Sharing stories
Veterans discuss anti-Semitism, tell war stories at FAU in Boca

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Four veterans whose military service spanned World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm talked about anti-Semitism and told war stories at the Jewish Cultural Society's Veterans Day program at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

In addition to serving their country, Jews in the U.S. military were asked to "navigate the treacherous waters of anti-Semitism" during World War II, said Patricia Rellinger, moderator of the panel discussion and chairwoman of the history department at FAU.

Arthur Jaffe, 91, of Boca Raton and a veteran of World War II, recalled hearing an officer say, "This is a war caused by Jews," but Jaffe said he encountered little anti-Semitism in the Army.

Jaffe told the audience how he led Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in September 1944 in Verdun and liberated hidden Torahs from the attic of a Gentile woman's cottage.

He passed the veterans on the panel a 20-pound menorah made of shell casings that was given to him as a gift.

Harold Sarshik said he experienced no overt anti-Semitism while serving in World War II and the Korean War.

Sarshik, 90, of Boca Raton, talked about coming upon Jewish prisoners at a concentration camp in France at the end of World War II.

"We were just overwhelmed, had no knowledge," Sarshik said. "I've lived with that almost every day, never have forgotten what it is, what humans can do to other human beings."

Years later at his temple in New Jersey, he saw pictures of the concentration camp.

"It taught me a lesson that one has to be helpful to everybody else because ... it could have been anyone of us," Sarshik said.

Kurt Leuchter, 83, of Boynton Beach, survived the Holocaust by hiding in France. He came to the United States after the war and served in the U.S. Army in Korea.

"I was more of a curiosity," Rabbi Alan Sherman, an Army chaplain for 26 years and a veteran of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, said of his year at Fort Stewart in Georgia.

Sherman, 64, of Wellington, said there was some anti-Semitism among the chaplains, but he marveled that a 12-foot-tall menorah was built to accompany a 25-foot-high Christmas tree on the base.

"For the most part, as a man of God, you're a man of God, and most people accept you that way," he said.

Retired judge and World War II veteran Joseph Mazur, of Delray Beach, said he was fascinated by the men's experiences.

"[Serving in the military] was a positive experience even though they encountered some anti-Semitism," he said.

Marshall Isacson, 53, of Boca Raton, said, "The stories are great. You learn from history to honor and respect those that served, never to forget."