

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU  
Historical Services Branch

**Interview NGB-16**

INTERVIEW OF

Chaplain (COL) JACOB GOLDSTEIN  
Chaplain, NY STARC

CONDUCTED BY

MAJ LES' MELNYK  
National Guard Bureau

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Editorial clarifications indicated by brackets [ ]

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

## 1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 **MAJ MELNYK:** This is MAJ Les' Melnyk, Army  
3 National Guard Historian for the National Guard Bureau.

4 I am interviewing Chaplain Rabbi COL Jacob  
5 Goldstein, of the New York Army National Guard. He is  
6 the Chaplain for the Headquarters STARC, New York Army  
7 National Guard.

8 This interview is taking place on the 20th of  
9 September 2001, in the Chaplain's office in the 7th  
10 Regiment Army in New York City.

11 Chaplain Goldstein, to begin, you have read  
12 and signed the Oral History Access Agreement that you  
13 agreed that the Army can use this history in any way  
14 that it chooses; is that correct?

15 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Yes, sir.

16 **MAJ MELNYK:** Could you briefly state for me  
17 your -- what you do in civilian life and, also, a brief  
18 synopsis of your military career?

19 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** In civilian life, I'm  
20 Assistant Housing Commissioner for the State of New  
21 York, with the State Division of Housing, with the

1 Office of Rent Administration, and I'm the Assistant  
2 Commissioner, with responsibility for the five  
3 boroughs.

4 I'm also Chairman of the Community Board and  
5 won't list everything else that I do, but, briefly, I'm  
6 also a chaplain with the United States Secret Service.

7 Militarily, I entered the Army on 13 March  
8 1977, served as a first lieutenant with the 101st  
9 Signal Battalion.

10 Then from 101 Signal Battalion, I went to the  
11 205th -- at that time, it was Support Group. I was  
12 assigned to them.

13 **MAJ MELNYK:** These are both New York Army  
14 Guard units.

15 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Everything I've been  
16 through has been the Army National Guard, all my life.

17 Then I was at the 187th Signal Group for a  
18 short period of time. I was in Grenada with Operation  
19 Urgent Fury.

20 **MAJ MELNYK:** As a?

21 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** As a Jewish chaplain, as

1 the Jewish chaplain for the invasion.

2 I served the 205th Support Group. I'm trying  
3 to remember everything I did. That was Desert Storm,  
4 went to Desert Storm with the 369<sup>th</sup> [Transportation  
5 Battalion, NY ARNG], was detached when the air war  
6 started from the 369th and was sent directly to Israel  
7 to serve as a task force chaplain with the American  
8 Patriot units - Task Force Patriot Defender, and worked  
9 for COL Dave Heatner (phonetic,) who was the brigade  
10 commander, 10th ADA Brigade out of Germany, and he  
11 subsequently became the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff  
12 of the Army, retired as a lieutenant general.

13 Let's see. Came back, went to the  
14 Headquarters, Troop Command. Well, I came back to the  
15 107<sup>th</sup> [Support Group], then went to the Troop Command,  
16 and from the Troop Command, became the State Staff  
17 Chaplain somewhere around this time, I think two years  
18 ago or three years ago. I can't remember. You never  
19 know in this business. You get mixed up with time, but  
20 roughly that's it.

21 **MAJ MELNYK:** Thank you. Getting now to the --

1 back to September 11, last week, last Tuesday, how did  
2 you learn of the terrorist attack? What was your  
3 initial reaction? Where did you go and what did you do  
4 when you first found out about it?

5 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I work not far from the  
6 World Trade Center. I work on Beaver Street.

7 That morning, I was scheduled to be in my  
8 office and the last minute the day before, I had to re-  
9 schedule to have a meeting with one of my offices in  
10 Brooklyn.

11 When I arrived at the office, one of the  
12 people said, "Look, the World Trade Center is on fire."

13 We have trouble with our radio. We didn't know what  
14 was going on.

15 We could see the smoke, had a direct line of  
16 sight. As we were looking, we saw plane number two go  
17 barreling into the tower.

18 Hard to tell, at that time, if it was Tower 1  
19 or Tower 2, which tower was hit, but we saw plane two.

20 I immediately ran to the phone and tried to  
21 call and see what was going and all the lines were

1 jammed, all hell was breaking loose.

2 I then called Albany. I thought this was a  
3 disaster much bigger than that, perhaps the Guard would  
4 be calling out. Little did I know it was a terrorist  
5 activity.

6 And I called. They said that two planes, not  
7 one, but two were driven and maybe as many as four  
8 planes out there looking to crash -- may have crashed.

9 At that time, there were all kinds of things, the  
10 Pentagon, White House, what have you.

11 So it was -- I realized this was serious  
12 stuff. So people in my office there, I had to keep  
13 them calm, sent everybody home. Traffic was screwed  
14 up, backed up from Manhattan into Brooklyn.

15 And I called again and they told me to report  
16 to Randalls Island. Initially, that was going to be  
17 the standup point. Randalls Island, I think my  
18 assistant, I called him on the phone, I said, "Hey,  
19 grab your gear. I don't know what's going on. Just  
20 grab your gear, whatever you got, take your TA-50  
21 equipment, you know," and I picked him up."

1           I had already drew a government sedan. I went  
2 and drew one from an armory. Picked him up, went to  
3 Randalls Island. There were some other people there,  
4 and they said, "Well, maybe go to the Park Avenue  
5 armory," which I did. I reported in.

6           Came to the armory and set up shop and here I  
7 am.

8           And my main mission is to coordinate all  
9 chaplain activities. Chaplain, chaplain assistant  
10 activities.

11           **MAJ MELNYK:** And how many chaplains do you  
12 have on the ground?

13           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Currently, twelve, twelve  
14 teams. Would you like a list of them?

15           **MAJ MELNYK:** You did. And the teams consist  
16 of?

17           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Chaplain, chaplain  
18 assistant.

19           **MAJ MELNYK:** And --

20           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** But not every chaplain  
21 has an assistant currently. Some are elsewhere, some

1 are at school. So they don't all have assistants, but  
2 most of them have assistants.

3 **MAJ MELNYK:** What -- do you also coordinate  
4 with the medical teams, the psychological teams?

5 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** No, not really. We work  
6 closely with them, but we don't coordinate. If they  
7 need us, they call us.

8 **MAJ MELNYK:** When did you -- at what point did  
9 you begin organizing and calling other chaplains in?  
10 Some of them are assigned to units. Some of them came  
11 from outside the area.

12 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Absolutely correct. The  
13 chaplains that came with the units that were called up,  
14 they came organic to the units. Those units that came  
15 without chaplains, I looked at them real quick, as I  
16 saw who was coming. In order to plus them up, I looked  
17 right away.

18 Which brings me to an interesting event. The  
19 engineer brigade, of the 42nd Infantry Division was  
20 called up in toto. So that gave me three chaplains and  
21 chaplains' assistants. When they came to Stewart, they

1 were told to go home because they stood them down.

2 Well, they got back on again this weekend.

3 They stood them down.

4 I told the chaplains not to move from Stewart  
5 til I did some checking.

6 **MAJ MELNYK:** Where is Stewart located?

7 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Stewart is right above  
8 Newburgh, New York [about 15 miles North of West  
9 Point].

10 **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

11 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** It's right up the  
12 Thruway. So I guess they were trekking across country,  
13 you know, from Buffalo.

14 **MAJ MELNYK:** And that was a staging area.

15 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** For the -- that was the  
16 staging area, pre-position staging area for the  
17 engineers.

18 **MAJ MELNYK:** And what's located at Stewart,  
19 then?

20 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** What's located on  
21 Stewart? State police, the 109th Aviation, 109th

1 Military Wing.

2           **MAJ MELNYK:** And that's where they -- all  
3 right.

4           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** They are big tenants over  
5 there.

6           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

7           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** So the bottom line was I  
8 told the chaplains to stand fast, called -- and then  
9 made a decision to bring them into the city, because I  
10 had the units that needed coverage, I had an (inaudible  
11 - armory?) that needed coverage, and they said "great."

12           I called the commander to get their  
13 permission, which I did, they're now working for me.

14           **MAJ MELNYK:** When did you call them? I saw  
15 today you had a meeting of all your chaplains.

16           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Correct.

17           **MAJ MELNYK:** Is this the first time or have  
18 you been able to get a coordinated --

19           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I have talked with them  
20 off and on, but this is the first time I got them all  
21 in under one roof. This is a very large mission.

1           **MAJ MELNYK:** Yes.

2           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** People think it's just  
3 the World Trade Center, but it's much greater than the  
4 World Trade Center itself.

5           **MAJ MELNYK:** Can you --

6           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** ..with responsibilities  
7 all over the place. Go ahead.

8           **MAJ MELNYK:** In general, what services has it  
9 encompassed, other than directly administering to the  
10 troops down in that site? Have you been involved with  
11 civilian bereavement centers?

12           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Not really. They have  
13 civilian chaplains. We told them at the civilian  
14 bereavement center, "Hey, if you need us, call us,  
15 we're there."

16           But when they [the bereavement center] were  
17 located at the 69<sup>th</sup> [regimental armory], it was easier.

18           **MAJ MELNYK:** Yes.

19           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Because we had a chaplain  
20 assigned there. Now they're at Pier 92, I believe, in  
21 that area, it's a little more difficult.

1           I mean, if they need backup, if they need  
2 assistance, we'll get them chaplains from our assets  
3 that we have or if we don't have them, we'll find them.

4           But they have not called and I don't think  
5 they're really going to call, because I don't think  
6 there's a need for them.

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right. At this meeting, you had  
8 one of the doctors here who is --

9           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Joan Sullivan.

10          **MAJ MELNYK:** Yes.

11          **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Division doctor.

12          **MAJ MELNYK:** And she's mostly concerned with  
13 the psychological care at this point that there aren't  
14 that many actual physical medical cases.

15          **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Right. Well.

16          **MAJ MELNYK:** Have you worked closely with her  
17 before. What's --

18          **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I know her very well.

19          **MAJ MELNYK:** You know her very well. What is  
20 the protocol for chaplains when -- do they -- to work  
21 with the psychological services? When do you pass one

1 off to the other?

2           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** We work very closely. I  
3 mean, they'd want a chaplain, there's a need for a  
4 chaplain, you know, stress, whatever, he's there. All  
5 chaplains, most -- almost all of them went through or  
6 have had CIS training - Critical Incident Stress  
7 training.

8           So we would know what to look for (inaudible)  
9 people. In this case, we would be working to probably  
10 help identify people who need help, or want to see a  
11 chaplain, or think he can (inaudible) in his hands.

12           **MAJ MELNYK:** Most of the chaplains have  
13 commented that the soldiers appear to be holding up  
14 well. There are a few, especially those who had --  
15 were bringing difficulties in with them that have  
16 cracked under the strain.

17           But what are -- the long term problems are the  
18 real concerns for the chaplains that I talked to.

19           What actions or how are you prepared for  
20 possible long term problems with the soldiers?

21           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Well, there's two key

1 components. Number one, if they're in that unit,  
2 that's very helpful, because they know the soldier and  
3 the soldier has a good working relationship with that  
4 chaplain, or that unit knows the chaplain.

5           Number two, the chaplain, just like anybody  
6 else, he can come in and out and the next person would  
7 be able to pick up from where he left off.

8           So hopefully chaplains will be able to, in the  
9 unit, be able to continue, and if not, defer to the  
10 chaplain that's coming in.

11           **MAJ MELNYK:** I see from yesterday's New York  
12 Times article, which actually covers you, that you had  
13 performed services down at Ground Zero.

14           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Yes.

15           **MAJ MELNYK:** How much of an opportunity have  
16 you had to get down there and do ministering of your  
17 own?

18           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** More than one occasion.  
19 I've done three or four services. I've blessed two  
20 flags that have gone from flagpoles, including one  
21 that's flying - the famous one that's flying in front

1 [at ground zero] - before they put it up.

2 One of the cops actually came over to me, said  
3 "You're a Chaplain," he says, "you want to bless this  
4 flag?" I said "That would be a great idea."

5 Before I knew it, they had 300 people standing  
6 in a semicircle, you know, and just said a prayer over  
7 the flag and over the people, the families. So it was  
8 kind of a moving event.

9 Then soon as I was done with the flag,  
10 somebody screamed "Let's do it," and everybody just  
11 disappeared and went back to work.

12 **MAJ MELNYK:** And you held Rosh Hashana  
13 services on Tuesday.

14 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** And Wednesday.

15 **MAJ MELNYK:** And Wednesday.

16 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Both days, outside.

17 **MAJ MELNYK:** That is what is described in the  
18 Times article. But the construction, the -- not the  
19 construction, but the recovery effort had to go on.

20 What was that like? Was that unique for you?

21 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** It was different. I

1 mean, I was sad that I was out there digging, you know,  
2 with everybody else, so that was unique.

3           It's unique because of the mission. Whoever  
4 thought he would be standing and doing this in New York  
5 City? and battle rattled and, you know, doing the  
6 various things that we're doing just guarding?

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** How have you dealt with the anger  
8 and the desire for revenge that soldiers have been  
9 expressing?

10           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Well, I told them we need  
11 a -- I've talked to some soldiers about that, you know.  
12 I let that play itself out, because it can get you  
13 into trouble.

14           So they did appreciate talking to us about  
15 that. I'm not sure I have the desire for revenge, but  
16 America has to go back to do what it's got to do.

17           Should have done this a long time ago. So now  
18 I think we're going to be pushed to do it.

19           **MAJ MELNYK:** And is that the sense you're  
20 getting from the soldiers, that they're -- what is your  
21 sense of the mental and spiritual state of the soldiers

1 that you spoke to? Where are they?

2 Is there a strong desire for revenge? What is  
3 your evaluation?

4 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I'm not sure. You know,  
5 nobody wants to go to war, but if you got to do it,  
6 let's do it.

7 I mean, the President was very blunt when he  
8 said things that no one has ever said. Even his father  
9 never said that, you know, we're going to come back  
10 with body bags. That's a big bad word.

11 But I think he wants to break that taboo,  
12 because that can happen. So instead of people being  
13 shocked, they will understand, well, that's the price  
14 you got to pay to stay free.

15 **MAJ MELNYK:** Mentally preparing them for --

16 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Absolutely.

17 **MAJ MELNYK:** -- for the losses that have to --  
18 that will occur.

19 Can you summarize, initially, your feelings  
20 upon realizing this was a massive terrorist attack?  
21 Have your feelings changed in this past week, as you've

1     confronted the events?

2                   **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:**   It's hard to say.  In  
3     terms of reprisal?

4                   **MAJ MELNYK:**   In terms of -- have you yourself  
5     gone through periods of mourning or sorrow or anger or  
6     . . . .

7                   **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:**  Yes, I think so.  Yeah.  
8     Anger, because I know people who have relatives in that  
9     building, in that pile.  They call my house.  So if  
10    they don't get me, my wife won't give them my phone  
11    number, thank God.  There's nothing I could do for  
12    them.

13                   They tell my wife they want to come dig.  They  
14    want to come see.  Your husband can make it happen.  I  
15    asked her, "Don't you talk to him," and she said no,  
16    they wouldn't believe her, it's not a lie.

17                   But she said "He's out with the soldiers and  
18    there's very little he could do."  Surely, they can't  
19    come to the site.

20                   **MAJ MELNYK:**   Now, you're a Hasidic Jewish  
21    Rabbi.

1           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** That's me.

2           **MAJ MELNYK:** The only one in the Army.

3           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** That's me.

4           **MAJ MELNYK:** My understanding. I assume  
5 you've spent extensive time in Israel.

6           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Not really.

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** Not really.

8           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I did during the Gulf  
9 War.

10           **MAJ MELNYK:** During the Gulf War. I was  
11 wondering if you had a sense, having spent any time  
12 there, the Israelis have a lot more experience with  
13 domestic terrorism than Americans do, if you could  
14 comment on how they manage to cope with terrorism and  
15 how you see Americans coping with terrorism.

16           **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I think nobody copes with  
17 terrorism. That's not something that is a way of life.  
18 It shouldn't be a way of life. It should never be a  
19 way of life.

20           I think because they deal with it, they've  
21 built up some probably certain thick skin. I'm not

1 sure we in this country, we live in such a free and  
2 open society, we don't have people trying to come down  
3 from our north, south, east and west and kill us, that  
4 we are prepared to do -- to have another one of these  
5 things.

6 **MAJ MELNYK:** I'm sorry. Say that again.

7 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** To have another incident  
8 like this, because the entire leadership would be run  
9 out of town, the President, Vice President, Congress,  
10 you name it.

11 They'd get rid of everybody. The country  
12 wouldn't tolerate -- wouldn't tolerate and shouldn't  
13 tolerate it.

14 I think over there, the mentality is a little  
15 different. You know, some -- nobody wants it, but  
16 somehow or another, they've had it before.

17 **MAJ MELNYK:** And they accept it?

18 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** I don't know if they  
19 accept it. They just have it as a way of life.  
20 Unacceptable. So I think it's different.

21 **MAJ MELNYK:** Is there anything you want to

1 add, in summary, to what you have seen the New York  
2 National Guard -- you're the Chaplain for the whole  
3 Guard.

4 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Yes.

5 **MAJ MELNYK:** What has this incident done to  
6 the Guard, its relationship with the citizens of the  
7 state, and the civil authorities?

8 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** Well, a couple things  
9 I've noticed. Number one, Guardsmen have found out  
10 that they're appreciated, that they are very much  
11 appreciated.

12 I mean, I drived down the street the other day  
13 with my assistant. We were driving down West Street  
14 and I know there are people along the street cheering  
15 us, like we're conquering heroes. I've never seen that  
16 before.

17 Chris, who is my assistant, is a Vietnam Vet.  
18 He said he came back and they threw urine at you, you  
19 know, things like that.

20 So that has -- that I found interesting. I  
21 think it's the first time the public now understands

1 what the National Guard is all about.

2           They have heard about them. Actually  
3 understood our role, that at least peacetime. Well, we  
4 go to war, everybody is a fighter.

5           But what is the National Guard? The National  
6 Guard are citizen soldiers of the country. So now we  
7 are acting as true citizen soldiers, protecting and  
8 safeguarding and assisting, you know, the public, and  
9 in our role as soldiers.

10           They also know that we maintain the check  
11 points and doing all that, not that New York City  
12 Police Department is (inaudible) their own in-house  
13 stuff, but people see all that.

14           And I think soldiers have reacted quite well.  
15 They have carried out their mission very well and they  
16 have made us, I guess, all the Guard, Guardsmen should  
17 be proud of how they --

18           And it's not an easy mission. It is tough.  
19 Nights on guard duty in lower Manhattan can be the  
20 worst thing in the world, you know. Although this city  
21 is better than Oklahoma City, because probably nobody

1 walks in Manhattan. There's always somebody there  
2 floating around.

3 But the point is that you have to do it  
4 professionally and they do it the way they know how to  
5 do things best.

6 **MAJ MELNYK:** Thank you very much.

7 **CHAPLAIN GOLDSTEIN:** You're welcome.

8 (The interview was concluded.)

9 \* \* \* \* \*