John Thanks a lot for agreeing to the interview. And why don't we start, when and where were you born?

Thomas: I was born on May 28th, 1918 in Rockford, Illinois.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Thomas: And my parents moved to Beloit, Wisconsin when I was about two years old. And so I grew up in Beloit, went to Beloit High School and Carroll College--

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Thomas: McCormick Seminary. And then in 1950, I earned a master's degree from Northwestern--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: In the area of pastoral counseling.

Driscoll: Carroll is a lovely campus there. It's an old school. Isn't it the oldest?

Thomas: It claims to be the oldest. I think Beloit actually had students before Carroll did.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: Carroll, was it 1836 or '46?

Driscoll: How about brothers and sisters?

Thomas: I have two sisters. Deanne [??] is two years younger than I am, and Nancy is three years younger than I am. And then I had a brother, Roger that was born eight years after I was. He died a couple of years ago. He was at the King Veterans' Home. He had a lot of problems in his life.

Driscoll: I see, okay. And then when did you start your theological training?

Thomas: Graduated from Carroll in '42. Graduated from McCormick in '44. I got married the day I got out of seminary. In those days, you were kind of penalized if you got married during seminary--

Driscoll: During, okay. --unless you had a wife that was putting you through.

Thomas: In that case, it wasn't an obligation to the seminary.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: I had taken Junior ROTC at Beloit High School in the last two years. My father had been in World War I and had a big chest in the basement which contained some old uniforms and an old gas mask and various things like that. So we used to play with those when we were kids. So I guess it wasn't surprising then that I got involved in--I guess they called it Junior ROTC for the last two years I was there. So then when I got out of the seminary-- let's see, what--I went to Chaplain School at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg and graduated in March of 1945. And I was very pleased when I got assigned to a Marine Corps air station in Kinston, North Carolina.

Driscoll: Oh, yes, um-hm?

Thomas: Because the older chaplains were getting assigned to ships or the younger chaplains got assigned to duty stations where there were already chaplains. So this was a solo assignment for me. And so I appreciated the symbolic meaning of that.

Driscoll: Great.

Thomas: And I also had duties brought in as a chaplain at Oak Grove Marine Air Station about 50 miles away from Kinston. So then about a couple days a week, I'd go to Oak Grove. And I'd sometimes find a jeep. One pilot offered to fly me; I guess he needed some air time or something. And so I was seated behind him in this SNJ training plane, which had a forward and aft seat in it. So all at once, he started spiraling toward earth. And I was sitting behind him, and so I could see that he still had a hand on the controls.

Driscoll: Um-hm.

Thomas: But he leveled off just in time. He had, as it were, rung me out. But that was one of the few times that I accepted an air trip to Oak Grove. Depending on the season of the year, I'd pass Negroes planting the tobacco plants or picking the leaves and, as I drove along, noticed how many poor black families had very poor housing. One day, one of the planes, it was an XF6F fighter plane, and the right wheel refused to lock. And the skipper of the station had the pilot fly around until his fuel was nearly exhausted and then gave him the okay to land. A doctor and I were in a jeep at the

end of the runway. And the pilot really managed to not have the plane flip over. And then the plane kind of settled down on the one wheel. But when we got to the pilot, his flying suit was wringing wet.

Driscoll: I can imagine.

Thomas: He really sweated it out. And when I was in this air station, I was assigned to the commanding officer—we had two photographic squadrons, and one of them was commanded by Colonel Christianson [??] and one of them by Major Jones. And Major Jones was a more jovial fellow. Colonel Christianson--I can remember once it was some kind of Jewish holiday. And one of our Jewish lads had not come back on time, had been AWOL [Absent With Out Leave]. And I offered to take him in to a local synagogue where they were having an appropriate Jewish service. And I had thought that, you know, and trusted the chaplain that there wouldn't be any concerns. He was very adamant that this Jewish lad wasn't going to pull anything on him. So I raised a question of religious intolerance, and the colonel got very mad at me and said, "There's the door, Padre." And then later on, the major came down and apologized for the colonel, for the way he had rebuked me. One of the interesting experiences that I had was discovered that I had a second cousin--

Driscoll: Oh yeah?

Thomas: Who was a woman reserve [unintelligible]. And I'd forgotten exactly – what happened. But anyway, she and one of the top sergeants in the Marines were going to get married. So they asked me if I would officiate at the service.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Thomas: And we did that. I've forgotten whether we did that in a local church or if it was in one of the Quonset hut chapels. But I wrote home to my wife and said that, "Today I married Winnie Davies [??]." I got this nice letter back. Well, I thought that you had married me? I wasn't very careful in--

Driscoll: Talk about a Dear John?

Thomas: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Driscoll: Wow, that's a good story.

Thomas: My wife, at this point, was working for as a counselor for Western Electric Company.

Driscoll: Okay.

- Thomas: And she joined me for about three months in this small North Carolina town of about 12-13,000 people. And when I arranged for her to take about a three months leave of absence, which she did, here we were stuck in this town without any car.
- Driscoll: Oh, boy.
- Thomas: And living next door was a dentist from the field, and he had a car. So we got back and forth to the base all right but didn't have much other stuff going on.
- Driscoll: This was in Kinston?
- Thomas: Yeah.
- Driscoll: Yeah, okay.
- Thomas: One day we took a--somehow managed to get to Morehead City. And I saw my wife waving at me. I was lying on the beach getting sunburned, and so I waved back at her. The next thing I knew, the lifeguard was pulling her in. She was in the undertow and, you know, the very brave husband waving at her.
- Driscoll: Oh, wow.
- Thomas: Every place you went in Kinston, they always said, "Good bye and hurry back." That was the North Carolinian living experience.
- Driscoll: What were some of your duties?
- Thomas: Oh, as a chaplain--
- Driscoll: Yeah.
- Thomas: Sunday services in what was called a Quonset hut, which was a square hut with a roof on it. Then you'd put two of these or three of these together for the temple. And so I had Sunday services there. At that time, I wasn't a very good preacher, and Marguerite would give me some suggestions after the service. And I knew they were true, but it didn't make me happy that I wasn't doing a better job. Then she went back to work, wanted to hang onto her position.
- Driscoll: Western Electric where?
- Thomas: In--is it Cicero, Illinois?
- Driscoll: By Chicago, yes.
- Thomas: And they had started a program offering counseling to employees.

Driscoll: That was early on?

Thomas: Oh, this was 1944, '45. The Hawthorne Experiment, they called it.

Driscoll: Yes, I remember hearing some of that. Go ahead and describe it.

Thomas: That's all right. And so they found out that people who had some help with problems did a better job in the company than those who didn't have that access. Before being discharged in May of '46, I was transferred to the big Cherry Point Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina. And one time I remember going into the chaplain's office, I noticed a young Marine and a tearful young lady with one of our theologically conservative chaplains. And he said, "John, this couple wants to talk with you"—and he left abruptly. I asked them to come in one of the offices and tell me how I could be of assistance to them. And the bride had come all the way from Chicago to North Carolina so they could get married before he shipped out. But the other chaplain had refused to marry them.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Thomas: And so I realized that they had known each other a long time. So I arranged to officiate at their wedding; I guess it was the next day. And the wedding took place. My other duties included visiting the flight line. And I did--I guess I didn't have that picture here. Anyway, they assigned me—scooters were not very possible. And this is all they have.

Driscoll: Oh, yes, okay.

Thomas: The chaplain assigned me one of these so I could go out to the flight line. And this was me and my wife. And I was in the Marine Corps, so I was--so they invited me to wear the Marine uniform. And this was my summer whites.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Thomas: So we had F6Fs, which were single-engine planes. And then they gave us F7Fs, which was a twin-engine.

Driscoll: This was photo recon?

Thomas: Um-hm. Then, of course, if there were military funerals in the area, I was called out to do those. We had a--I was--let's see. I've forgotten exactly what my duties were, but I remember helping organize a Christmas party in 1945.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And I guess that's as far as it goes.

Driscoll: What's the carrier here?

Thomas: Oh, that's the FDR 40--CVB-42--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And I was on it for a--active duty training cruise from Norfolk to New York and back. I've forgotten the year--on back of that. I don't have the year on that. Probably about 1946. And we were refueling a destroyer--

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: And I had this sailor standing next to me, he said, "Padre, I'd give my right arm to be down there." And this thing was bouncing around. And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, it's a family down there; here we got 3,000 men."

Driscoll: Yeah, that's right.

Thomas: And then lo and behold--that was in '49, I guess it was. And then in '50, when I offered to go back on active duty for Korea, they--my orders read, DesRon Seven, so I had eight destroyers I was responsible for.

Driscoll: Oh, wow.

Thomas: And that was kind of fun, because I had never been in a destroyer except for in port.

Driscoll: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: And somewhere here, I have some pictures of—I thought I did. No, I must have given them to-- what's her name?

Driscoll: Gayle?

Thomas: Dale?

Driscoll: At the museum, yeah.

Thomas: Water pouring over the deck from when we were refueling and stuff. I had, I think, 23 different transfers--

Driscoll: Wow.

Thomas: In the fifteen months that I was on destroyers.

Driscoll: Wow.

Thomas: And the skipper would see this bag of stuff coming over, think he's going to get a new batch of sailors, which he badly needed, and here it was the chaplain coming over.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: But I had 15 different commanding officers in those 15 months.

Driscoll: Wow.

Thomas: That included the destroyer squadron and the division squadron captains. And out of the fifteen or sixteen, there was only one that was a "Captain Queeg" [a fictional horrible captain from *The Caine Mutiny*].

Driscoll: There's always got to be one, yeah.

Thomas: And one night I explained my frustration. And we were at a movie topside. And the engineering officer, who was a Mustang, which started out as a seaman--

Driscoll: Yeah.

Thomas: Said, "Padre, do you know what your problem is?" And I said, "No, Dennis." He said, "Well, you expect perfect justice in the United States Navy." And all at once, I realized that that was true; I expected the captain to be good to the padre. And this one guy I'd--occasionally would be at captain's mast. And somebody make [unintelligible] to me to be a pretty good excuse. And the exec would not accept it. And I said, "How come?" And he said, "Well, don't forget, I was a white that once." He had heard them all.

Driscoll: Probably used them all?

Thomas: Yeah.

Driscoll: That was great. How long were you at sea?

Thomas: About fifteen months.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And I'm trying to remember. I had arranged to call my wife on our wedding Anniversary--November 4th. And that was when the Chinese communists got in the war.

Driscoll: Okay, all right.

Thomas: So we pulled out early the next morning for the north. And I think I completed my phone call to my wife about three months later. Because we hadn't been back in port with a long distance phone call. Those were before, of course, the days of email.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: But I got an awful lot of credit. Because when I'd come aboard a new ship and somehow ice cream would be served that night, I'd get the credit for it.

Driscoll: It's a miracle.

Thomas: Yeah. Well, I spent a lot of time just visiting various departments on each ship. And each time, of course, they wanted to "Have a cup of joe, Padre?" So I got coffee'd out a lot.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah. So you'd drink a lot?

Thomas: But you'd hear a request through the Red Cross for somebody's father died--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: Or something like that, would have to. This one captain, it would have been very simple to have a Halo come from the carrier and pick the guy up, and he said no.

Driscoll: Wouldn't do it?

Thomas: So he was the one guy I didn't get along with. He also kind of bragged that he was a 32nd Degree Mason or whatever. I don't know anything about them.

Driscoll: I don't either.

Thomas: But, anyway, I didn't think that he was as humane as he could have been. But otherwise, I had good rapport with all the other skippers.

Driscoll: Good.

Thomas: It was kind of rough, though. Because as the chaplain--the best place to ride a destroyer, if you got seasick problems, is mid-ship.

Driscoll: Yes, right by the engine room, yes.

Thomas: And they had a nice aft quarters for about six officers about mid-ship. And, of course, I was not a permanent officer, so I got what was left. And that was always the--just aft of the forward chief's quarters, there was a junior officers' company. So I could lay there at night and hear the waves. A steel ship, you know, it wasn't very thick. And then I would go to bed thinking this was all in my head. And then I'd

wake up in the morning, and the destroyer had changed course because they were playing guards with the carriers. And I guess I even looked green when I came to the table. And, fortunately, the chief of the hospital had a good supply of Dramamine. So I was kind of half sleepy, but anytime-- **[End of Tape 1, Side 1]**

Driscoll: Dramamine?

Thomas: Yeah. Well, then I discovered that the ship had actually changed course and we were into the wind. So my idea that it was all in my head was partly true, but it was because of the change of course. Yeah. I don't have any--I thought I had some here, pictures of--I thought I saw a picture. This was on the carrier. We had Easter services on my FDR [??]. And somewhere here, there was a picture of myself conducting services in a long --on a kind of a deck of a destroyer, forward of a mid-ship, with the men seated behind me. And I'd use whatever I could for a place for the cross and the candlesticks. I'm trying to remember what--it seems to me once I had to use a depth charge or something like that--seems symbolic.

Driscoll: You do with what you got.

Thomas: I tried, yeah.

Driscoll: How was attendance at services?

Thomas: Oh, I don't think I ever had more than thirty. That's ten percent of the crew. A certain percent were on duty, of course. But sometimes I conducted it down below decks if the weather was bad; and I'm trying to remember if I had fewer or more than topside. I think I had about the same number. That was, of course, during the Korean event. I--well, that's pretty easy. That was when I went to chaplain school.

Driscoll: There's a couple of lady chaplains?

Thomas: They weren't lady chaplains. I think they were administrative types to run the office.

Driscoll: Oh, I see.

Thomas: And this was all the way--this was a Dallas hut chapel.

Driscoll: Okay. Must be around Christmastime with the wreath on the door.

Thomas: Yeah. And here's V-E Day.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah. What was the reaction of everyone around you when they heard about V-E Day?

Thomas: Everyone was pleased. They wanted to go home. This is the other plane that we used, was a single-engine fighter plane. This photography, they were teaching those pilots--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: To come in low and take photographs.

Driscoll: Are those TB--not TBFs?

Thomas: That's an F6.

Driscoll: F6, a Wildcat or? I forget what they call them?

Thomas: That sounded like--and then the 7Fs, I think I showed you, didn't I--

Driscoll: Yes.

Thomas: The two-engine?

Driscoll: Yeah, the two-engine.

Thomas: Yeah, that was on May 8th. And then in August, I think it was, V-J Day.

Driscoll: V-J Day, yes. Now, when V-J Day happened, you were still--you weren't in the Pacific then, were you?

Thomas: No--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: I was at the Marine Corps air station.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: Let's see, I got--oh, here's the F7, which was a faster plane. Oh, yeah, here's Christmas at the air station--

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Thomas: Christmas dinner.

Driscoll: What was your rank, John? Was it JG [Junior Grade]?

Thomas: I wasn't in as a JG during Korea; I was a lieutenant.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: This is the Christmas--

Driscoll: Oh.

Thomas: They weren't starving us. They were treating us very special.

Driscoll: Oh wow, good eating.

Thomas: Yes. Let's see, this is Major Jones, and this is Colonel Christiansen; they were the two squadron commanders. This was at a party off base.

Driscoll: Oh, yeah.

Thomas: When I wrote my wife "I married Winnie Davies," this was Winnie.

Driscoll: Okay. Had you known her before that?

Thomas: No.

Driscoll: Little bit of a reunion, then?

Thomas: Yeah.

Driscoll: That's quite a scrapbook, yes.

Thomas: I thought I'd given all these pictures when wha-cha-ma-call-it had come over.

Driscoll: Gayle?

Thomas: What?

Driscoll: Gayle?

Thomas: Yeah.

Driscoll: Have you ever been back in the archives and seen what they actually have back there?

Thomas: No.

Driscoll: Oh, it's extensive. And it's all humidity-controlled and fireproofed and all that. She's a professional archivist, and she runs a good shop. Because these pictures and all that material that goes in there, that's all precious stuff.

- Thomas: Yeah. I'm trying to figure out--I know I gave her my logbooks, which indicate services that I conducted and everyone that I counseled and stuff like that.
- Driscoll: Well, how was--how was being a chaplain as far as the military organization went? Were you pretty much on your own, or did you have any oversight or--?
- Thomas: Well, I was--during World War II, I was the one chaplain for the station; there weren't any other chaplains over me. I had a district chaplain at Cherry Point that I, if I had any questions, once in a while I'd call him on the phone to find out about something. My one experience--as a chaplain, my office was practically next door to the commanding officer's office on this Kinston Air Station. And one day Major Omelia [??] came down and had two men in civilian clothes. And he said, "Padre, these men want to talk to you." And that's the only clue I had. And I invited them to come in and sit down. And what had happened, that one was the father of a young lady--I don't know whether she was in the Marine Corps or not--and the other was the pastor. And the Marine who had allegedly impregnated her was at a different base--
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Thomas: Thirty or forty miles away. And the pastor thought I could just call up the Marine and get him over here and get them married. And I got the information about it and called up and talked with him on the phone. And he was going to come over two different times to meet the parent and the pastor but didn't show up either time. So then in my counseling with the daughter involved, it became pretty obvious that he didn't want to accept any responsibility for her.
- Driscoll: Sure.
- Thomas: So then I helped her to sort out what kind of a marriage that would be. And, finally, she and her mother agreed to go someplace else, you know—and that was in a small town--and went away and had the baby and kept the baby and then came back. And I stayed in touch with her for a couple of years. And she shared with me that she had married another Marine and they were going to have a baby, and things were looking pretty good for them.
- Driscoll: Good. So that worked out.
- Thomas: I had had quite a bit of what we call clinical pastoral education, which was actually like a doctor has an internship.
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Thomas: And we, as chaplains, had units of this kind of training under the supervision of another chaplain and with a group of chaplains discussing it. So I had a little bit of

preparation for this kind of counseling than the average person did. When I got to chaplain school, nobody even knew what clinical pastoral education was, so--and so I thought I was pretty smart, you know. And it turned out that I needed it, that kind of training. And also, when I got out, I realized I needed more of it. So I became a specialist in what they called clinical pastoral education after a couple more years of preparation

Driscoll: Then when did you get out of the Navy?

Thomas: Let's see, I actually was released from active duty from Cherry Point in June of 1946.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And then we tried to get an apartment. I put an ad in the Chicago Tribune, you know, "Navy chaplain and wife seeking an apartment." I got one answer back, one answer. [Oh, thank you.] And that was from a lady whose husband was--apparently had had memory problems and was in some kind of an institution further south in Chicago. But we had this one response from Mrs. Hawkinson [??] in Lombard, she would rent a couple of rooms in her home, including kitchen privileges and a little bit of an alcove that--so we would have some privacy. And that was nice. We were there for a year. And the Aurora and Elgin into Chicago where I was working at Cook County Hospital at that time was only a couple blocks' walk.

Driscoll: Oh, okay.

Thomas: So I got a salary of \$225 a month, and then I'd pay \$85 a month rent and then another \$30 for transportation to Chicago. So you can see that we had \$115 a month to live on. And the first two paychecks were late. And so I had to borrow money from the bank, unsecured loan, for the Church Federation to pay--pay me back so that then I could pay off the bank loan

Driscoll: And then after that, you stayed in the ministry, I assume?

Thomas: Oh, yeah. That was just the one year that we were in Lombard. And then I was certified as an acting supervisor that fall, in '48 I guess it was. And then as a part of my training, I began seeing a psychoanalyst. In those days, if you were doing training of beginning supervisors, you wanted to make sure that your own problems didn't interfere with the others.

Driscoll: Oh, sure.

Thomas: So I had a couple of years of that before I went back on active duty in 1950.

Driscoll: Now, did you get called back, or did you volunteer to go back or?

Thomas: You'll remember that--was it in June or July of that year, the Chinese attacked South Koreans.

Driscoll: North Korea attacked South Korea that summer, yeah.

Thomas: Yeah. So I called up to see whether or not if we needed any Navy chaplains. I had not been overseas in World War II, and we hadn't started our family yet, so I felt I was in pretty good shape to check it out. So they called back in several weeks and told me that I had been assigned to Destroyer Squadron 7, which was the big one.

Driscoll: Where? Where was it based?

Thomas: Oh, in San Diego.

Driscoll: San Diego, okay.

Thomas: Oh, yeah. I remember my wife and I driving our Nash Rambler out to San Diego. And I've forgotten what happened. Anyway, we got out there, and she decided that she'd rather fly back. And so I turned the relatively new car in out there, and then she picked one up in Kenosha.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And then later on, when I got off destroyer duty—we just got settled in San Diego--she drove a car out by herself. We had a nice dog. And so the dog sat up on the front seat, and so she wasn't worried.

Driscoll: She had company on the trip.

Thomas: She had company, yeah, didn't worry.

Driscoll: Great.

Thomas: And we had visited a force chaplain--fellow name of Hohenstein [??]--who had a picnic for us destroyer chaplains and our families. So she brought Jan [??] along with her on a leash. And she was well-behaved. So the next day, we had this call from this lady who had an apartment over her garage. But then when she found out it was--I had a dog, then she checked with her friend who was at the party and gave an okay. So we had the dog, so--

Driscoll: The dog had references.

Thomas: The dog had references. And then, of course, then a few months later, son John was born. And so we walked with the baby carriage and the dog on the leash around the neighborhood, yeah. Funny how little things--

- Driscoll: They stay in your mind.
- Thomas: Make a difference.
- Driscoll: Yeah. After you got out, did you keep in contact with any of the people you were in with? Any reunions--anything like that?
- Thomas: I did not for a number of years. I was busy teaching clinical pastoral education, and that organization took up most of my energy--
- Driscoll: Okay.
- Thomas: And time. Later on, I noticed that one of our ships was having a reunion. So Margaret, my second wife, and I signed up for the reunion.
- Driscoll: Oh, okay.
- Thomas: And had a nice experience. That was in the Quad Cities. And then we had another one in the Chicago area.
- Driscoll: Oh, good, good.
- Thomas: So I touched base with some people who had remembered me. I hadn't--because I was bouncing around on these eight ships--
- Driscoll: Yeah.
- Thomas: I didn't have many personal relationships develop. But it was fun to be with the guys again--
- Driscoll: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Thomas: And their families.
- Driscoll: Any activity with the veterans' organizations?
- Thomas: No. The one veterans' organization that I later got involved with in the last few years was a veterans' organization against war. I technically belonged to the American Legion for many years; but actually, with my other professional conferences, I didn't get ever get active with that.
- Driscoll: Sure.
- Thomas: I think maybe one year I was supposed to be the state chaplain or something, but I really can't claim any activities-- **[End of Tape 1, Side 2]** Well, and expecting to get called back. I mean, that's why we were there. And World War II, how did I feel

about my life getting upset? I guess I felt that I owed it, because I had not--well, let's see, World War II? Let's see, I volunteered. Hmm, I have to think back. 1944, I graduated from seminary. And then, let's see, in 1944, I applied for a regular commission in the US Naval Reserve. Dick Pritchard [??] gave me a good recommendation, and I received my commission in November of '44 as a Lieutenant, Junior Grade. Marguerite and I were married the next day, November 4th. And 15--I've got 16. My orders to report for the Naval Chaplain School at the College of William and Mary were on November 30th.

Driscoll: Oh, that was right after--yeah, okay.

Thomas: And it was my first trip in an upper bunk sleeper.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: An admiral in the supply corps was on the train. And, fortunately, I had been in Junior ROTC, so I remembered how to salute. It was the first time I was in, you know, a JG uniform. And he took me to the Norfolk Chaplain School. And then those of us who were in the—at Williamsburg, if we hadn't had any parish experience, they assigned us to a chaplain at a nearby Naval base--

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: Which made up for my lack of parish experience. So it was the extra duty for the parish.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: So when I--it wasn't as though I were picked up and set down. I volunteered.

Driscoll: Okay.

Thomas: And so it wasn't that kind of a strain. We didn't have any children. And I had just gotten married, so.

Driscoll: I think I've done--I couldn't give a hard number-- but I've done well over a hundred of these interviews. And I've never had a veteran, male or female, complain.

Thomas: Uh-huh.

Driscoll: Now, some of them didn't like it, and some of the stuff they got into was awful, but there was no, "Poor me. Everybody--The world is against me. They came and made me go." Everybody's attitude was, you know--had to.

Thomas: Well, that would be especially true for chaplains, certainly.

Driscoll: We were going to make a landing, and we thought it was going to be bad, very bad, in Lebanon in 1956. I was in the Marine Corps. And we had--we thought Syria was going to invade; and we were getting into it, and we were pretty uptight. And we were down to the nights getting into the landing boat. I was a sergeant, and I was checking the guys into the boat. And here was one Marine without a rifle. And I grabbed him by the collar and said, "Where the heck is your rifle?" And he turned around; here it was our chaplain. And I said, "You're supposed to be up there." And he said, "No, I'm supposed to be here." Yeah. And he wasn't a terribly young guy; but that's where he thought he, you know, he was supposed to be.

Thomas: Um-hmm.

Driscoll: Okay, this is a remarkable story. Every one of these stories is so different and so important. Golly, you can read a book about the time you were in the service, but that's--that's not the story; that's not the real story.

Thomas: Yeah.

Driscoll: Okay. Before we wrap this up, anything else you want to get to, John?

Thomas: No. I guess the only thing is that as a chaplain, I--particularly during Korea, I heard a lot of sad stories--

Driscoll: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

Thomas: About people who were in the Reserves and didn't realize they were in the Reserves, and they had gotten called. I remember one fellow was--had requested a different designator, a different type of officer, because he got seasick--

Driscoll: Oh.

Thomas: And he ended back on the destroyer.

Driscoll: Yeah.

Thomas: It's just--

Driscoll: Yeah. I remember as a kid, we went to a baseball game in Cleveland, and we took the train up. And as we were at--leaving the game and going into the big terminal tower, the station there, there was a Marine unit that had just been called up, a Reserve unit; and they were putting them on the train. And there were wives and kids crying. And it was--it was a sad thing to see.

Thomas: Oh, sure.

Driscoll: But they didn't have much warning; they just grabbed everybody. Yeah, I

remember that very clearly. Sergeants running around, running around and pushing guys on the train. Okay, this is great. Well, I'll tell you what. I'll take this--in fact, the museum on the way home. And I'll give that, the copy you gave me here, I'll give that to them. And they will--it will take them a couple of weeks, but they will transcribe this and they will send you a copy of it.

[End of interview]