

JOHN T. HARALSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is December 1, 2005. This is an interview with John T. Haralson. Do you call yourself John?

HARALSON: Yes, John.

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well John, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

HARALSON: I was born May 13, 1940, in upstate New York, a place called Oneida. The Oneida Indians were one of the 5 tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy. Oneida means "people of the stone". It is also the home of the Oneida Community from the mid-1800s. They were known for their silver products.

Q: Were you part of that?

HARALSON: No.

Q: It sounds interesting.

HARALSON: No, my family was not involved in the Oneida Community (experiment) but I am very familiar with it. I had friends whose family line evolved from it. I ended up working at the Oneida Community Silver Factory for a while during high school (evenings), making donuts in the cafeteria after school hours in my junior and senior year.

Q: Well they had communal marriages or something like that.

HARALSON: They did.

Q: That sort of interested me as a young lad you know.

HARALSON: It still remains a great place to visit. The old communal home is called the Mansion House; people still live there. Mrs. Henry Allen (Dink), a good friend of mine, still lives there (I grew up with her children). Her husband (Hank Allen) passed away several years ago. They have great tours of the Mansion House showing how the Community started by building animal traps, raising silkworms and a lot of different ventures before they hit upon silver plating. That is what really worked as a sustaining business for them.

Q: Well that whole area was interesting. The Mormons came out of there. There were other communities. All part of that turn of the 19th Century religious movement.

HARALSON: The communal movement was taking off about that time.

Q: The Mormon began their trek from around there, the millennium.

HARALSON: The trek for the Mormons started about 20 miles south of where I grew up. Quite a place, a great place to spend your early years.

Q: Ok, let's talk first about your family on your father's side. What do you know about them?

HARALSON: My father's full name was Herbert Hunt Haralson. He originally came from Forest, Mississippi, large family, and they were farmers.

Q: It sounds like they were Nordic stock.

HARALSON: Haralson is Norwegian for the son of King Harold. I have done some research on the family name; there is a Haralson County, Georgia and a small town named Haralson, Georgia. He grew up in Forest, Mississippi, which is in the center of the state. The way the family story goes, with the depression, everyone was hustling to make a living. My father joined the CCC program, Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930's. One of his first jobs was assisting with the restoration of the Civil War battlefield at Vicksburg. Following that, he was transferred to Pine Camp, New York, which currently is known as Fort Drum, New York. It is a military base now. He was trained to be a tree surgeon and landscape architect. During that time he met my mother Margaret Ann Gouchie who lived in Cleveland, New York, a small village on the north shore of Oneida Lake, which is in the Finger Lakes Region of central New York State. They married, and settled in that area, and I was born May 13, 1940, in Oneida, New York. That is where I was raised until I was 18 and joined the Army.

Q: What did your father do after he left the CCC?

HARALSON: He became a tree surgeon. He had a business; his middle name was Hunt, so it was called HHH Tree Surgery and Landscaping. That is the type of work he was doing when WWII started. My father was drafted, even though he was married and had a son, and was 32 or 33 (rather old to be drafted). He served as an infantryman, a machine gunner in WWII, and saw a considerable combat action including the Battle of the Bulge, European Theater. He often indicated that he was glad when we used the atomic bomb against Japan, because he was about to be transferred to the Pacific. I recall when WWII ended and I remember things from WWII although I was only four or five years old. I recall my mother taking me to Florida on a bus in 1944. My father was in training and his unit was preparing to ship out. I remember visiting his platoon in a Quonset hut barracks at Camp Blanding, Florida. That Camp is still in use today for the Florida National Guard. I remember visiting with my father and his buddies. I also recall quite vividly the day WWII ended, at least in Europe. The neighborhood women, and it was almost all women around in those days, had gathered on our front porch. We had a large home on the outskirts of Oneida, they were listening to the radio and they began jumping up and shouting and carrying on and whatever. WWII had ended. I also remember the blackouts, people (air raid wardens) coming around and insuring your shades were down and things like that. They were worried about enemy aircraft bombing and did not want any lights showing. It seems a bit silly in retrospect, but it was very serious at the time.

Q: What did you father do after the war?

HARALSON: He continued in the tree surgery and landscaping business. He would take trees down for individuals and also had tree removal contracts with the cities in the area. We were mentioning Oneida Ltd. earlier. I recall him working on their trees. In the winter he would log. Some of my earliest memories were of working with my father. I wanted to mention that I have a sister. Her name is Margaret Anne Haralson and she currently lives in Wilmington, NC. She was born in 1945 and we remain very close. My parents have both passed away and are buried in Cleveland, New York.

Q: Tell me about your mother's side. What do you know about them?

HARALSON: My mother's maiden name was Gouchie, a French Canadian connection. I didn't know my grandparents on my mother's side; both had passed away before I was born. Cleveland, New York was a center for glass blowing in the 1930's, my relatives worked in the glass factories. Some worked on the railroad and others commuted to work at the Oneida Ltd.; which is located in Sherrill-Kenwood, a few miles from Oneida. My mother had several brothers and sisters, most of whom I knew while growing up. We would go to Cleveland quite often, on weekends and holidays. Her family also fished a great deal on Oneida Lake. During the depression, one of the ways they got along was by fishing and selling walleye pike, which are a delicacy. That is how they survived.

Q: Were your mother or father able to attend college?

HARALSON: No, neither attended college. Both graduated from high school. My mother was Roman Catholic and my father was Baptist when they first met. He converted and became a Roman Catholic. They were married in the Roman Catholic Church in Cleveland, New York.

Q: Well then, let's talk about growing up. You were in Oneida, or the Oneida area, how long were you there? Did you go to high school there?

HARALSON: I did. From the time I was born until the time I went into the army at 18, I grew up in Oneida.

Q: What was it like being a kid, this would be during the 50's and 60's.

HARALSON: I wouldn't say that I was a particularly studious person. I was much more interested in working, hunting, fishing, and trapping. I went to school, passed but didn't excel. Actually, I wasn't overly encouraged to be studious. No one encouraged me to study, not my parents nor the school system. I played some sports but not to any great extent. I played football at the JV level, also some baseball and basketball. When it came to classes, I just got along, didn't study hard. I don't recall spending much, if any time on homework. My time outside the classroom was focused on working and other activities I enjoyed. Schoolwork was not a priority for me. In retrospect, just about everything was more important to me than going to school.

Q: Your work was working with your father's company?

HARALSON: That was part of it. If it was a holiday or summer vacation, I was expected to go out and work. My father would have a work crew that would cut trees down, and buck them up with chain saws. I remember using crosscut saws prior to chain saws and working the downed timber with saws and axes. I was also very active in Boy Scouts. I rose to the rank of Life Scout and was a member of The Order of the Arrow. I went from Boy Scout, to Explorer, to the Army. I think that I must have had very huge arms and shoulders from the type of work I did, because I would always win the axe competition or rowing or anything like that in Boy Scouts.

Q: I was thinking about the tree business, I have watched people do it here, it is dangerous.

HARALSON: Very dangerous. When I see a tree crew, I go up and talk to them because I know what the work is like. And because it is dangerous, it is interesting, you have to be alert at all times. My father did a lot of the work up in the trees; this is before you had mechanical lifts. You would put a ladder up and wear climbers (spikes) on your feet, using ropes to move around in the trees. My father, I guess from the time I was 12 or 13, entrusted me to be what is known as his rope man, or ground man. You really had the person's life; that was up in the tree, in your hands. You were not only securing him with a safety line, but passing up and lowering tools, and lowering cut limbs to keep them from hitting houses, cars, etc. It is a very tough, difficult work, because you are always on the ground looking up. The back of your neck was always stiff as you were watching the person up in the tree. If I was not in school, chances were that I was working with my father. He trusted me as his ground man and I never failed him.

Q: What was your religion? I mean how Catholic were you?

HARALSON: We were Catholic. I was an altar boy, went to Mass and attended religious instruction at Saint Joseph's Church in Oneida. That would mean that you were a part of a religious structure/system. The Mass in those days was in Latin. You had to learn how to pray and reply to prayers in Latin. The priest we had, a Father Lower, was German, spoke with a German accent, and was crippled. When he would walk out and move around the altar, he would almost put a death grip on your arm, as you would help him move around. In those days, being an altar boy was like being on a military duty roster. Sometimes you had to serve early Mass, which meant that you would have to be at the church, which was a mile and a half walk, at seven in the morning. There was always competition regarding who would serve at weddings, you usually received a pretty good tip. If you served funerals, you hardly received anything. I didn't go to a Catholic school even though there was one in town. The grade school I attended was next to St. Joseph's Church and every Tuesday afternoon the nuns would escort us to religious instruction.

Q: Politics. Where did your family fall politically?

HARALSON: My mother was always inclined towards being a Democrat. She worked in a factory after I started school and was very pro-union. I never heard my father express any political preferences, but I know my mother was a Democrat.

Q: Well your father would more likely fall into management. I mean he was running a business, a small business albeit, but he would have a different perspective.

HARALSON: Perhaps, I just don't recall him expressing an interest one way or the other as far as politics were concerned. I guess he was too busy working and making a living. And a hard living it was. It was not easy.

Q: Well you are in the snow belt there. That must have affected you.

HARALSON: Oh sure. In the winter we would switch our activities to logging, my father would have a contract with farmers to log their wood lots. The snow was often deep and you would need to dig down two or three feet to reach the trunk. We didn't want to waste lumber, so you would have to dig a wide circle around the base of the tree. Then you would bring the timber out of the woods using a tractor and place it on the logging truck. Logging in the winter was dangerous, tiring work. Make a mistake and you were crippled or dead.

Q: Sleighs?

HARALSON: No, this was after the use of sleighs, I don't recall having to do it with horses, but sled and tractor, that type of thing. Wintertime was also for ice-skating and the old Erie Canal was a mile away from my home. We would fish there in the summer, and ice skate throughout the winter. Later, as a teenager, we would to hunt rabbits while ice skating up and down the Erie Canal.

Q: Well then how about books? Were you much of a reader?

HARALSON: No, I was not much of a reader in high school. It wasn't until years later that I began reading seriously and pursued educational opportunities. After I left home in 1958, my Mother would say, "The day you went into the army we opened the trunk of your car, and there were all of your schoolbooks. They looked like they had never been opened."

Q: How about did foreign affairs intrude? I mean upstate New York is not exactly the center of international discussion.

HARALSON: I would say no. My father was a member of the American Legion and the VFW; as many of the WW11 veterans were. My mother was a member of the Cootiettes, female auxiliary of the VFW. I didn't pay attention to world events. I remember President Truman coming through on his "whistle stop" election swing; the New York Central railroad came through the middle of town. I certainly remember reports from the Korean War. But as far as active interest in anything outside of central New York, I would say no. Carmen Basilio, a well-known boxer, lived in Canastota, about ten miles from me. I remember going to the Syracuse War Memorial and watching him win the middle weight championship against Tony Demarco. It was a central New York small town environment that I grew up in.

Q: Did the military play any role in that area while you were there?

HARALSON: Yes, Rome Air Force Base was 15 miles away. The B-52 Bombers (carried nuclear bombs) were stationed there, we knew about them. I had an Uncle Bernard; that lived near Batavia, New York and Samson Air Force Base. There were soldiers you would meet coming home following the Korean War. You would see people in town that you knew had gone into the military. The military was looked on with respect following WWII and Korea, something new and exciting.

Q: Did you have your eyes set on the military when you were in high school?

HARALSON: I don't think so. I had no intentions of going to college; certainly that wasn't expected or thought about. The primary goal was to graduate from high school and then to do something else. My something else would have been going to work with my father in the tree business. I don't recall making plans to go off and do much of anything after high school. It was taking "one day at a time", and that was it.

Q: I take it the high school was not one of these places with career counselors and all that.

HARALSON: Well, Stuart, as I recall, and I don't wish to sound overly critical, but I think career counselors in those days were programmed towards taking care of the kids that came from wealthy families, that already knew where they were going. The rest of us we ended up taking wood and metal shop classes and were not being prepared for college. Primarily because we didn't express any interest, and they didn't want to waste their time on us. So that is how I recall it.

Q: Did the priests have any influence, any call towards the religious life, at all?

HARALSON: No. I was not inclined in that direction. I did a lot of scouting however, and remained in Boy Scouts all the way through Explorer Scout, and was still in scouting when I graduated from high school. Scouting was similar in many ways to the military life and that type of lifestyle must have rubbed off on me.

Q: Well then you graduated when, about 1958 or so?

HARALSON: '58 I graduated from high school.

Q: Then what?

HARALSON: Then I went to work for my father. After high school, a few people headed for college, others were finding work. The tree business is a very hard and dangerous way to earn a living. During the summer of '58 my buddies and I started talking about what else we wanted to do; we started thinking about the military. We thought about joining the military as an escape from "small town" living, rather than a patriotic calling. It is mostly the sense of adventure and excitement, as well as leaving town.

Q: This is particularly true with kids from small towns, this is how you get out of there.

HARALSON: I have always joked, when I return to Oneida, that if your father didn't own the bank, insurance company, farm, bar or gas station, you had to scratch and figure out what you were going to do. There wasn't a clear path or road map; you had to figure it out yourself.

Q: Did you have any feel for it is them and us?

HARALSON: Absolutely. There were kids from one side of the railroad tracks and the others from the other side. There was a caste system when I was growing up, and everybody knew where they belonged, how much money their fathers earned, who belonged to the country club, etc.

Q: Was there any element of racial problems or just ethnic problems or anything of that kind at play in this at all?

HARALSON: Well that is a very good question. The answer to both of those questions is yes. Let's mention ethnicity first. There were major ethnic groupings in this part of the country. In Oneida, when you came to a four way stop sign, on three of the corners there would be bars, one was Irish, one was Polish, and the other was Italian. On the fourth corner there would be some kind of a gas station. As far as racial diversity, there were only two African American families in town and I was very good friends with one of them. One of my two best buddies while growing up was African American; his name was Lyle Smith. We trapped, hunted, fished together and were close friends. He was always in and out of my house, and I was in and out of his house. The tensions where I grew up were not ethnic or racial, they were economic. It was very clear who lived on Main Street, who belonged to the country club, who was going to a private school and then on to college. Then there were the rest of us.

Q: How about dating. Was there a dating pecking order or anything like that?

HARALSON: I think there was, sure. I think people that were well off financially tended to hang together, but there wasn't any lack of girls to go out with. The social hang out in the summer was at Sylvan Beach, an amusement park on Oneida Lake. That is where you would go for the bands, dancing and cruising around. My buddy (Seman Eddy) had a '49 Ford with a flame job on the hood, a convertible that we used to ride around and smile at the girls and all that stuff.

Q: Well we are getting to the summer of '58 or so and you were wondering if there was going to be something better than this.

HARALSON: That's right. I thought there has to be an easier way to make a living than tree work. So three of us took a drive to Syracuse, which was the largest city closest to Oneida. We were going to talk to military recruiters and didn't have our mind set on any particular service. First we talked to the Marines, and then the Army. The Army recruiter was a paratrooper, wearing bloused paratrooper boots and parachute jump wings on his uniform. I recalled that Tony Graziano, who owned a bar in a nearby town, had been a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne in WWII. His bar was named The Parachute Inn. I recall wondering how much we would be paid in the Army. The recruiter said, "Well you start out as a private, you get \$50 a month. But if you are a paratrooper you get an additional \$55." Whoa, here was a chance to double our pay. The funny thing is none of us had ever flown in an airplane. What hicks we were. I don't think we signed up initially. We came back home; told our parents we were interested in going into the Army. I told my father that I thought I would like to be a paratrooper. I think that impressed him, because he had been what paratroopers call a "straight leg" infantryman (not a paratrooper). My parents didn't have objections and neither did the two fellows I went with, and so we signed up. Three of us were going to enlist, but one of us couldn't pass the physical initially (Joel Stevenson). Tony Salerno and I enlisted on 28 September 1958 for the paratroops, our parents took us to the train station, and we shipped out for Fort Dix New Jersey.

Q: I was going to say in '58 there was nothing particular going on at that time militarily.

HARALSON: No. What is interesting, Stu, and I am sure you have heard this from others. The Korean War, which had only ended five years before I enlisted, seemed like ancient history to me. World War Two seemed as long ago as the Civil War when you are 18. Vietnam must seem like ancient history to the kids of today.

Q: Well I am a Korean War man.

HARALSON: Well there you go Stu.

Q: I get a blank look when I say we were in Korea.

HARALSON: Exactly. But Korea had only been over five years when I joined the Army. So we went off to Fort Dix, New Jersey, knowing we were going to be paratroopers. But you still had to have a military skill. They had to give you what is termed a MOS or Military Occupational Specialty, other than only jumping out of airplanes. As part of the basic training, they would test you for various aptitudes. It was funny in retrospect, but based on the testing, they said, "Private Haralson, have you ever considered being an officer?" I thought they must have been kidding, I barely scraped through high school. I didn't take education seriously, and now they want to know if I want to be an officer. I said, "No, I don't think so. I think I will just continue with what I am doing." But I was taken aback and must have had high scores, native intelligence perhaps, that I did very well on their tests. After telling them that I had no interest in being an officer, they said, "Well Salerno and you both tested high in Morse Code and we are going to make you both Morse Code radio operators." I knew why, Morse Code was one of the things we learned in Boy Scouts. When we finished basic training, we were sent to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, to learn CW Morse Code.

Q: CW means continuous wave.

HARALSON: Exactly. Basic training wasn't very difficult for me; I had lived an outdoor life and was pretty strong, in good shape. We finished basic training and shipped out to Fort Chaffee Arkansas, where we attended radio operator school. We had been there a couple of weeks and then it was time for Christmas vacation. We were given leave over the holidays and headed for home on the train. In those days there was a train stop in Oneida. An interesting thing about Morse Code, I always thought it might have something in common with the study of languages. When study Morse Code, you learn how to copy and transmit it. At night you wake up and you can hear it, it is in your brain. We learned to send and receive 18 words per minute in Morse code that was the standard. We finished the training, received our certification, and then shipped out to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I encountered racism for the first time on this trip. My father, being from Mississippi, we would always go home in the summer. From the time I was eight or nine, I would travel with him to Mississippi and run around with my cousins. I always had to fight them when we went to Mississippi; because I was a Damn Yankee and also because I was Catholic. I knew I was going to have to fight several cousins just to establish a pecking order. This was the first time that I was back in the Deep South; other than going to Forest, Mississippi with my father. My relatives were hard-working Baptists, salt of the earth people, but very aware of racial separation. I don't think it bothered me when I was a child, I couldn't make the connection. My friend in Oneida was African American, but when I would go to Mississippi, I wasn't allowed to interact with blacks because they weren't part of my family's social structure. On the train to Fort Campbell, I became fully exposed to racial segregation. There were several black soldiers traveling with me, and when we stopped at a train depot, they couldn't go into the restaurant with me, they were made to go around to the backside and order a sandwich. They couldn't use the same bathrooms or drink from the same water fountains. I remember being shocked, embarrassed and very angry. We arrived at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and were assigned to the 501st Signal Battalion. We began a three-week jump school at Fort Campbell, which is the home of the 101st Airborne, known as the Screaming Eagles. We went through two weeks of ground training and I remember my father, uncle, and one of my cousins visiting a few days before we were scheduled to make our first parachute jump, we went to a restaurant in Clarksville, Tennessee. The night before I was scheduled to make my first jump, I called my mother and said, "Mom, I am scared." She said, "Well what do you want me to do about it? You got yourself into this thing, go ahead and take care of it." So much for sympathy from Mom! Anyhow, the first time I took off in an airplane, I jumped out of it. It was a C-130 aircraft, and you made five parachute jumps to qualify for your novice parachute wings. They were a combination of daylight and night jumps, with equipment and weapons. I became jump qualified and was very proud to be awarded my parachute wings. This was the beginning of 28 years in the Regular Army, I was a Morse Code radio operator, paratrooper, and assigned to the 101st Airborne.

Q: You were saying the problem with jumping is...

HARALSON: Yes, the problem with parachuting is that I never considered it fun; I was afraid every time I jumped. I ended up with a couple of hundred parachute jumps, but I never went out and jumped for the fun of it. One thing about jumping, it does not seem real. When you are in an airplane, and are at the jump height of 1250 feet, you really can't sense the ground. It is like watching a movie as you are looking out the airplane at the ground below you. When you go through jump training, they make you jump out of a tower at 34 feet. They say that is the optimal height for being afraid of the ground. That is where you jump attached to cables. You can sense the ground from 34 feet in the air, but you cannot sense the ground when you get up to 1000 or 1250 feet. Being assigned to the 101st wasn't all that great. It was a lot of physical training; five-mile runs in boots, not running shoes and warm up outfits that they wear today. A lot of field duty and it's cold in that part of the country in the winter. One incident that created a major change in direction for me happened unexpectedly. I was on radio duty (night watch) on a vehicle radio Teletype rig during a field training exercise. The generator which powers the radios ran out of gas. I was a lowly Private, and I was out there by myself. I got out of the radio rig in the middle of the night, picked up the gas can and went over to the generator. While pouring gas into the generator, some of the gas spilled over hitting the hot muffler, and the whole thing started to burn. I received a burn on the back of my hand and ran to the radio Teletype truck and drove it away from the generator fire. I had saved a very expensive radio van, but the generator was a total loss. The next day I was called into the company commander's office and was told, "Private Haralson, we are going to conduct a report of survey (investigation) because the generator was destroyed." I said, "Sir, I saved a \$200,000 truck from being burnt up while the generator was burning." "Yes, but these are the procedures, Private and we are going to do it anyhow." So a First Lieutenant investigated, interviewed me and took my testimony. Lo and behold, they found me pecuniarily liable for destroying the generator, and decided it was going to cost me \$325.00. Now remember I was a Private earning a total of \$105 a month between basic and jump pay. Nothing was said about saving a \$200,000 truck. They decided it was my fault (it was), and I was going to pay for the generator. They then said, "Oh by the way, we are going to promote you to PFC, to help you pay for it." Not that I was not a good soldier, but the regulations were such that they had to find somebody liable, so they stuck me with the bill. That didn't set well with me and I thought that this isn't the way to treat someone. A week or so after this incident, we were informed that Special Forces (Green Berets) were interviewing people. They were looking for volunteers that had at least a year in the Army, a year left on their enlistment, Morse Code radio operators, jump qualified, and have at least a secret clearance." I had by this time received a secret clearance. So I thought, "I think I will volunteer." So I went to Tony Salerno who came into the Army with me and said, "Hey Tony, I think I am going to go talk to these Special Forces people." He said, "I am on KP (kitchen police) and can't get off". I said, "Well I am going to see what they have to offer." I went and spoke to a senior NCO and a Captain. I chatted with them and they said, "You know Haralson, you are the type of soldier we are looking for, are you in good shape? Let's find out?" They had me do fifty push-ups, pull-ups, runs, I felt like I was trying out for the NFL. They indicated, "Now if you want to transfer, we can get you into Special Forces." I said, "Can you tell me a little bit more about it. What do you do?" "Well, you will be a Morse code radio operator and on jump status. We are an organization that will organize partisan units in Eastern Europe if we ever have to go to war with the Russians." Wow, that was different than paying for a burnt generator and running in boots. They also said, "You are kind of young (I was 19), I don't know if we have anyone as young as you in Special Forces, most of our people are WWII or Korean War veterans." He further said, "We have a lot of DP's." I said, "What is that?" He said, "Displaced persons. We have a lot of people who entered the Army under the Lodge Act from Yugoslavia, Hungary and throughout Eastern Europe. You will have to grow up fast; this is not like an Airborne Division. You will be working with people that are old enough to be your father." I felt that the Special Forces recruiters treated me as an adult, with respect. I thought, "I had just been stuck with a reported survey for the generator, and I didn't think I should have paid for it. OK where do I sign up." A couple of weeks later I received orders to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I departed Fort Campbell and caught a bus to Fort Bragg, reporting to the Special Forces orderly room. These were old WWII barracks, small wooden orderly rooms. Do you remember them?

Q: Oh my, I spent four years in those things.

HARALSON: Well, you know what I mean. I reported and this Captain and First Sergeant said, "Haralson, huh." This was a Friday and he said, "You have any money?" I said, "No First Sergeant, I don't have any money." He replied, "Well we have an IG inspection on Monday. We don't really want you around. We would have to work too hard to get you ready for the inspection. Here is a hundred dollars. Why don't you get back on the bus and go to Fayetteville, we won't charge you for leave. Get out of the area and come back on Tuesday." I thought, "I think I am going to like this outfit." I left Fort Bragg and returned the following week and reported for duty. The barracks life was quite Spartan, wall and foot locker and living in an open bay with other people. Most of other soldiers were older than the troops at Fort Campbell and seemed to be quite intelligent. Most of the NCO's were combat veterans. Many of them had stars on their jump wings from combat jumps in WWII and Korea. There wasn't any harassment of the younger troops and they treated me as an individual. They trusted me. Part of the equipment we were issued included a packet of five injections of morphine. I stored it in my wall locker with the other gear. There wasn't any hesitation in letting a 19-year-old soldier have morphine in his possession. I was expected to carry it on field exercises as part of my medical kit. That would never have happened in other units. I had been assigned to Special Forces for about a month when I was called to the orderly room and told, "We just received a call from the Red Cross. Your mother notified them that Lyle Smith," this is the African American friend I grew up with, "had been killed in a car accident along with several other people that you know." My NCO asked, "do you want to go home?" I said, "Yes, I would like to go home for the funerals." They said, "Do you have any money?" I said, "No." They replied, "Well here is an advance of hundred bucks, pay us when you get back and stay as long as needed". I thought that these people really care about me. Here I was 19 years old, the youngest person ever brought into Special Forces, and they really trust me. I went home for the funerals and I returned a week later. I told my Father and Mother that I really liked Special Forces and might remain with them for some time. I already was a Morse code radio operator and I was placed into an "A" Team and assigned to a nuclear detachment. In those days the plan was that should the Soviet Union invade Western Europe, that teams like the one I was assigned to would parachute into Eastern Europe and place nuclear demolitions into tunnels to slow the Soviet advance and restrict their movement. No doubt a suicide mission and one I am very happy never occurred. After several months I was taken off the nuclear team and received another assignment. They said, "We are going to send you out to Utah to learn how to ski." This was not the ski resort type of skiing, however. We had to ski wearing wooden cross-country skis with leather bindings while wearing what we called Mickey Mouse boots (large rubber boots). After several days on the easy slopes, we graduated to something really exiting. We were taken to some well-known ski resorts; Alta and Brighton, to ski downhill while wearing antiquated wooden cross-country skis. To make it more interesting, we had to wear a 50-pound rucksack and carry an M-1 rifle while skiing downhill. You have never seen such wipe outs in your life. People would come from miles around to watch these crazy Special Forces troops come down regular ski slopes on cross-country skis with rucksacks that would be swaying, carrying a rifle. After we had achieved a certain level of competence and had not broken anything, we were then parachuted into the Kings Mountain Range, which is between Utah and Wyoming. The snow was very deep on the drop zone and we had to swim through the snow to reach our skis and snowshoes, which were parachuted in a separate bundle. The mission was to cross-country ski 200 miles through the mountains pulling Akios, a large sled. You would be harnessed to the sled like a dog team. One or two people would be in front breaking trail in the snow, which is an excruciating job and had to be rotated often. We would pull the six or seven hundred pound Akio while on cross-country skis. This was a survival exercise and we were allowed to shoot anything for food except Elk or Beaver. We would take deer or snowshoe rabbits primarily. We moved through the mountains living off the land. In addition to this survival exercise, we worked with the local National Guard units that acted as our guerilla force. We would conduct training for them and then lead them on raids, ambushes and similar activities. I stayed in the mountains for four months and had a great time. I was really beginning to like this Special Forces life. After returning to Fort Bragg, we went on a couple of other exercises, including to Florida where I able put to use my outdoor background from growing up in Oneida to work on survival activities. Things such as fishing and catching enough catfish to feed the entire team. I was doing quite well in Special Forces and enjoying myself. I was just finishing my second year in the Army and had enlisted initially for a total of three years.

Q: We are talking about 19...

HARALSON: We are in the spring or early summer of 1960 by now. People in the unit were talking about serving overseas. Well I had never been overseas, so I thought I would look into it. I went to the personnel office and they said, "Well there are two places you can go. You can go to Germany or you can go to Okinawa." I said, "which one can I leave for soonest?" They said, "Well we have got a quota to fill for Okinawa. You can go in about a month." I said, "Well I would like to go on leave first." That was it. I signed up and went home for a month, and then headed for Okinawa. That was the last time I saw my Father alive. He was not feeling well and had been in and out of the VA hospital. I think he was very proud of me for what I had accomplished. The First Special Forces Group was stationed in Okinawa. I was still a PFC Morse code radio operator; promotions were slow in those days. After arriving, I was assigned to an "A" detachment. The detachment consisted of 12 people, two officers and ten enlisted. I was the youngest, the junior of the team. I was a competent radio operator, in good shape, and a bit full of it. After a few weeks we began language training. I barely passed English in high school and was going to learn a foreign language. The officers said, "By the way, our team is oriented on Southeast Asia. We are going to bring a couple of Army officers from Thailand and a woman, and they are going to teach us Thai." Soon enough we started taking classes in Thai. Not only did we study Thai but we were immersed into the culture of Thailand. To this day I can sing and dance in Thai from what I learned in those classes. We would study for a month or two, and then we would travel to Thailand, working and training with the Thai Ranger Battalions. This was before Thailand had Special Forces units. I remember parachuting into Northern Thailand, around Chiang Mai, participating in war games, moving through the mountainous areas, and interacting with the various tribes in the area. I remember Chiang Mai only had one bar in those days, and it was owned by the sheriff. We would study the language and culture, visit Thailand and become familiar with the area and the people. Following this, it was determined that we should do the same thing in the Philippines. We went to the Philippines and were teamed with King Alfonso's Negrito pygmies. King Alfonso had been awarded Colonel rank during WWII because he was the leader of a guerilla force working with the allies against the Japanese. His village of pygmies lived outside of Clark Air Base. We spent time learning the back areas of Luzon Island and living with the native population. A lot of time we were on survival exercises. They would put two or three of us with the Negrito pygmies and we would learn from them how to live off the land. One day we were moving through the jungle, and we came into a clearing, a typical Filipino arrangement, the houses were on stilts. There was a Filipino woman out on the veranda of her stilt house. She looked down and she saw four or five Negrito pygmies and three big tall Americans. She looked and said, "Japanese come back?" She hadn't seen Americans since the guerillas in WWII. In addition to training in Thailand and the Philippines, we spent considerable time training on Okinawa. We would make parachute jumps on the golf course and hopefully the golfers were nice enough to pull the pins on the greens. We often make water jumps into the ocean. During this time several of us went through training to become SCUBA divers. They brought in an underwater demolition team from Yokosuka, Japan. We had an agreement with them; we would put them through parachute school, if they would put us through SCUBA. I learned how to SCUBA dive down to 110 feet; swim in at night from ships to the shoreline. It was just one training exercise after another, all types of training. I learned a lot of things from the displaced persons from Eastern Europe that were in our unit including how to break out of jails. They would teach you how to analyze the materials in your prison walls and to break out. We went through a lock-picking course where we made our own picks out of the strands of metal used in street sweepers. As an aside, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, the city was losing money in their parking meters. After the Special Forces troops would run out of money, they would go out and break into the parking meters, take the change, and go back in and have a few more beers. I learned a lot of real neat things in those days.

Q: Have you reached the point where you were getting the Green Beret and all that sort of thing?

HARALSON: The Green Beret came in a little bit later. There were Special Forces units from '54 to '62, but we didn't wear Green Berets. We had them; we would wear them in the field, but we were not authorized to wear them by the Army. It wasn't authorized to wear the Green Beret until 1962 following the visit to Fort Bragg by President Kennedy. He liked Special Forces, what we stood for and decided that we should have a distinctive look, thus we were given permission to wear the Green Beret. Before that happened, in the summer of 1961, I was getting close to the end of my enlistment and would have been able to get out of the Army in September. I would have had three years in. I need to back up for just a second and go back a little earlier. I was notified that my father had passed away while I was on an exercise in Thailand in March 1961. We were in civilian clothes with a cover story that we worked for USAID. We were actually running reconnaissance missions between Bangkok and the border of Laos. I copied down in Morse Code that my father had died and was immediately sent me back to Okinawa to turn in my equipment and return to the States. They said, "John, we want you to pack everything up because you won't have to return if you don't want to. You are the only son and you could likely obtain a compassionate discharge from the Army." I returned home on emergency leave, not really knowing if I were going to return to Special Forces. We went through the funeral and I remember very clearly sitting with my mother in the kitchen. I said, "What do you think, Mom? Special Forces indicated that I probably could get a hardship discharge since I am the only son and my sister is five years younger than me". She said, "Well you know, John, you could take over the tree business from your father, but you see how that aged him. Other than the tree business, you would probably end up having to go to work in the factory." She said, "What do you think?" I said, "Well I feel like I should be here to take care of you all." My mother, I never will forget her generosity, said, "No, you seem like you are enjoying the military. Why don't you go back and see if you want to stick around the Army a little longer. It sounds like you are doing very well." I returned to Okinawa, and was promoted to Corporal, which was a big deal for me. That meant as a non-commissioned officer, I didn't have to pull kitchen police or walk guard duty. But I think there was another reason they promoted me to Corporal. In those days you could be promoted to Specialist Four or Corporal. As a Specialist Four you were considered a specialist, but as a Corporal, you had NCO rank. I believe they promoted me to Corporal to someone else to go to the NCO Club and buy a round of beer. I never believed they promoted me based on my leadership potential. This was the summer of '61 and rumors started regarding our deployment to Laos. We had teams in Laos, it was rather hush-hush; the teams were in civilian clothes and were called civilian advisors. We were planning to introduce Special Forces teams to advise the Laotian military and indigenous tribes. The word came down that the team I was on was one of the teams that were going to be deployed. I was told, "You don't have enough time left on your enlistment contract. If you will re-enlist we want you to come with us into a combat zone." Now some people would think that I was foolhardy, but there was never any doubt in my mind. I re-enlisted on the spot because I wanted to be with my team in Laos. We went into intensive training for our mission and deployed to Laos in October of 1961. The operation was called "White Star". We split the "A" team in half and placed six people with two different Lao military units. If you can speak Thai, you are understood in Laos. They could understand you but you sounded like you were speaking "Bangkok Thai" to the Lao in the remote villages. We flew into Savannakhet, Laos, and we were assigned as advisors to the 55th BP, which stands for Battalion Parachute in French. Laos was formerly a part of French Indo-China, and there remained French military units stationed in Laos in 1961. The closest French unit to us was at a place called Seno, a French air base outside of Savannakhet. We spent a couple of days there, and then were dropped off by helicopter deep in Laos to join up with the 55th BP. I don't know if the village has a name, not one I remember, but it was a three-day walk east of Savannakhet, near the North Vietnam border. We had our usual equipment carried in rucksacks. I carried an M-1 rifle, radio, one-time pads, CEOI's, that is communication talk for being able to talk in code and how to communicate with higher headquarters. The Battalion Commander, Major Suk Chai, met us. He later became a General, now lives in the United States and works at Dulles Airport. A day after our arrival we were told that the Battalion was going to relocate. This is a Parachute Battalion of about five or six hundred Laotian soldiers. There were only two Parachute Battalions in all of Laos. The six of us on the split "A" team were assigned to this unit as advisors and trainers. I thought I was in good physical shape, but moving through the jungles of Laos without having had a chance to become acclimatized was a real strain. We walked for a couple of days and finally set up operations along the Se Bang Phi River, very close to North Vietnam border. The forces we were opposing were called Pathet Lao, which means Lao Communist. A former Laotian Army Captain, Kong Le, commanded the Pathet Lao. My role was communications with higher headquarters. I operated the radios and we used hand crank generators to provide power to the radios. We built bamboo huts off the ground, because there are a lot of poisonous snakes throughout the area. We set our camp in close proximity to the Battalion Commander and the command group of the Battalion. As the radio operator, I spent most of my time around the camp and became the cook for the team. I remember very clearly digging into a termite mound and fashioning a stove where you could feed in wood underneath, and dug two escape holes where you could put a teakettle or frying pan. I turned this into my cooking area and kept water in an old lister bag. The rest of the team spent their time training Lao soldiers and would teach classes on rifle marksmanship, squad and platoon in the attack, demolitions, patrolling; while I remained at the campsite. Perhaps the most useful thing I accomplished, at least for the first three or four months was to kill a water buffalo every three or four days. The Battalion would purchase a water buffalo to provide meat for the unit. The Lao soldiers were armed with carbines. It is hard to kill a water buffalo; it has a very small brain. They would shoot the water buffalo with a carbine and quite often they couldn't kill it. It would only become enraged. We ended up taking more casualties from charging water buffalos that would throw the soldiers over its heads, then gore and stomp them, than we ever took from Pathet Lao. One day the soldiers came to me and said, "Corporal Haralson, you have an M-1 rifle, will you come and kill this buffalo." I walked out and they had wounded a water buffalo and he was backed into a stand of bamboo in the village. I took my M-1, and about this time the rest of my team had come back from training. They were off to one side watching me, sort of like a high noon western movie. I was in the middle of a dry rice paddy advancing on a water buffalo that is wounded. He starts to charge, and I drop down on one knee, fired and killed him. As a reward for this I received the first cut of meat, I took the loin. When I returned to the campsite, I felt quite proud of myself. I said, "What do you think, Team Sergeant O'Connor?" He said, "Well it was OK, John, but I have got to tell you, that is a semi-automatic rifle that you were using. You fired the first time and that ejects the spent round and another round is injected automatically. After you fired you reached up and pulled back the lever and ejected a live round, shot again. You had the worst case of "buck fever" I have ever seen." I don't think that they were very impressed with my "actions under stress". We spent four and a half months at that location.

Q: You were mentioning Kong Le. Later Kong Le turned into something else didn't he?

HARALSON: But at the time he was part of the communist movement.

Q: Was this before he moved up to the Plain of Jars?

HARALSON: No. The Pathet Lao coalesced around him, and received support from Vietnam and China. It was a civil war that was taking place and we were on the side of the royal family and the royalists. I believe the Vietnamese and Chinese had advisors with the Pathet Lao. We ran patrols with the Laotian units, and lived with the local tribes, we went totally native. We ate the local foods, spoke the language, and had a total immersion working with these people. I enjoyed it a great deal. There was no electricity, so when the sun went down, we didn't have anything to do. We decided to do something about that and hired four men from the local village. Their job was to walk three days to Savannakhet to buy six cases of beer and candles. That would give each of us a case of beer a week, which we would put in our lister bag to cool off a bit. Then we would set candles up on each end of our bamboo table and play pinochle. That was our recreation. Of course, having candles we were able to read at night. We were very much out in the boondocks during this period. After four and a half months we told that we were going to be redeployed. The Battalion was returning to Seno Air Base, the French base I mentioned earlier. The word came down that we had to prepare to make a combat jump in northern Laos at a place called Nam Tha. The Pathet Lao had placed direct fire weapons on the hills outside of town and had shot down two or three aircraft. The Royal Laotian Government couldn't re-supply the town. Nam Tha was one of the alternate medical camps for a famous missionary, Doctor Tom Dooley. Our mission was to make a combat jump at Nam Tha and attack the communist forces in the area.

Q: Oh yeah.

HARALSON: So we returned to Seno, the six of us. Headquarters' said, 'Only three of you should go to Nam Tha.' Our team leader, First Lieutenant Robin Luketina, who currently lives in Maryland, indicated that he would take the medic, Merlin Frances, and me because I was the radio operator. This would be the first combat parachute jump made by US Forces since the Korean War. Since there were going to be just three of us, I knew I would have to travel very light. My plan was to jump with an M-1 rifle, with two bandoliers of ammunition. Team Sergeant O'Conner gave me his .45 caliber pistol and one magazine of ammunition. I also had a small demolition bag containing one-time pads, CEOL, two fragmentation, one thermite grenade, poncho, and three cans of food. That is all I carried. We flew to Vientiane, the capital of Laos and then to Luang Prabang, the royal capital of Laos to assemble the unit and prepare for the combat jump. Many of the troops deserted, rather than makes this dangerous parachute jump and our unit strength was reduced to three hundred men. Our heavy weapons consisted of one .30 caliber machine gun without a tripod, one 81mm mortar without a sight. Only fifty of the troops had boots, the rest jumped barefoot or wearing flip-flops. We were at the airfield when Colonel Carevoy, the Special Forces officer in charge, said, "You know you don't have to go on this operation. We are in Laos as advisors, and this could be some heavy combat you are going into." Being young and stupid we replied, "We have been training these soldiers for a long time and would like to see if they have learned anything." We were going to find out if they learned anything for sure. They brought a case of beer out to the airfield and we had a few cool ones before we boarded the C-47 aircraft. We were told that we are going to jump at 500 feet, so don't bother putting on any reserve parachutes. Our Lieutenant was an interesting character. I think he thought he was a little bit of John Wayne, because he was jumping with a sub machine gun. Rather than putting it by his side and strapping down as we were taught, he decided he was going to put the sub machine gun across his chest. We started flying north, the hills are saw tooth, very rugged, and we experienced a lot of turbulence. I had to go to the bathroom real bad after drinking beer on the runway. After awhile we move into the vicinity of where we are going to jump and the plane starts losing altitude. The green light came on and the Battalion commander goes out first. Lieutenant Luketina is second. I go out third, and everybody else follows us. We are jumping into an area outside of Nam Tha with dry rice paddies. I hit the ground as enemy mortar rounds begin impacting on the drop zone. The first thing I do is to relieve myself after drinking all that beer combined with fear. While getting out of my parachute and I hear somebody yelling, "Corporal Haralson, Corporal Haralson, I am hit, help me." I removed my parachute, grabbed my bag and rifle, and ran over to Lt. Luketina. By the time I got to him his face was bloody. I thought that shrapnel from the mortar rounds had hit him and I took a closer look at him. What happened was that his sub machine gun, when he hit the prop blast while exiting the aircraft, flew up and hit him in the face and broke his nose. He had a broken nose from jumping with a sub machine gun thinking he was John Wayne. We stopped the bleeding, assembled everyone, took a few casualties from the mortars, and moved off the drop zone. The plan was to move into the hills outside of town and clear the ridgeline from enemy weapons so that aircraft could start landing in the area again. We moved with the command group of the Battalion. You have to understand one thing about northern Laos; it is lack a of water in the mountains. I have come to realize that water is the one constant in all the battles that have ever been fought. When you are on top of a saw tooth ridge or mountain, there is no water up there. We cut large bamboo stalks into six-foot sections, and drove a hole between the connecting sections, and filled them with water. We ate rice that has been pre cooked, packed and carried in the bamboo. I didn't have to carry my own radio and used the Laotian's radio to make contact back to headquarters. We had been on the move for a couple of days when we began taking mortar fire, and enemy probing of our positions. We expected a major attack against us at any time. I made radio contact with headquarters and received a message asking if we wanted to return to Okinawa with the rest of the Special Forces elements. That was strange, I am hunkered down in a foxhole being mortared, and they are asking me if I am going to join them, as though there was some way I could. We replied, "Yes, we would like to do that." They said, "We would like you to try to get back to Luang Prabang in a couple of days. After your unit has cleared that ridgeline, we will fly in to get you in an Otter, a small aircraft that carries four people. We will fly it into the airstrip in Nam Tha, and it will be there at 10:00 on such and such a date." I said, "Fine." I told the Lieutenant and the other American that we needed to be heading back if we were going to meet that plane. About two hours after I did that, here come the bugles. Bugles for anybody that has fought in Korea knows that this is the way the Chinese signal they were starting to attack. A joint force of Chinese, North Vietnamese, and Laotian troops, preceded by heavy mortar fire attacked us. I was in a bunker when we were overrun, and they started rolling hand grenades in on us. I was blown out the back of the bunker. Several of our Laotian troops were captured or killed. We were pushed out of our positions and several of us headed back towards Nam Tha. I became sick and the medic gave me something that was a narcotic of some type. I had diarrhea very badly and thought I was going to die. He gave me a narcotic, because for a day and a half when I was walking or running towards the airfield, I would look down and see that I was not even touching the ground. I was walking about a foot off the ground as I continued on. Nevertheless, we made our way out of the mountains, made it to Nam Tha and were waiting at the airfield when the aircraft landed. As it was taking off, the mortar rounds were dropping on the airstrip behind us. We went back to Luang Prabang, met up with the rest of the teams and returned back to Okinawa.

Q: Well now you said it was a mixed Chinese, North Vietnamese, Communist Lao force.

HARALSON: How do I know that? Years later I was attending the Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and met a Laotian Colonel, who had been a Lieutenant with us during that action outside of Nam Tha. He and some of his men were captured and taken to China, held prisoners for about year and then overpowered their guards and escaped. He is the one that told me there were Chinese, Vietnamese, and Pathet Lao that attacked us.

Q: Did you find out what happened. Did the communists re-establish control?

HARALSON: That is a good question Stu. There is more to the story. After over running us at Nam Tha, the communists began a general military offensive that was designed to come down all the way to Thailand. In fact, the U.S. mobilized and moved Marines into Thailand to stop this attack. The communists never made it to Thailand and being over run at Nam Tha was the opening battle of the general offensive. In other words, I was with the first unit that engaged the enemy during their push to take all of Laos.

Q: Was this sort of the beginning, all of a sudden at a certain point you have President Kennedy showing Laos probably for the first time on the map. Where was it, in Geneva or something?

HARALSON: That's right, it happened after we had departed Laos in March 1962. There were other Special Forces teams that replaced us. I think a few months later the UN became involved, and peace accords were put in place. Under those agreements we pulled all of our Special Forces out of Laos. This was the '62-'63 time frame. I imagine the end result of this offensive that over ran us and continued towards Thailand was an increased awareness on the part of the US or UN that they had better bring this escalating conflict to a conclusion through negotiations, and that is what happened.

Q: They ended up with sort of a three power agreement.

HARALSON: Something like that.

Q: It was a peculiar set up. More or less it neutralized Laos because I guess there were plans, at least they were beginning to look and say maybe we should put a division in Laos, and start looking how the hell do you put a division in there?

HARALSON: Laos is a landlocked country, with no infrastructure to speak of. There still not much infrastructure in Laos. I have returned to Laos in my current capacity and it is not too much further ahead than it was in '61 or '62. That is how I know who attacked us at Nam Tha, the fellow that was captured in 1962 told me.

Q: How did he get away, I mean what happened to him?

HARALSON: Well they were held prisoners for awhile, in China, and then they overpowered and killed their guards. They escaped and made it back into Laos and he rejoined and remained in the Laotian army. Major Suk Chai who commanded the 55th BP eventually was promoted to General. The Laotian Lieutenant who I had been with at Nam Tha was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Years went by and we both landed at Fort Leavenworth in 1974. By this time I had become an officer and had the rank of Major and we both ended up at the same school. While we are at that school, Laos fell to the communists. This would have been 1975. The last time I saw him, he was managing a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Kansas City.

Q: I was just talking to a man whose first overseas assignment in the foreign service was being a political officer in Laos, and he got there in '76. Talking about obviously a very difficult time.

HARALSON: Yes it was. It was my first combat action. I had made a combat jump, which was a major accomplishment. I had experienced my first combat action and survived. After returning to Okinawa, I decided to re-enlist in the Army. I did not have a lot going for me at this time. At least not much that would be valued outside of Army life. I had a high school diploma and was just a Corporal. However, I had combat experience on my record, the first since the Korean War and I had a combat jump which was a highly prized within Special Forces. I received orders to return back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After some home leave and returning to Fort Bragg, an intersection of events took place. I got off the bus at Smoke Bomb Hill at Fort Bragg and was walking across the parade field to report into my new unit. Coming towards me was a Lieutenant Colonel whom I recognized. His name was Colonel Riggs and I knew him because he had been the officer in charge when we received ski training in Utah. I put my bag down, saluted and said, "Good morning sir." He said, "Oh Haralson, how are you doing? I haven't seen you in a couple of years. Where have you been?" I said, "I was in Okinawa, and fought up in Laos." He said, "Oh you are a Corporal. You must have screwed up and got busted right?" "No, sir, I didn't screw up. There weren't any promotions in those days to make Sergeant, so I am just a Corporal." He said, "What did you do?" and I told him what I had done in Laos. He said, "Well nice to have you back. Be seeing you around." So I saluted and proceeded to the unit. I think it was in the same building I had been assigned to back in '59. I knocked on the door and an old gruff Sgt Major indicated for me to enter and I reported, "Sir Corporal Haralson reporting for duty." He said, "Who the hell do you know, Haralson?" "Sergeant Major I don't know anybody, I am just reporting in from Okinawa." He said, "I just got a phone call from Colonel Riggs. He said as soon as you came through the door to promote you to Sergeant." A chance meeting on the parade field caused me to be promoted to Sergeant.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. I would like to have a cut off point. We will pick this up the next time in 1962.

HARALSON: I arrived at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in the summer of 1962 and had just been promoted to Sergeant.

Q: For those that don't know, Fort Bragg, North Carolina is the home of the Airborne and Special Forces.

HARALSON: Special Forces. By this time we had been authorized to wear our green berets.

Q: Well President Kennedy started making big publicity about green berets, because all of a sudden all of the Kennedys, I include Bobby in this, embraced the green beret concept which is in a way sort of an opening wedge of sort of getting us involved in Vietnam.

HARALSON: Exactly. He visited Fort Bragg in early 1962. Because he had heard about what we had been doing in Laos, he came down to be briefed about our working with indigenous populations, etc. We had been wearing the beret on the "sly" against the wishes of the military chain of command. He awarded Special Forces the authority to wear the Green Beret. That really launched the popular notion of what Special Forces stood for, which continues to this day.

Q: I realize you were way down in the feeding order, but you know every time we have these special units, first the paratroopers and the rangers in WWII and later on the idea of taking the cream of the crop from the leg infantry. What you are doing is you are diminishing the fighting ability of your main armed force.

HARALSON: Absolutely. There is no doubt that is one of the impacts. Once you start reassigning good NCO's from regular units, you are essentially eating your seed corn. There is no doubt that is one of the results. One of the problems with Special Forces, and we will cover it in later interviews, is once you start expanding, you have to start to take in people that might not have been accepted when it was a small, very exclusive organization. I suspect that today, 2005, while Special Forces are touted as the answer to everybody's problem for combating terrorism, you have to be cautious not to expand too fast. The problem becomes one of maintaining quality as you keep expanding the force structure. You don't have enough time to train them in languages, area orientation, and specialized skills, etc. There have always been problems within regular units when good soldiers transfer to Special Forces.

Q: Well in WWII you had the British, the commandos were part of this, and the German army they kept having special SS and this and that. You know it....

HARALSON: There are only so many outstanding soldiers to go around. If you want an exclusive unit, you can't build one overnight. You have to retain them. They have to work together and do a lot of different things over a period of time. If you don't, then Special is not very special at all.

Q: OK, well we will pick this up the next time. We are 1962, and you have just been made Sergeant at Fort Bragg.

HARALSON: Perfect.

Q: OK today is 14 December 2005. Now we are back to '62. What happened?

HARALSON: Well thanks Stu. Well after making Sergeant I settled into the life of a junior non commissioned officer, and participated in various training exercises in '62. One thing very unusual happened, however, in late '62. One morning I looked out the window and I saw military police spreading triple concertina wire around the barracks where our team was working. This was unusual, so I went and picked up the telephone and tried to call out, and the line was dead. The next thing we knew, we found ourselves in a lock down mode. In other words we were forbidden from communicating with anybody and were not allowed to leave the premises. The next thing I knew, we were provided footlockers and told to put in all of our uniforms, personal belongings, make an inventory and put that in the footlocker. They brought lawyers in to help us write our last will and testament. They also put that in the box, locked and banded it. We were re-issued uniforms with no markings, no patches or nametags. We were given foreign weapons without serial numbers, that could not be traced to the U.S. We went into an intensive study program. We were being alerted to go to Cuba. This was a year after the Bay of Pigs but it was right at the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis. For about two weeks, we took a crash course in Spanish. The only Spanish I remember these days is, "don't shoot me, I am your friend, hide me". At night we were put on trucks with no markings, driven to Pope Air Force base at Fort Bragg, placed on airplanes with no markings and flown to Cuba. For the next six weeks we spent our time at Guantanamo Bay. This was during the height of the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: This is tape 2 side 1 with John Haralson.

HARALSON: We were flown to Guantanamo Bay, and were there as the advanced element for what could have ended up being a U.S. response to Soviet missiles that were being placed in Cuba. I won't go into details on our specific missions; they are still a little bit too sensitive as long as Castro is alive. We returned to the States in December 1962. About that time I was thinking that I should do something other than remaining a junior NCO for the rest of my life and decided to put in an application for officer candidate school. This was a very arduous undertaking. No one would help you with the application process, I spent a lot of time picking away with two fingers on a typewriter, putting together the voluminous information that you needed to apply for officer candidate school. I went home on vacation over the holidays, and returned to Fort Bragg in January '63. After sending the application up the line, I didn't pay much attention to what happened to it. In those days physical training was quite difficult. I had come off a 25 mile road march and found myself extremely tired, went on sick call and found out that I had contracted malaria. We had not been provided with any type of malaria prophylactic while in Cuba and ended up in the hospital suffering from vivax malaria. After two weeks in the hospital, I suddenly received a call, saying, "John, you have been selected to go before an officer candidate school board. Can you be at the board site this afternoon?" Well here I am on my back with malaria. I said, "Sure." I jumped up and raced back to my barracks, put together my best dress uniform, and off I went. The board process was very interesting. One of the questions I remember them asking, "What makes you think that you could be an officer, Sergeant Haralson?" I said, "Well I just spent six months in the jungles in Laos sleeping next to a First Lieutenant. I know I am a better man than he is, let alone an officer." They asked me what his name was, and I gave it to them. They all laughed and I think they agreed with me and I passed that part of the selection process. After two weeks I received a call from the office of the Commander of Special Forces and was informed that he was going to recommend disapproval of my officers school application. I asked them why and was told that because of only having a high school diploma, I would be placed at a disadvantage compared with West Point and college ROTC graduates. They asked if I would like to pull my application back, because General Yarborough was going to recommend disapproval? I indicated no. After having spent all this time preparing the application, I did not want to retract it and I told them to forward it to the Department of the Army and have General Yarborough recommend disapproval if he wishes, but I am not pulling it back. A couple of months later, I was on a field exercise at Camp McCall. I remember it being very cold.

Q: Where is Camp McCall?

HARALSON: Camp McCall is a subsidiary post to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was a very large base in WWII as a paratroop center. I was told to get on a truck and return to Special Forces headquarters at Fort Bragg. Arriving back, I went in and the Sergeant Major said, "John, I just got a call from the Department of the Army." This happened to be Friday morning. "They want to know if you can be at Fort Benning, Georgia, to start Officer Candidate School (OCS) on Monday. And by the way, I told them yes, you could, and I have already filled out your clearance papers from Fort Bragg, and do you have any money to get there?" Earlier in this interview I talked about people loaning me money. Well this particular Sergeant Major, his name was George Vedrine, he has since passed away, gave me \$100 and said, "All I want back from you is an invitation to your commissioning." The next morning I took a bus and headed for Fort Benning, Georgia. I went through 23 ½ weeks of Infantry OCS that began in early April 1963 and graduated in September '63 as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry. Just before graduating from OCS, it was announced that there were six openings for the Ranger School. It would start on Monday, and we would graduate on Friday and by the way, would you like to attend? Being young and foolish I said sure. I took the weekend off and immediately started training at the Ranger Department, which lasts nine weeks. I teamed with Jim Grimshaw, as Ranger Buddy for the training. Jim had also been in the same OCS with me. During the third week of the course, while standing in formation, it was announced, "Ranger Haralson, front and center." Ranger School is not the type of place that you ever want to be singled out and called forward for any reason. I was called forward and awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB), which was very unusual in 1963. I had been awarded the CIB for my actions in Laos, which were described earlier. It was a perfect time to be awarded the CIB; because the only people with any combat experience in the Ranger Department were the Colonel, his Sergeant Major, and Ranger Haralson. From then on, I had no trouble passing any of the arduous events because of having received the Combat Infantryman's Badge. The day we graduated from Ranger School was the same day President Kennedy was assassinated. I graduated, received my Ranger Tab, and was picking up clothes at the cleaners when I heard that President Kennedy was shot. My plans were to travel to Mississippi to visit relatives before going home to upstate New York for a vacation. I had orders after Officer Candidate and Ranger School, to report back to Special Forces at Fort Bragg. After hearing of President Kennedy's assassination, I drove to Mississippi and stopped in at a restaurant/bar that was owned by my Aunt. I must have arrived there about 2:00 in the afternoon and they were having a party, a big time party. They were celebrating that President Kennedy had been killed. They felt that with Kennedy being assassinated that this probably would roll back some of the gains that the anti segregation elements had made during the Kennedy administration. I spent five minutes before leaving. As I left I told them, "I am leaving, and the next time you see me I will be back here to integrate you with federal troops." I didn't stop to visit my other relatives at that point.

Q: Just a quick aside, how integrated was your portion of the Army that you were seeing.

HARALSON: Totally integrated. We had black soldiers with me at Officer Candidate School; we had black officers and NCO's in Ranger School. The military had desegregated under the Truman administration in 1951 or '52. I was used to working with blacks. I had black Sergeants and black Officers over me at various times. The military was totally integrated. I reported to Fort Bragg after the holidays in early 1964 and was told that I would be going to school again. Most qualifications do not carry over from enlisted to officer status, except for Special Forces, Airborne and Ranger qualification. Nevertheless, I started the Special Forces Officer's course and was in it for about three weeks. Officers that knew me before I went to OCS contacted me and said, "We have got a mission going to Ethiopia, would you like to be the Executive Officer of an "A" detachment. If you accept, will just give you credit for all of these courses that you were going to attend." I said, "It sounds good to me." I joined the team being sent to Ethiopia in 1964. We were in Ethiopia due to an agreement between President Kennedy and Emperor Haile Selassie whereby we would provide counter insurgency training for Ethiopian military units that were returning from the Congo where they had been under the UN Peace keeping programs. We arrived in Ethiopia; there were four "A" Teams, and I was the Executive Officer or the number two officers on an "A" detachment. The team leader was Captain Paul Finlayson. We flew into Addis Ababa. The second day there we went to Jubilee Palace, where we had an audience with Haile Selassie, and briefed him and his advisors on the type of training we planned on conducting with his military. Following that we flew to Jiggia, a town in the Ogaden desert, about an hour by road from Hargeysa, Somalia. We lived in tents just outside of the town.

Q: When you are talking about Hargeysa, Somalia, we are talking about essentially northern Somalia up near Djibouti.

HARALSON: Yes, not too far. These days it is known as Somaliland.

Q: The British had that part and the Italians had the other part before WW11.

HARALSON: Exactly. We took up residence in a UN sponsored Point Four well drilling compound. It had three strands of barbed wire around it and a deep water well. The reason we were able to take the compound over was because Somali Shifta had killed the former occupants of the Point Four project. Shifta are Somali bandits. We moved in and began training Ethiopian units. I taught patrolling that entailed teaching classes during the day in an old graveyard, because the tall cactus provided shade. I had a horse and would ride him bareback to classes. We would teach during the day, and then I would lead patrols at night, looking for Somali bandits and smugglers of chat. Chat is a mild narcotic that was being smuggled through Ethiopia to Djibouti for onward shipment to Yemen.

Q: This is a leaf one of the narcotics.

HARALSON: I never chewed it but those that do end up with huge pouches in their cheeks from stuffing these leaves into their mouth. Jiggia was in a very remote part of E. Africa and we were truly way out and beyond anything that you could consider to be a military support system, even to the point where we would run a duty roster where two people a day would hunt for our food. We mostly survived on Guinea fowl and Francalino, a type of a quail. Occasionally we would take a boar, and or a Kudu, a type of deer. We ate with the troops when we could and dined primarily on injera and wat which is a stew spread over hard flat bread.

Q: Did you get up to Kagnew Station?

HARALSON: I did. I will tell you about that right now. After we were in Jiggia four months we were told to pack up, that we were moving to Eritrea. Eritrea was part of Ethiopia in 1964. There was a US military listening post located in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, called Kagnew Station.

Q: It was also a transfer point, I mean a place where they would catch messages and pass them on too.

HARALSON: A re-transmission site as well, they were also listening to transmissions from the Soviet Union. We lived 30 miles west of Asmara; in the town of Decamare. We pitched our tents and for the next couple of months we established a Non-Commissioned Officer academy for Ethiopian soldiers. After TDY in Ethiopia for 7 months, it was time to leave Asmara and we packed up our gear went to the airfield. There were 10 NCO's, Captain Ray Schrump and myself. Captain Schrump was later captured in Vietnam and released at the end of the war. A plane was to transport us back to Addis Ababa for our farewell audience with Haile Selassie. Well it turned out to be a very small plane, only large enough for half of us. Captain Schrump turned to me and said, "Lieutenant Haralson, I don't know how you are going to do this, but I am taking half the team and leaving on the plane. You take the rest of the men and all of the equipment and I want be in Addis Ababa in four days. Good luck." He and the others got on the plane and left. I was standing at the airfield with six NCO's and several large boxes and everybody looking at me. I told them, "Stay here and I will go figure this out." I hitched a ride to a Major's house that was part of the US military assistance group in Asmara. He said, "Well I have never driven to Addis Ababa, but it is about 1500 Km across the Rift Valley. But I know somebody that has driven there." I was able to hire a truck driver that had fought in the Korean War with the Ethiopian contingent. Ethiopia had a very substantial military force that fought with the UN during the Korean War. This fellow owned a Mack Truck and agreed to drive us to Addis Ababa. I gave him money to buy two or three barrels or 55 gallon diesel fuel and found somebody who drew us a map on a cocktail napkin, with two locations of where we might find a place to stay overnight. We loaded everything on the truck, and within three hours we were heading west into the Rift Valley. The blacktop road ends about 10 Km south of where we started. From then on it was unimproved roads for 1500 Km. Most of the tunnels and bridges in the area had been constructed by the Italians in the 1930's. When we would go through the tunnels you could see where across the face of the tunnel it had said Benito Mussolini, but had been filled in with mud, but you could see some of the mud was falling out. It was a very long and dusty drive to Addis Ababa. After arriving, was gave the truck driver all of our money so he could return home. We arrived in time to get cleaned up, and made the audience at Jubilee Palace where Haile Selassie gave us all small gifts and thanked us for training his forces.

Q: Question. That road between Addis and Eritrea was renowned for having Shiftas whom waylaid people. That is why you didn't drive. Later as things developed, the Shiftas were said to be part of the Eritrean Liberation Front. Did you have any trouble with them?

HARALSON: Here is how we did it, Stu. We also had trouble in the Ogaden with Somali Shifta, which were also bandits. Shifta is a common term for bandit throughout Ethiopia and we encountered them in Eritrea as well. We always carried several cartons of cigarettes. When we were stopped at checkpoints, we would hand out packs of cigarettes. That is just how we made it through the Shifta, of course, we were armed as well and not likely to put up with much nonsense. The roads throughout Ethiopia were very dusty. They reminded of the movie about General George Patton. We would wear goggles, and have a layer of dust caked all over your face. We never were robbed, but we passed out a lot of packs of cigarettes as we drove around Ethiopia.

Q: I can talk about the Korean War time and packs of cigarettes were the currency. Now tell me, what was your impression of the Ethiopian military in the Korean War. They had a pretty good reputation along with the Turks.

HARALSON: I have very good impressions of them having trained with them every day and led them on patrols. They are very brave and were without fear. In some ways, that didn't always work out to be the best solution for what we were trying to accomplish. I never saw them turn and run in a firefight, and I was in several with them while we were on patrols. But the problem was they had no fire discipline. What I mean by fire discipline, is they would shoot all of their ammunition and then wouldn't have any left. So they were good for one charge, and that was it. After that there was no ammunition left. That was their reputation from the Korean War as well. Extremely aggressive, but the problem was after they had seized their objective, they couldn't hold it because they were out of ammunition. One other thing before we leave Ethiopia. This was my first encounter with the Peace Corps. I became friendly with some Peace Corps girls that were teaching in Ethiopia. Peace Corps in the early 60's really wouldn't have anything to do with the military. They were afraid to be branded as spies.

Q: They were afraid of the embassy too. The whole thing was very much hands off.

HARALSON: The way we worked it being young girls and guys, we found ways to get around all of that. We couldn't be seen together in public, but if you came around at night with a six pack of beer, we would get together and have a few beers. You can't separate 24 and 25-year-old boys and girls for very long. We did have some interaction with Peace Corps, but it was very much kept under wraps so to speak. It often bothered me though. Before we went into Ethiopia, Peace Corps wouldn't give us any information on the diseases we might encounter in the area. I wasn't too happy about that, the idea of not sharing that information still does not set right with me.

Q: Well I think you have got to go back to the times. When the Peace Corps was started, it was accused of being an adjunct of the CIA in those days. They wouldn't give out information to embassy personnel. I mean they were trying to be a little bit holier than thou. I think things broke down later on, but you were there at the beginning. Everybody was very touchy on this, and probably rightly so until the program got fully developed. But no, it might have bothered a lot of people.

HARALSON: Very interesting times. It was impressive having audiences with Emperor Haile Selassie and roaming around east Africa. We returned to the States and went on home leave over the holidays. After returning to Fort Bragg, I was transferred to become a commander of an "A" team departing for training in Alaska. This was the middle of January 1965.

Q: An "A" detachment or team is...

HARALSON: Consists of 12 people, 10 NCO's and two officers. It is the basic building block of the Special Forces unit. It was designed to be split in half, just as in Laos, when I was in half of an A detachment. Half of a team consists of an officer, weapons, demolitions, medic, communicator and intelligence NCO. We left for Alaska and were assigned to Saint Lawrence Island, in the Bering Strait. It is the second closest spot to the Soviet Union from the US. I took half of the team and moved to the Eskimo village of Gambell. The other half of the team was located halfway up the island at a place called Savoonga. We had several teams in villages training the Alaska National Guard (NG), the Eskimo Scouts. The primary reason for Eskimo Scout NG units were to serve as early warning, watching for people coming across the Bering Sea from the Soviet Union. It was an hour flight from Nome to St. Lawrence Island. We were met by dog sleds and stayed at the NG armory. I began coordinating with the Sergeant, who was also the village chief, on the classes we were scheduled to teach and included refresher training on unit tactics, weapons, etc. We were ready to teach the first day and nobody showed up. I went to find the Eskimo Sergeant and asked him why no one came to class. He said, "Well, you have to understand when the weather is good, we hunt. When the weather is bad, we come to class." Being a quick thinking Special Forces officer, I said, "Ok, when the weather is good, I hunt with you and when it is bad, we will have classes." That led to hunting for walrus and seal from walrus skin boats throughout the Bering Sea. We would shoot a walrus, and then you had to harpoon them before they sank. Then you would drag them over to an ice flow, using block and tackle; you would haul them up on the ice. They would be butchered and the food and the skins would be used in the village. We spent two months hunting and teaching classes with the Eskimos. Following that, we returned to the mainland, and the Eskimos became guerilla forces for us during winter exercises against units from Fort Lewis, Washington.

Q: Well was there any interaction with Eskimos or whatever you want to call them, on the other side. Because in a way, nations develop borders but tribal groups have their own ways of doing things.

HARALSON: It is a very good question, Stu. Actually yes. Many of the Eskimos in these villages had their cousins and extended family in villages on the other side, residing in the Soviet Union. They told me they would often meet halfway in the Bering Strait, exchange cigarettes, talk about relatives and occasionally slip back and forth between villages. Yes, the Soviet Union was using the Eskimos on their side of the border for reconnaissance as well. There were cases of finding signs of patrols that have come across into the US. You can look across five or ten miles of water or ice and see the Soviet Union on the other side. The exercises we were holding were unremarkable with the exception of making parachute jumps out the back of C-130 aircraft at 45 below zero. You definitely had to bundle up. We would jump off the tailgate of C-130's pushing what are known as Akios or sleds ahead of us. We snowshoed and cross country skied for several weeks. This was the same type of movement I learned back in Utah several years before. We were opposing forces from regular army units that were being sent to Alaska for training. After leaving Alaska and returning to Fort Bragg, it was time for me to leave the "A" team. Having been to Ethiopia and on exercises in Alaska, it was decided to move me up to Headquarters. I became the Executive Officer of the Headquarters Company, was promoted to First Lieutenant, and soon after was notified by Officer Assignment branch that it was time for me to leave Special Forces for other assignments. You could not spend too long in Special Forces as an officer in those days, because it was not considered the Infantry. You had to rotate between Special Forces assignments and conventional units. I received orders for Germany. Enroute I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky for a Maintenance Officers Course and arrived in Augsburg, Germany in January of 1966. I was assigned to a Mechanized Infantry Battalion. I reported to the unit and the Battalion Commander said, "Lieutenant Haralson, we have been waiting for you. We see that you went to the Organizational Maintenance Officer course at Fort Knox enroute to this assignment. I want to make you the motor pool officer." Well that really wasn't in my plans. My plan was to be a Company Commander, and here is the Battalion Commander wanting to stick me in the motor pool, so I decided be bold. I said, "Colonel, you don't understand. I just came from Special Forces, and you obviously can see that I am wearing a Special Forces combat patch on my right shoulder. I have received the Combat Infantryman's Badge from Laos, and I am Ranger qualified. Not only do I not want to be your motor pool officer, but I would like to be one of your company commanders and preferably of the worst company that you have." Well the Colonel was obviously taken aback by this and said, "Lieutenant Haralson, do you think you can come back in about two hours?" I said, "Yes, sir, I would be happy to." When I returned he had his Executive Officer and Sergeant Major in his office. He said, "Lieutenant Haralson, based on what you told me, I have relieved B Company commander. Would you please go down there and take charge of that outfit and get it shaped up." I said, "I would be glad to, Colonel." That is what I did. I had the Company for about six months. It was very interesting. I won't go into a lot of details, but what happened the first day I was in command is indicative of how I commanded a Company. The following morning I arrived at the unit for the first call, when the troops were getting ready to go into the dining hall for breakfast. At five o'clock in the morning, I drove in from BOQ where I was living; it was raining and drizzly. All the troops were standing in the rain outside the dining hall door. I walked up said to the first two or three people, "How come you are standing in the rain and not inside eating." They said, "Sir, the mess sergeant won't let us in. He said, he doesn't have a head count." A head count is someone who is detailed to keep track of the number of people that are being fed. That is the basis for drawing rations to feed your troops. I said, to him, "If I gave you the OK do you think you all could knock that door off its hinges?" He replied, "Oh yes sir, we could do that." I said, "Ok, on the count of three we will all run and hit the dining hall door at the same time. 1,2,3." We hit that door and knocked it off its hinges and it went flat on the floor with a loud bang. I was the first one across and up comes this big fat mess sergeant sputtering, wondering what is going on. "What is going on here?" I said, "Mess Sergeant, how come our troops are standing out in the rain?" He said, "Sir, the head count didn't show up." I said, "Well you are going to be head counter until I tell you otherwise. Let's get these troops fed." I obviously started off the first day in command with a strong statement. I only was there for six months. The unit went on many field exercises and near the end of my time in Germany we had the unit in the mountains behind Bad Tolz, Germany. Unexpectedly a helicopter landed and the Battalion Operations Officer jumped off the helicopter ran up to me and said, "John, try to look surprised. The Battalion Commander is going to tell you that you are being curtailed. You are heading for Vietnam." I said, "Try to look surprised? I am surprised." I turned the Company over to my Executive Officer and I was put on the helicopter. I had one day to clear, pack, and I was on an airplane heading for Vietnam. The Army obviously wanted Special Forces officers with combat experience. I spent a short time at home, and headed to Vietnam, arriving in September of 1966. After going to the headquarters of Special Forces in Nha Trang, and meeting with the Commander, Colonel Francis Kelly, he assigned me the mission of completing construction of a training center on Phu Quoc Island, which is off the southern coast of Vietnam, close to the international borders of Cambodia and Thailand.

Q: It is not quite the delta area, it is above the delta.

HARALSON: It is off the southern coast, but as you fly out to it, you usually stop at Can Tho and some of the other towns in the delta. In the center of Phu Quoc Island, is the capital of the Province, called Yong Dong where we were building the training center. I arrived just as they were completing the berm (dirt wall), erecting tents, and establishing the infrastructure for a training center. The plan was to bring Vietnamese volunteers, known as CIDG which means Civilian Irregular Defense Group, from primarily a religious sect called Hoa Hoa to the training center and turn them into effective combat ready units.

Q: It was a sect that had fought the communists for many years.

HARALSON: Very anti communist. They were from Chou Duk Province, in the delta. They were volunteering to fight against the Vietcong and were sent to us at Phu Quoc Island to put them through not only basic but also unit level training. Following that, they would be sent back to the mainland and form into company size units that Special Forces would lead and advise, primarily in the Fourth Corps area of Vietnam. One humorous incident occurred while I was there on New Years Eve, we were getting ready to have a party. We had a couple of American girls who had flown down from Saigon and brought a Christmas tree to cheer us up. We were starting the party when the radio operator came to me. By now I had been promoted to Captain, in Vietnamese the rank is called Dai We. He said, "Dai We, I have got an important message here." So we decoded it and it said, "General Westmoreland will visit your camp tomorrow at 10:00 in the morning. Be prepared to meet and brief." Well we immediately stopped the party and organized an honor guard. The following morning General Westmoreland's plane landed outside of the camp. Well, I had a little problem. I had these two American girls who had no business being in our camp. I didn't want General Westmoreland to find out that they were in the camp, so I had my bodyguard, we called him Frenchy because he was half-French, half-Vietnamese, help us out. Frenchy took the control of the two American girls and kept them from being seen. I went out and met General Westmoreland and his party, and we went through the honor guard review and I gave him a walking tour of the training facility. The main building was shaped like a "U", and as I was walking General Westmoreland and his party around the camp, Frenchy would have the two girls in tow, one corner ahead of the official party. General Westmoreland never knew we had American women in camp. Years later I met General Westmoreland at a Special Forces Convention, our daughter Stacey, who was about 18 or 19 at the time, was with me. We told General Westmoreland the story about his visit to us on New Years Day and how we hid the American women during his tour of the camp. He said that he remembered being there on New Years Day and indicated why he came to visit us. He said, "The reason I came to your camp was that I told my staff that I wanted to visit the most remote Special Forces team in Vietnam on New Years Day." They said, "Well then, you have to go see Captain Haralson, he is way out on this little island." In any case, the other story that I want to tell is about having the largest supply of San Miguel beer in Vietnam. One day a Navy C-130 landed and the pilot and crew come up to the camp, they were surveying airfields in that part of Vietnam. I said, "Well where are you going when you leave here?" They said, "We are going to the Philippines." I said, "Well if we gave you some money, do you think you could pick us up some San Miguel beer for us?" They said, "Sure." So I collected all the money we had in camp which came to \$1500 and gave it to them. About a week later, here comes this same plane with \$1500 worth of San Miguel. We immediately took all the supplies out of the supply room and put the beer in its place. I provided the Navy crew with weapons and uniforms to express our pleasure to them for bringing us the beer. From that point, it became known that the team on Phu Quoc Island had a large supply of San Miguel beer. Whenever we had visitors, we would trade for supplies. They would bring in steaks and lots of good food that we could not obtain, because we had to live off the local economy. Special Forces teams in remote locations were never supplied through Army channels. We would provide the visitors with fish sauce, called nuoc mam, which was made on Phu Quoc Island, and a case or two of San Miguel beer. In exchange we dined very well for as long as the beer held out. In February 1967, I was called to our Headquarters in Can Tho and asked if I wanted to transfer to the headquarters staff or if I would like to open a new fighting camp in the delta. I said, "I would prefer to take the fighting camp, but I would like to have the pick of the units that we had trained". They allowed me do this and I picked four companies that were Hao Hao and two reconnaissance platoons that were Chinese Nungs. During Tet of '67 the detachment was designated as A-424 and we moved to a place called My Phuoc Tay in Tien Giang Province, Cai Lay District. It is located on the edge of the Plain of Reeds.

Q: Tet of '67 this is before...

HARALSON: This is a year before the 1968 Tet offensive. We were taking over the location from a Vietnamese Ranger Battalion. They left behind something that became very valuable, two 155 howitzers and a Vietnamese platoon to man these artillery pieces. We started building the camp in February 1967. This was a contested area and we received enemy small arms fire or were mortared almost every night. You only had to travel to the first tree line outside of camp (500 yards) to have all the combat action you wanted. For the next four months we both built the camp and engaged in combat operations, with a great deal of success. We were mostly fighting against what are known as main force units. In addition to commanding 1000 Vietnamese troops, I had 2000 refugees that I was responsible for. My additional responsibility was as the senior advisor to the District Chief. He was located at Cai Lay, which was 10 Km down a road that we would have to clear of mines every day. We conducted numerous operations and experienced a great deal of success. Nearly everyone on the team was wounded at least once. Many of the Americans, including myself, were awarded the Silver Star for heroism. The one thing I am most proud of is that we didn't have any American soldiers on the team killed. A lot of Vietnamese gave their lives for their country, and I think that is as it should be. We (Americans) were much more aggressive than the Vietnamese we were advising. I think many Vietnamese took the long view, that to survive the war in fact was a way of winning the war. It was a tough position, I think, for them to be in. I used to be very frustrated while dealing with the Vietnamese about not being aggressive enough. The way I worked it and I will go into a little bit more depth if you like. I was responsible for paying the Vietnamese troops and made them a deal. I am not sure that West Pointers would have done this, but being a good former sergeant I did it. The deal was the CIDG were stealing weapons, ammunition, and caching them for the future when Americans wouldn't be around. I knew they were doing this. I sat down with the Vietnamese Hao Hao commanders, and told them that I knew what they were stealing, that I would let them continue on a limited basis. In exchange, I would have total control over combat operations. There always was a bit of a rake off, not only of weapons and ammunition, but there also was a racket we called ghost soldiers. People would be killed, and the officers would continue to draw their paycheck. There was always a little bit of this subterfuge. I let this continue as long I had control on a tactical level. It is worth noting that the next two Captains that replaced me were killed. I would not be at all surprised if they were killed by their own troops, perhaps because they didn't understand how to operate in this particular type environment. Several times General Westmoreland, General Abrams, Colonel Kelly would visit the camp. We had a great deal of success in capturing enemy supply depots and capturing or killing large numbers of Vietcong. We were very successful, and I am very proud of what we accomplished. I remain friends with the people that were on the team. We still come together, these many years later, usually at Special Forces conventions. I turned over command of My Phuoc Tay in June of 1967. I had gone on R&R to Hong Kong just before I turned over command. That is where I met my future wife, Sharon, we have been married for 37 years. Sharon was living in Taiwan with her parents. She was working for Air America and her father was working at the US Embassy for USAID. She was also on vacation in Hong Kong. The first restaurant I walked into in Hong Kong she was having dinner with two Air Force Captains. I immediately swooped in, made off with the good-looking blond and we have been married for 37 years. We were married within a year after meeting in Hong Kong. The last part of my tour in Vietnam was with the 5th Special Forces headquarters in Nha Trang. I was responsible for starting a program that would turn Special Forces camps over to the Vietnamese. This was the early stage of Vietnamization. Based on the successes of building a training center as well as a fighting camp, I knew how to deal with the Vietnamese. As I prepared to depart from Vietnam, I did not have orders to report to any place until my last day. I was on the telephone with the Assignments Branch back in Washington. They said, "John, we are going to send you to Fort Polk, Louisiana." I thought to myself, Fort Polk, Louisiana, that is about the last place I would like to go to after coming out of Vietnam. I said, "Well I will be to Washington to see you about this." After going home and visiting friends I traveled to Washington to inquire about changing my assignment. I was a Special Forces Captain, highly decorated, spit shined boots, green beret, and I strolled into infantry assignments branch wanting to see Mr. So and So who had decided to send me to Fort Polk. When I met him I said, "You don't seem to understand, I don't think I am going to go to Fort Polk. If you insist on sending me, I think I will resign my commission." He said, "Well very good Captain, if you will just step in here, we can probably take care of that in about an hour. You will be about the fifth person that resigned today. No problem." I replied, "Well not so fast. Let's think about this. I think I have to be leaving for Fort Polk." I drove to Fort Polk and was assigned to command an Advanced Infantry Training Company.

Q: What was Fort Polk for?

HARALSON: There were two things taking place at Fort Polk at the time. One was basic training; the other was advance infantry training. We would receive new soldiers that were assigned to the infantry, and when they finished training, they were sent to Vietnam as infantry replacements. I lived in a small house in Leesville, Louisiana, and commanded a company for about a year. During that time, I became engaged and then Sharon and I were married in May 1968. At about the time we were married, I received a call from infantry branch indicating that it was time for me to return to Vietnam. I said, "You know, I am just getting married. What other options do you have?" They said, "We could send you to Thailand, but it is an unaccompanied tour." I said, "I will take it." Sharon had grown up in the Army, her father was a retired Army Colonel, and she knew her way around overseas. We decided that she would fly to Bangkok, rent an apartment, and find a job while I was working with Special Forces up country. That is what she did. We ended up with an apartment in Bangkok, and I reported to Loperi, the location of the Special Forces headquarters north of Bangkok. I was further assigned to a training camp at Nan Dacu, in the mountains halfway between Bangkok and Korat. The mission at the camp was to train Thai Rangers and Special Forces as part of the Thai Army Division heading for Vietnam. I worked at this camp for five months and was able to drive to Bangkok once or twice a month to spend some time with my bride. After five months, I was moved to northern Thailand and was placed in charge of building a training center outside of Lampang, Thailand. Two Special Forces teams were moved to Lampang, which is about an hour's drive south from Chiang Mai. You will recall earlier in the interview that back in 1960 and '61 I studied the Thai language and had fought in Laos, so I spoke the language and was familiar with the area. We lived in Lampang and started clearing a training center located half way between Lampang and the Laotian border. We hired elephants to haul teakwood; drilled wells and built a training center. That lasted through the summer of 1969 and then Sharon and I rotated back to the States. By this time I was becoming a senior Captain and my lack of a college degree was becoming bothersome. I knew that I couldn't remain an officer unless I obtain a degree. I went to the Army Education Center in Bangkok and the first thing they did was have me take a series of tests. If you passed, which I did, you were given credit for your first year of college. Then we determined how I could obtain additional college credits. Back at Fort Polk, I had started taking college courses in the evening. This combined with end of course exams (take the exam, but you did not have to attend classes) allowed me to obtain two years equivalency of undergraduate work. Just before leaving Thailand, I applied for a regular army commission. If you had two years towards an undergraduate degree, you could apply. It was important to receive a regular army commission, because you were shielded from a reduction in force (RIF) when the war was over. It also placed you in a good position to attend college on a full-time basis, while remaining in the Army and drawing your full salary. I received my regular army commission before we departed from Thailand in 1969, and returned to Fort Benning, Georgia, for the Infantry Officer Advanced Course.

Q: I would like to go back for a minute to Thailand. Now when I was in Saigon which was '69-'70, the Thai division was called the dragon or tiger or something.

HARALSON: I think they were called the Black Panther Division?

Q: Black panther, something. Anyway, it seemed from what I gathered they seemed to spend an awful lot of time at the PX. I remember watching them march into the PX in Chou Lon. Everybody buying the same kit practically. Anyway, it did not have a great reputation. I am not sure they were really tested because they were there for almost symbolic purposes. Did you get that feeling?

HARALSON: Sure. In many ways it is like Iraq today, where you put your coalition partners down in the southern part of Iraq, where there is not much action, but you can point to them and say how much they are involved and support the war. You will remember the Koreans also had a large contingent in Vietnam, but they were rough soldiers. The communists didn't fool around with a Korean. I think you are right about the Thai units, I had heard that they had a live and let live kind of an agreement with the Viet Cong.

Q: Well to be fair, they were going in as a symbol, and they sure as hell weren't going to get themselves too tied up in this war. They had other fish to fry.

HARALSON: Sure, they had their own fish to fry. I think a lot of what they learned in Vietnam helped them when they returned to Thailand. Not only did they have some of their units with combat experience; they were not bloodied too badly. I am sure they ended up with new equipment and military aid from the US. Even to this day some of our best friends in that part of the world are the Thais.

Q: I just wondered. OK now we are moving on. By the way, how did Tet, we are talking about the Tet offensive of February '68. Did that have any impact on your operation?

HARALSON: The camp that we built at My Phuoc Tay was attacked but not over run. The end result from everybody that I talked with about the Tet Offensive was that it was absolutely devastating to the local communists. After Tet, all the Vietcong main force units were destroyed and never recovered to fighting strength. The insurgency remained at a very low level in that area. This Vietnamization concept really got on track after Tet; there wasn't much of an insurgency left. The local communists had all been killed off, and were unable to reconstitute themselves. The South Vietnamese were defeated by the regular Army of N. Vietnam, not the Vietcong. After departing Thailand, we moved to Fort Benning, Georgia and I started the Infantry Officer Advanced Course in '69 and went to night school four nights a week to obtain additional college credit. I was told that I could apply to attend college full-time to finish an undergraduate degree at no cost when the military school was completed. Actually it was a funny conversation. They said, "You are doing very well as an officer. You are about ready to be promoted to Major, but you don't have a college degree. You better start thinking about catching up with everybody else, you are making everybody look bad." I contacted Syracuse University, which is near to where I grew up, and they indicated that I would be accepted. However, they indicated that I had to have undergraduate math credits before I arrived. The night course for Algebra was difficult, having never taken it in high school. I fought my way through it, obtained two semesters worth of credit and graduated from the advanced course in the summer of 1970. Then it was off to Syracuse University for two years of the college life.

Q: This is Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York?

HARALSON: Correct.

Q: Let's talk about coming back and being an army officer and having seen action in Vietnam and all of that. What were your impressions of America at the time? We are talking about the anti-Vietnam movement. Did that impact or were you sort of insulated from it. How did this work?

HARALSON: We were insulated somewhat. Living on a military base, we obviously were totally anti anybody that was anti military. To this day I have a picture of Jane Fonda in my garage sitting on an anti aircraft gun, I mean to this day. 2005.

Q: They would say we are not Fonda Jane.

HARALSON: I have recurring dreams of going through a receiving line with Jane Fonda there. I reach out and shake her hand and break her small finger. We were insulated from the anti-war movement, living on a military base.

Q: How about at Syracuse?

HARALSON: Very interesting how we dealt with it at Syracuse. There are two sides of it. I started school in the summer of '70, was promoted to Major and our daughter Stacey was born in December 1971. My wife Sharon, took a position with a group of Psychology Professors. We would go to cocktail parties and they would all want to talk to me about being a Green Beret in Vietnam. Sharon and I held our own and could argue with any of them. I was now 30 years old, an undergraduate at Syracuse and majoring in business management. In addition to a primary concentration, you were required to have a secondary one. I was looking through the course catalogue and decided to have my secondary concentration be in non-violent studies, which is where all the longhaired peaceniks were hiding out from the draft. When I began classes, I was pretty clean looking, short hair, clean clothes, etc. The other students immediately thought I was a government spy. So I said to them, "Let's be clear, I am an army officer, am drawing army pay. As a matter of fact, I am a Major in Special Forces, just back from Vietnam and I may be returning there after I graduate. The Army sent me here to complete my undergraduate degree and I have decided to take these classes because I want to see your point of view." I received a good reception from them, they figured they were going to try to win me over. We had an excellent dialogue, even to the point to when they were going to protest by taking over the ROTC building or the University President's office. I would go along, and while I wouldn't participate in the actual take over, I would take notes and would critique them in class afterwards. The ROTC knew I was doing this as well, so I straddled both fences. If I could jump 20 years forward for a minute to when I was a Lieutenant Colonel and the Professor of Military Science at St. Bonaventure University, and they were going to start a Peace Studies program. They canvassed the faculty to see who was the most qualified to be the senior advisor. It turned out that my secondary concentration at Syracuse in non-violent studies allowed me to become the senior advisor. Returning to Syracuse, being 30 years old and an Army Major is a lot different than being 18 or 19 going off to college and away from home for the first time. First of all, I could not fail; otherwise it would have cost me my career. As a consequence I did very well, studied hard and approached school as if it were a job. I put in eight hours a day, five days a week and ended up graduating Cum Laude with an undergraduate degree in business management. It was a great two years, to step out of the military, it really expanded my view of the world and other people's opinions. It was a great opportunity. I always say about our country that this may be one of the only countries in the world where you can re-invent yourself no matter who or what you are. It doesn't matter if you just got out of prison or whatever, you can regroup, step back, take advantage of the opportunities that are here in abundance, you can recreate yourself and go off in a totally different direction.

Q: Well the interesting thing about the foreign service is it is the only executive type position, foreign service officer, where you don't have to be a college graduate to come in. You pass the exam and that is it. I know at least two who are not college graduates who became ambassadors. You know, they were very good and for one reason or another they hadn't gotten their college degrees, and it didn't make any difference.

HARALSON: They must have had a lot of practical experience. After leaving Syracuse I ended up on an assignment that was probably the toughest I had in my entire military career, recruiting duty. This was 1972 and anti Vietnam movement was very large and vocal. I was assigned to a recruiting main station at New Cumberland Army Depot, Pennsylvania, which is across the river from Harrisburg. The responsibility included 25 recruiting stations from the New York State line to Maryland, west to State College, east to almost Philadelphia. What made this a particularly difficult assignment was that the draft ended in December of 1972. Many people came into the military motivated by not wanting to be drafted. Once the draft incentive ended, it became very difficult to find recruits. Plus, you were given a quota, they called it mission, based on the population of the area. In our case that was without concern for Amish and all the other religious sects that lived in and around central Pennsylvania.

Q: Which is completely pacifist.

HARALSON: Who would never go into the military, recruiting was very difficult and frustrating. I was the operations officer at the recruiting main station. One of the hardest things I had to do, and this has applicability even today, was I had to conduct the investigations when people would go into the military and claim that their recruiter lied to them. Perhaps created a phony high school diploma, or overlooked an arrest record. One thing I learned is that if someone enlists in the Army using subterfuge, in the third week of basic training they will start screaming recruiter malpractice and you will have an investigation. Some of this has taken place during the summer of 2005, based on not being able to recruit enough people because of the Iraq war. So a large part of my time was spent interviewing parents, soldiers that had gone AWOL and NCO's that were being accused of irregularities. Some of the hardest things I had to do were to take disciplinary action against good sergeants that were on recruiting duty. This was very difficult, for example, let's say a Sergeant was located in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania at a recruiting station. His children were in school and his wife has a job and maybe they have bought a house. After conducting an investigation you found out that he was guilty of recruiter malpractice for actions he should not have been taking. He ends up being relieved from duty, reassigned out of recruiting duty and reduced in rank. It was a very difficult time; I did not enjoy that type of work in the least.

Q: I would have thought though, that the area you are talking about also, obviously you have the pacifist groups which were strong, but you also had another thing. The people, who come out of the immigrant population, coal miners and that sort of thing. I mean you know hard working people often Catholic who were prone to go into the military.

HARALSON: Well there were a lot of those people, but there weren't enough of them. It was a struggle the whole way. We were in the aftermath of Vietnam, the draft was ending, but you are right, this is the part of the country that you would think would be the rock bed of patriots. Just not enough of them.

Q: This is good football country.

HARALSON: A beautiful place. Good people, all of them. But, no recruiter ever made his quota at a recruiting station by sitting there and having people walk in. It just didn't happen, it was tough going. I was lucky however. After two years, the tour was normally three years; I was selected for the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Returning to Syracuse for a moment, we had been at the University for about a year when our first child, Stacy, was born. Stacy is now a GS-14 at Homeland Security and doing very well. Just before we left New Cumberland Army Depot in 1974, our son Derek was born. He joined the Army after high school and became a paratrooper, served in Korea and has also done very well. In the summer of 1974, we packed up the two small children, left New Cumberland Army Depot for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It is a yearlong course of study and I did very well. I graduated on the honor roll, among the top ten percent of graduates at the school. The Army offered to send me again to college and gave me six months to finish a Master's degree in History, at the University of Kansas. So from the summer of '75 through December of '75 I was at Lawrence, Kansas, and obtained my Masters Degree. Leaving there, we went to California and became an Inspector General after completing a course at the Pentagon. I was in charge of complaints and investigations for most of California, primarily with the 7th Infantry Division located at Fort Ord. For ten months I interviewed people coming in to the IG making a variety of complaints and accusations against their supervisors, etc. You were required to take sworn testimony and conduct an investigation.

Q: Were you finding any of the problems that later came to almost say bedevil the military, homosexuality in various forms and sexual harassment of women?

HARALSON: You could find that. I had women come in and complain that their chain of command or their boss was harassing them. I don't recall too much of a problem with homosexuals, although I am sure it was very big in California. I just can't recall it. It was a very interesting position to be in, to be an inspector general conducting those types of investigations, a very powerful position that carried a lot of responsibility.

Q: I mean it is the way they system corrects itself, because there is nothing scarier. I speak as someone who was an enlisted man for four years. I was a college graduate when I went in. I was not a happy camper, but I adjusted, but realizing you are up against this awesome force. They can do terrible things to you. The recourse is mine. I never had any problems, but I was aware that being in the military can be scary. They can do things to you.

HARALSON: Being an inspector general was not a popular position to have. The only other people that would talk with you were other inspector general or military lawyers. You would go to the officer's club and everyone would stay away from you. I had that position for about a year when I was asked to become the Executive Officer of an Infantry Battalion. I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry, known as the Buffaloes. It was a straight leg infantry battalion, and I served as the Executive Officer for about a year. We did well; it was a good assignment. I had a lot of interesting stories that came out of the assignment, but I won't go into any detail. It was time to move again. We had been at Fort Ord 2 ½ years and received orders to Fort Monroe, Virginia, The Army Training and Doctrine Command. We lived on the base and I was assigned to the office that was responsible for the Non-Commissioned Officer Education System. I was tasked to do something that had not been done before, a very interesting assignment. In those days NCO's on the active Army side could go any NCO Academy. They had various levels they would go to as a sergeant, staff sergeant and on up. If you were a sergeant in the Reserves, you could only attend Reserve schools. If you were in the National Guard, you would go to National Guard schools, but a National Guard sergeant could not attend a Reserve school and visa versa. This made for a terrible waste of resources throughout the country as to who could go to what school and receive credit as they moved up within the NCO education system. They put me in charge of a study to figure out how we could combine the Reserve and National Guard Non-Commissioned officer education system. I spent a year visiting every NCO academy in the United States and some of the ones overseas. Working with me were the Sgt. Major of the National Guard and the Sgt. Major of the Reserves. We put together our study that set up the same type of courses that could be taught in both of the NCO Academies at the National Guard and Reserve schools. After having made recommendations following a year's worth of work, I was told, "You have go to go to the Pentagon and give a briefing to obtain the approval from the Generals at the highest levels of the Army." So I thought about that. By now I was a Lieutenant Colonel. I said, "I am a regular army officer, and I am telling Reserve and National Guard Generals how their sergeants should be trained, that sounds like a no-win situation." I asked both Sgt. Majors if they believe in the recommended changes that we have laid out?" They said, "Yes." Then I said, "Then you are going to give the briefings at the Pentagon. They are going to have to take your word for it as their senior enlisted representative or they have to fire you. It is going to be much more difficult for them not to take your recommendations than mine." I put together the briefing, rehearsed the two senior enlisted men, and they gave the briefing based on the study that we had come up with, and it was approved. Within a year the courses were in place and a National Guard sergeant could go to a Reserve school, take the same type of training that he would get at a National Guard school and vice versa. It saved massive amounts of money, time and resources. That was my most significant contribution as I look back at my time at Fort Monroe in Training and Doctrine of Command. I transferred from Fort Monroe after three years and took an assignment at St. Bonaventure University as the Professor of Military Science. That included being in charge of the Army Reserve Officer's Training Program (ROTC). St. Bonaventure is located in the western part of New York State, in the town of Olean. It is a small Catholic University run by the Franciscans. I spent three years there; it was a great assignment. I would to call myself the warlord of Western New York. There is no military installation near the University and I spent a lot of time speaking at The Rotary Clubs, VFW, American Legion, and other organizations. I was a faculty member at the University, a very well respected position in western New York.

Q: This is from when to when?

HARALSON: This is from 1981 to 1984.

Q: Testing the waters at that time had Vietnam faded or was there a different attitude?

HARALSON: It was mixed. There was still some hangover from Vietnam, particularly among the faculty.

Q: In fact the faculty in many places was the last refuge of the people that were trying to dodge the draft. They were still around.

HARALSON: They were still around. But having said that, there was a counterbalance. Several of the faculty members, Franciscan monks and priests had fought in WWII. On my ROTC advisory panel, I had former 82nd Airborne paratroopers who had become Franciscan friars. Do you remember Father Daniel Berrigan and his anti-military organization?

Q: Oh yes. He had a brother too.

HARALSON: That's right. They came to the University quite often, and I would be asked to debate them. We debated the major topics of the day including peace, justice, military activity, and terrorism at the Student Center in front of students and faculty. When the debate was over, we would go to the Friary, chat and have a few drinks. I was able to represent the military perspective and the ROTC program to the point of debating Father Daniel Berrigan and afterwards we would be civil enough to sit around and have a pleasant discussion.

Q: The Berrigan brothers were major figures in the anti war movement.

HARALSON: Swords to Plowshares or something like that. We had to work every day to keep the faculty on the side of the ROTC program. There was an inclination towards anti-military thought and action. We expended a great deal of effort attempting to persuade students to sign up for the ROTC program. We were very community oriented, both for the University, as well as people from the towns of Olean and Allegany. For example we would conduct a cross-country ski program in the evening for the people in town as well as the faculty at the campus. We would construct cross-country ski trails, place torches, provide instruction and afterward host a dance (sock hop) in the University's gym. This type of community involvement was very important to us. The ROTC program at St. Bonaventure wasn't large, perhaps a 100 participants, but there was always somebody that wanted to get rid of us. A day didn't go by that we didn't have to fight for our survival. It is still there, the ROTC program is still at St. Bonaventure and seems to be doing well. After three years at the University, I had been in the military for 26 years and was thinking about retiring from the Army. The University asked if I would like to have a position on the faculty, teaching in the School of Business. It would have been a nice transition, I was well thought of in the community, but my wife, Sharon, didn't want to live in the area. She wanted to live in a warmer climate, somewhere with a more cosmopolitan lifestyle. So we delayed plans for retirement and took an assignment in Hawaii. I went back on parachute jump status, wearing a Green Beret and jump boots. We were assigned to the Special Operations Command, part of the Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu. For the next two years I was responsible for counter-terrorism programs in the Pacific. This was a good terminal assignment before retiring from the military. Sharon and the children enjoyed living in Hawaii and I came into contact with State Department personnel while they were conducting crisis management exercises at embassies throughout the pacific region. I represented the Pacific Command as a participant during these exercises and based on that association with State Department, decided to retire from the military and begin the next phase of my life working in crisis management for the Department of State.

Q: OK, well then we will stop here. The next time we will pick it up when you are out in Hawaii and you are getting involved with the State Department. What year are we talking about?

HARALSON: 1984 to 1986.

Q: Great. Tell us a bit more about the type of work you did in counter-terrorism.

I am going to switch tapes here. This is tape three, side one with John Haralson.

HARALSON: After arriving at the Pacific Command I became the head of counter- terrorism programs for the Pacific. That entailed, at least initially, traveling throughout the region, interacting with other countries' counter-terrorist forces.

Q: Could you explain what counter terrorism means, as a military officer. The term is thrown around particularly since 9-11, and I mean because as a practical thing what is it?

HARALSON: In those days we broke the term into anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism. Anti terrorism is taking actions to prevent terrorist acts, and would include such things as training police forces, building barriers, screening aircraft passengers, etc. Essentially preventing terrorist acts from occurring. Counter terrorism is what is known today as consequence management. What actions are taken as a terrorist act is taking place, how to resolve it, what do in the aftermath. This would entail; for example, terrorists entering one of our embassies or ambassador's residences and taking hostages. The types of actions that would be taken to respond to this act would be counter terrorism. It is what you do in response (counter terrorism) as opposed to what you do in advance (anti terrorism).

Q: Well there used to be something that was called the Delta Force. What was that?

HARALSON: Delta Force is our most sophisticated, highly trained military response to terrorists, the major leagues of counter terrorism.

Q: We have seen many watching hijack situations where you professional teams such as the Israelis that seem to be able to get in and do fairly well. Then you have other groups like the Egyptians that create a mess by killing everybody because this is beyond the capabilities of the normal military unit. I am just saying that unless they are really professional at doing this, it is done poorly.

HARALSON: That is the reason that I refer to the big leagues or the first team coming in to resolve this. In extremist situations, let's say an embassy or aircraft seizure, we would want to have Delta Force deployed to resolve it. We did possess counter terrorist response capabilities in the region, but it wasn't trained to the same level of competence as Delta Force. Of course we are talking about long distances. You might have to do something, in extremis, with the response capability at hand. This is the type of assignment I found myself involved in when I arrived back into a military assignment after coming from a college environment. Not too long after arriving Hawaii I was notified that the State Department was beginning to conduct exercises at their embassies and consulates in the Pacific, and they wanted a representative from the military headquarters to join them. In addition to counter terrorism expertise at these exercises, I was advising on the possible use of military assets in non-combatant evacuation operations or NEO, to evacuate Americans from a deteriorating situation. I would represent the military options during these exercises. The first Crisis Management Exercise (CME) I participated in was held in Bangkok, there I joined a team arriving from the Department of State in Washington. The Washington team was part of the State's counter terrorism program, known as S/CT, headed by Ambassador Robert Oakley. The team leader was a retired senior Foreign Service officer, normally a former Ambassador or Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). The number two person on the team would also be retired but often would be retired military. Both the team leader and assistant were contractors. Then you had a mix and match of other people that would be on the team. Some might be from Diplomatic Security; others were from Consular Affairs, country desk officers, etc. Four or five people were usually on the CME team and would spend a week at an embassy. After arrival, they would have an in brief with the Ambassador and DCM, then spend the first two days visiting every location at the post. They would go through all the rooms at the embassy and travel to all outlying sites. This included motor pools, USAID, Peace Corps and all US facilities throughout the capital, becoming familiar with where everything was located. On the afternoon of the second day, we would meet with the Post's Emergency Action Committee (EAC), normally chaired by the DCM. We would brief the EAC consisting of heads of sections on the scenario; set the stage for the exercise. Our equipment in those days was a closed-loop telephone set. After determining where the EAC was going to meet for the exercise, and we would install four telephones. It would be a conference room, inside a secure area, because the exercise was classified Confidential. We would also install four telephones in an area designated as the control room. It had to be within 150 feet of where the EAC was located based on the length of the connecting cables. We would augment the control team with people assigned to the embassy for their specific knowledge of the post, country, and local situation. We often selected the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) to be on the control team, a Marine Security Guard (MSG) and a Political or Economic Officer. The exercise would occur on day three and four of the visit by the team and consisted of telephone calls, written injects that could represent cable traffic, faxes, etc, positing a deteriorating situation. We played using a fast clock, which means that for every 10 minutes real time you were playing the exercise would equal one hour of exercise time. The exercise would move quickly requiring the EAC to make fast decisions and decide how they were going to coordinate their actions. A morning would represent a full day. The afternoon would represent another day. The next morning would represent another full day, and that afternoon would represent an additional day. You were exercising during a two-day period that represented a full four days. The exercise control books were quite large and were similar to a script of a play that you might put on at a little theater playhouse. The exercise was often a couple of hundred pages in length, with roles that role-players would follow. Each action to be played was called an implementer and there were instructions to the role-player regarding how the particular implementer was to be played. The roles played by the control element would represent calls coming from the Department, the Foreign Ministry or from Americans in trouble. The typical exercise would have a variety of events occurring that would lead the EAC to consider the evacuation of Americans from the country. The exercises were extensively researched and drafted in detail. Research would include reviewing past cable traffic at the post, previous crises, current threats, and crisis that could possible occur. A variety of events would be portrayed to the EAC ranging from natural disasters to include earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes; as well threats against Americans, terrorist acts to include bombings and aircraft hijackings, which occurred often in the mid 80's. Also played were kidnappings, unrest associated with deteriorating situations within the local government, coups, and anti-US demonstrations. These events would be scripted in a way to ratchet up the seriousness of the threat to Americans and the official diplomatic community. It could include demonstrators coming over the embassy wall, considerations for rules of engagement, shoot-no-shoot, host government response or lack thereof, etc. The exercise usually would move towards consideration for evacuation of Americans, usually under extreme circumstances. That was part of the reason I was there. I would advise and play military roles concerning counter terrorism responses and evacuation options that represented the gathering, processing and transporting of evacuees by helicopter to naval shipping or by military air because commercial air was not flying. At the end of the exercise, the control element would convene and decide what we wanted to provide the EAC regarding lessons learned, feedback, and a general critique of their actions.

Q: OK do you want to talk about your first initial reaction dealing with the State Department types which wasn't your culture and all that. How did you find it, and then maybe we can talk about some examples of things that would work and things that didn't.

HARALSON: Sure. You are right, I was not used to dealing with people from the State Department. I tell a joke about how I ended up working for the State Department. In Special Forces, you become comfortable working with indigenous people from a different culture, speaking a different language, and acting in a strange manner. That was how I was able to interact with people from State Department. A few of the State Department officers had a limited military background, most did not.

Q: You are talking still about a generation such as mine where we were kind of militarily aware if not happy to serve.

Military backgrounds, their level of expertise usually was limited to the Lieutenant or Captain level before they had departed service. While they understood the basics of military planning, they didn't have an understanding of higher-level staff procedures or operations above the Company level. They had an appreciation for the military but they really didn't know how to interact and coordinate actions with the military at higher levels. I found their approach to emergency planning and procedures were less dogmatic than you would encounter in the military. Most of the time the State Department people would avoid following an emergency action plan and would "wing it", make up their response at the last moment. This was quite different than deliberate military planning and it took me some time to adjust to this approach to crisis planning.

Q: Well it was a guideline more than, you know because you are dealing with such a different world.

HARALSON: The State Department view of the world was quite different from the military. I found the State Department approach to be very interesting, very refreshing. They had a different approach to problem solving, not better or worse than the military, just different. What I did come to appreciate was the intellectual stimulation of working with these people. It was interesting to observe how they could adapt very quickly to almost any situation. In some regards there was a similarity between them and Special Forces, which essentially meant to be "quick on your feet."

Q: I have always compared the normal foreign-service officer to being a little bit like a parachutist. You plunk into something. All of a sudden you hit the ground running, and maybe you have never been in Kyrgyzstan before but you bloody well better adjust and do it right away without maybe much preparation, because there you are and you have got to work with it.

HARALSON: The Crisis Management Exercises (CME) had started a year before I joined up with the CME teams in the Pacific. The background for the CME begins in 1981 or '82 when the US military invited representatives from embassies and consulates in E. Africa to attend an exercise at the European Command Headquarters. The military conducted an exercise where they would be required to conduct a military assisted evacuation. One of the participants was the Consul General from Asmara, Ethiopia.

Q: Kagnev Station.

HARALSON: Kagnev Station. The Consul General participated in that exercise, then returned to Asmara to find himself in the middle of a deteriorating situation where he needed to evacuate Americans from that part of Ethiopia. After the evacuation was successfully concluded, he sent a report to the State Department highlighting the value he derived from participating in the military exercise in Germany and recommended that the Department should consider having its own exercise program. I am not sure of all the specifics, but in 1983 this concept was approved and a pilot program was started at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). The concept was to have a contractor-based program, hire retired State Department officers and retired military officers to write and conduct the exercises, focusing them on critical and high threat posts. Initially five teams; two persons per team were hired. The team leader was always a retired senior Foreign Service officer, and the number two was usually retired military. The program was constructed for teams to be regionally oriented. One team would exercise in the Pacific; another focused on Africa, etc. The teams developed regional expertise, knew the desk officers, and knew the critical threat posts in their assigned area. After the pilot program was successful it was transferred to the Counter Terrorism Branch (S /CT). CME exercises were based on a quarterly system. Every quarter, a team would write and conduct two CMEs. Every three months you would have a team that would research, write and conduct two exercises then repeat the process. In one year, one team would conduct eight exercises, a total of 40 exercises for the program. The visit to a Post to conduct a CME was not mandatory and was always a matter of negotiation between S/CT and the posts. It was a limited program, not designed to be held at all posts and they were classified. The people that were participating in these exercises at embassies were the senior officers, heads of sections and definitely not intended for local employees. In retrospect there were obviously shortcomings in the program. Some included exercising only high threat posts, including only senior staff, having the exercise classified, and not including our local employees. These shortcomings would be rectified some years later. Additionally, the CME teams did not teach classes in Washington, or at oversea Posts.

Q: I would think, you know, looking at this, that the team doing Africa, particularly sub Saharan Africa and the team doing the middle east, would be dealing essentially in real time where Latin America maybe, I can't really think of any particular problem outside of Central America at the time. Even the Far East, there really hasn't been that much action. Certainly, Europe you get the Stans weren't in existence in those days.

HARALSON: Here is how it worked. The team that would go to Europe had the hardest job. They had the best living conditions but they had the hardest job, meaning that when you would conduct an exercise, you would always have ask the people that were participating to suspend disbelief. Most of the real-world crises were occurring elsewhere. In the 80's it was hard to come up with scenarios that would capture the attention of the European posts. While living well on TDY, they were working harder as far as researching and writing. There was a humorous side to this. If you worked in Central and South America, you had crisis scenarios and you never had to suffer jet lag. Whereas the team that was flying to the Pacific, was always jet lagged. The team that was exercising in Africa, not only were jet lagged, there travel and accommodations were abysmal. You could always tell which team was working in Africa, they were always sick. The Africa and Pacific teams were always jet lagged, the European team was always searching around trying to figure out what to play that would be believable. It was humorous how the teams divided the world; we had an interesting mix of personalities. We decided to would come up with team uniforms for a party that would depict where we traveled and exercised. The team that went to the Pacific decided to wear sarongs. The European team purchased ties that had little cocktail glasses on them. The African team had pith helmets. I am jumping ahead of myself. Let me back up to my initial association with the CME program. After completing the CME in Bangkok, we exercised Colombo, Sri Lanka. The threats in the Pacific in those days were certainly from terrorism. We had such elements as the Japanese Red Army and there were plenty of natural disasters as well.

Q: The Tamil Tigers.

HARALSON: The Tamil Tigers, an interesting side light from my first trip to Colombo. I was sitting in a casino playing black jack one night in Colombo in 1985. I was chatting with the folks around the table and I said to one of the fellows, I must have gotten a bad hand or something. I said, "Well sometimes you get the tiger, and sometimes the tiger gets you." He looked at me and said, "Around here we don't joke about tigers," because the Tamil Tigers were very active in those days. This was a good assignment for me, still being in the military, because it allowed me to represent the military as a role player on these exercises and it gave me the opportunity to become familiar with everything at these posts. Remember; my primary work was counter terrorism. While I was working with the State Department, I was very interested in what would happen if we had to become involved in a counter terrorism mission at these diplomatic missions. When we would visit the ambassador's residence or walk the embassy grounds; I was very much aware of where we could land helicopters, or how we could assault the embassy if it was taken by terrorists. This was a double bonus for me, allowing me to add my expertise to their exercises, but it also allowed me to take a hard look at their emergency action plans should the military be needed for a direct action mission.

Q: Two questions. One, where were the retired military officers coming from, because your background is ideal for this type of thing. I mean this is what you have been trained to do. Most military officers aren't. Where were they coming from?

HARALSON: A variety of agencies and not all of the retired military people had extensive Special Operations backgrounds. One came from the Marine Corps with an infantry officer background; another was from Air Force Special Operations that had worked in the State Department's Operations Center for two years prior to his retirement. There was a couple of other Army Special Operations people that were hired, but you are correct, the number of people you want doing this type of work was limited. Some of the number twos on the team didn't come from a military background, but had been DCMs or Political Officers.

Q: How did you find, I am talking about this initial time, the security officers at the post. I mean how did they respond? Were they useful or somebody to get around the program?

HARALSON: Back in the 1983-'84-'85 timeframe, there was not a Bureau of Diplomatic Security. The Regional Security Officers (RSO) were assigned to SY and were retired police officers for the most part. They came from a police background and were older. Very few women were serving as RSOs. The RSO's were mostly in their late 40's, some older. I remember one of the first RSOs that I traveled with had retired from being a New York City detective. I viewed the RSOs as overworked and under appreciated people at the posts. They were real good security officers, but they had nobody to help them. They were responsible for the Marine Security Guard program and also had to conduct investigations. The RSOs felt that the CME program was helping them do their job. We would come to conduct exercises and this would force the Post to pay attention to emergency procedures and take crisis planning more seriously. In those days I don't think I would be wrong to say that crisis planning was not particularly high on the average diplomats things to be concerned with. Most FSOs viewed crisis planning as the RSO's business. The RSO's were very pleased to see us; we reinforced many programs they were attempting to put in place.

Q: Well when you first started this, did you find some embassies were more responsive and maybe the ambassador was more responsive where other ones tended to pooh pooh it.

HARALSON: Absolutely. It was always directly tied to the type of signals that post management gave as far as how seriously they took this. You could go into one embassy where you had an Ambassador or DCM that really pushed the program. If you looked at their past assignments, you would almost always find where they had experienced crises in a previous assignment. As a consequence they were believers. On the other hand, you would encounter people that pooh-poohed it as you indicated and said; "yeah this is kind of a necessary evil that is being forced upon us". That would be transmitted right down to their subordinates, how seriously they took it. I mean leadership in this type of situation starts at the top. If they are serious about it, their people will be serious.

Q: Yeah, I know in my last overseas post as consul general in Naples, there is nothing like having a major earthquake to shake you up and make you a believer that you really should make plans.

HARALSON: The CME program in the State Department was starting up by this time, the '84-'85-'86 time frame. The teams were gaining experience, figuring out how to do it, and becoming better the more times they went out. At about the same time that the CME program was starting, another activity was taking place within the Department of State known as the Inman Commission. The Inman Commission was very important to the crisis management program. Following the bombings of the Embassy and the Marine Barracks in Beirut, the bombing in Kuwait in the '81-'82 time frame, Congress was taking notice of the increasing danger to Foreign Service posts and American citizens overseas. The Inman Commission chaired by retired Admiral Bobby Inman began a review of security planning within the Department of State. As a result of the findings from the Commission, "fenced money" was provided for the CME program. I am not sure how much funding was allocated for the program, perhaps a million and a half a year would have paid for the contract trainers, travel, and the support staff. This would have included a couple of Foreign Service officers and secretarial staff. Of course, a large slice of the funding went to paying the company the contractors worked for. I want to stop for just a moment and talk about a parallel program that I was also in charge of at the same time I was participating in CMEs during the '84 to '86 time frame. I was responsible for starting counter terrorism survey teams in the pacific region. The military commander was responsible and had to be prepared to respond to terrorist activities within his area of responsibility. One of the ways these responsibilities were addressed was to send counter terrorism survey teams into embassies and consulates. These were Special Forces teams from Okinawa consisting of six or seven members in civilian clothes. They would arrive at a post, work with the RSO and address parts of the post emergency action plan, particularly the Chapters 1400 and 1500 dealing with evacuation. They would complete a photo layout of the embassy and the ambassador's residence. They would survey areas that could be used as assembly areas for Americans, including helicopter-landing zones, stretches of road where you could land an aircraft in an emergency evacuation. They would come in and spend a week surveying the key locations at the post. The survey product would be turned an annex, a military annex to the embassy's emergency action plan. A copy would be given to the embassy; a copy would be kept at the military headquarters, and a copy also would be forwarded to higher headquarters, the Pentagon, as part of the counter terrorism programs. While I was working with the State Department's CME teams, I would lay the groundwork for follow on teams that would come in and conduct the counter terrorism survey. One of the most difficult surveys to conduct was in Seoul, Korea.

Q: They had a huge civilian population.

HARALSON: You are right. They are very close to North Korea, 155 artillery from North Korea could reach downtown Seoul. We attempted to create a tripwire program, an attempt to determine the intentions of North Korea and if an attack was eminent, be able to move non-military Americans south of the Han River. We worried that the Han River bridges would be cut and the Americans would be trapped in the artillery impact zone. We wondered if evacuating American civilians would have been a tripwire for the North Koreans to attack, a reverse trip wire. The military still conducts evacuation exercises where Americans are moved to alternate airfields south of Seoul and plan for moving them to Japan and Guam. The threat was real then and it remains real today. It wasn't difficult to come up with a crisis scenario for Korea.

Q: Did you get any feel from your colleagues while you were doing this teams, about how they were used and what their clout was whatever you would call it within the State Department.

HARALSON: Sure, it was mixed. Some posts welcomed us and others wanted to avoid having us visit. We had an inside joke regarding the most preposterous reason a post could come up with for not allowing us to conduct an exercise. Some were very funny, such things as, "Well you can't come because everybody is new here and we are not ready for this." Well probably the best reason for us to come was that everyone was a recent arrival and the CME was needed as team building exercise. One post waved us off because they were hosting a softball tournament. That was obviously more important to them than going through a crisis exercise. There were always reasons, so we were always readjusting, rescheduling and being waved off at the last minute. These exercises were not mandatory for a Post and often it was difficult to obtain "backing" from the Department. I could never understand how they could avoid this training. In the military, we never would have allowed a post to come up with "baloney" excuses to avoid emergency planning. It was often frustrating; we were always struggling to be relevant. I think one of the things that kept our morale up, is you would exercise a post that didn't want you to come initially, but once you completed the exercise, they would say, "Well this was really worthwhile, we are really glad you came. This really helped a lot." I think it was a cultural thing. We were talking about the difference with the State Department culture, how they prioritize things. The military was very used to exercises, training and sending their people to schools for long periods of time. That wasn't the way the State Department operated.

Q: As you know working here at the Foreign Service Institute now, training has always you know, a real operator didn't train. He was out or she was out there in the field doing work in Washington policy. Training always has been a hard sell.

The best compliments I received are when I meet people that were Deputy Chiefs of Mission that chaired the EAC during those exercises. They would tell me that they used the exercise as a gauge, an evaluation, regarding whom they could count on in a real crisis. The exercises were very stressful, fast paced. I told you we used the fast clock that put a lot of pressure on people to make quick decisions. The exercises were role-plays, which means in addition to the telephones always ringing and they were in information overload. We also would have a loudspeaker in the center of the table representing hand held radio transmissions. You might have someone screaming from Post One, "they are coming over the wall, do I have permission to shoot"? These were very stressful, fast moving, very intense exercises. Many people cannot function well in that type of environment. The DCM's would tell me that the exercise gave them a good gauge about which officers they could count on during a real crisis. I have had many people tell me this.

Q: Did you see any pattern, I mean obviously it would depend on? Individuals, but between the people who were coming out of the? Consular or administrative or political side as to how they responded to this?

HARALSON: As far as how elements within a Cone might have responded to this?

Q: Did some Cones have more problems than others did?

HARALSON: Yes. The people that played best in these exercises were Consular officers. I think primarily because they were used to dealing with Americans in trouble. They swung into action very quickly. The same with the RSO, I felt that these exercises strengthened their positions at post as others watched them respond to the types of crises we were presenting. I think the role of the CLO was also enhanced. When we first started the CME program, the CLO was viewed as the ones that obtained tickets to shows, ball games, and ran the library. They were spouses and took care of the kids. They weren't viewed as valuable part of the EAC. Partially based on the exercises, I think it became apparent to the leadership at post and probably back in the Department that we had to pay more attention to the family members, particularly during crisis. It had a direct impact on how people and the Post functioned, how they prepared for evacuations. When I first became associated with the CME program in '84-'85, you could always obtain the CLO as a role player on the control team. Over the years, this has changed. The CLO has evolved into being a valuable person in Post planning for emergency response. They were always given the primary responsibility for rumor control at a post. This role is important and now they also have the responsibility for preparing the family members for evacuation. I always found that the public affairs officers (PAO) also were excellent during an exercise. I never recall catching one of them short, whether coming up with a press release or how to deal with the press during a crisis. The Consular people, RSO, CLO, and PAO were consistently good during crisis. I found that the political and economic officers, the USAID reps to be less so. We had a harder time getting them to fully engage. Defense Attaches were usually very good players in these exercises. They had a military background and knew how to respond in crisis situations. I found that the intelligence agencies were reluctant to participate in the CME. I don't know if they were afraid of showing what they really were thinking. In the cases where they would participate, they were very good. Some would sit on their hands and not say anything. Having the Agency player was a mixed bag, as I recall. It was interesting how the Ambassadors viewed these exercises, because the CME was structured to be played with the DCM chairing the EAC, so what would you do with the Ambassador? In some cases, the Ambassador was willing to have their DCM's chair, take action, and make recommendations; other Ambassadors wanted to be involved. Sometimes they would work out of their office and have the DCM come in and brief them on the scenario and have the DCM offer recommendations. In other cases, and this is the model I prefer even to this day, is having the Ambassador sit with me as a controller. This allows them to observe what the EAC is doing and they may inject their observations, ask for clarification, and evaluate how their EAC is working together under the leadership of the DCM. That works best most of the time. It was always interesting to observe the difference between the professional Foreign Service officer who became Ambassador and the appointed Political Ambassador. Human nature or common sense might tell you that the best leaders were the professional Foreign Service officers. That was not always the case. The people that were probably the most supportive of the program, paid the most attention, fully participated in what we were doing to a large degree were the non professional ambassadors. People that came out of business or whatever seemed to take this much more seriously. It could be as we indicated a little bit earlier, that professional Foreign Service Ambassadors had come from primarily the political cone, which I indicated were the most difficult people to take the exercises seriously

Q: I might say as a supposition, that the political ambassador had a training course for ambassadors, and as I gather it is mainly telling them that they are responsible for this and this. It scares the hell out of everybody, but the professional who comes up through the ranks has been there, seen all this, and probably doesn't take it as seriously as somebody who is brand new to the trade. Oh, my god, you know. I have got responsibility for all these people. I had better shape up pretty quickly.

HARALSON: Possibly. I will tell you that some people were better in the exercise than others. You never were really sure what you were going to see.

Q: Two questions. During this time, sort of '84 up to '93 or so. Were there any horrific examples that seized everybody's attention? In other words, there is nothing like a major crisis or something that makes everybody sort of perk up. During that time was there anything that sort of engaged people?

HARALSON: I am having a hard time remembering something that jumps out at me. During this time frame, we were engaged in low level warfare, even though it wasn't recognized as such. We were having our people killed at embassies, occasional terrorist acts, but nothing horrific like Tehran, Beirut, or Islamabad. Nothing that jumps out at me that I can point to.

Q: In other words you didn't have where you said look at what happened in Liberia.

HARALSON: We had drawn on lessons-learned from the take over of our Embassy in Tehran. We often referred to the attack on our embassy where we were over run in Islamabad in 1979. There was a lot of turmoil in the world, many anti-U.S. demonstrations; the world was very unstable. The Soviet Union was breaking up; there was still a lot of anti Americanism in the aftermath of Vietnam. It was not difficult to simulate potential crises in a country where demonstrations were taking place, American businesses were bombed, kidnappings. It was just a general destabilization throughout the world that made our job fairly easy to convince people that they could be next.

Q: Yesterday I was interviewing a lady who was a Consular Officer in Saigon in April of 1975 and talking about the complete lack of planning. It went right to the Ambassador. He would not admit that the place was falling apart, and nothing was done. So all of a sudden she was told in the morning well you had better get out on a helicopter because we are reducing our force here down to 80. Well by that afternoon we were pulling everybody out. It was of that nature. But that was sort of a horror story but it also stems from you might say the political judgment, people refusing to acknowledge what was happening.

HARALSON: They are in denial. Interesting that you had mentioned that, Stu. The very first exercise that I went on was in Bangkok. I had certainly read and was aware of the lessons from the Saigon evacuation. It is obviously the high watermark of crisis management or lack thereof. One of the things that came out of the Saigon disaster that I use in CMEs to this day as an example of a trip wire, was cutting down the banyan tree inside the embassy courtyard in Saigon to allow the helicopters a landing zone. That was the ultimate trip wire, and in Bangkok they had a large banyan tree in a field where they were going to land helicopters in an evacuation. I asked, "How are you going to cut down that banyan tree in an emergency?" They said, "We have got a chain saw. We will use the chain saw." I said, "Let's look at the chain saw and see if you can start it." Well they finally ran around and brought to us this old chain saw, which didn't have any gas, and when they went and got some gas, they couldn't start it. So one of my first contributions to the CME program focused on the chain saw incident. My contribution was, "Talk is cheap. Let's see you do it." There were many examples where I found that the Post's emergency plans were all talk. You might say to the DCM, "Where is your helicopter landing zone?" They would say, "Over here or over there". I would say, "Let's get into a car and go look at it." One time I went and there was a vineyard planted in their helicopter-landing zone. Obviously no one visited the site for years. I would not let them just talk through plans. Talk is cheap; show us.

Q: Well, this brings up a point you have to deal with right in the beginning. That is OK you go to this training, and within a year half your team would be gone. I mean the people who had learned how to do this, and particularly not including the Foreign Service nationals and all, I mean what about continuity?

HARALSON: Obviously a real problem. Let me tell you why it is a problem not just from a continuity of people perspective. There was no re-enforcement to what we were doing. Back then, crisis management wasn't taught in the training base in Washington before or after FSOs went to post. You would attend classes at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI); there was no training for crisis management. There was nothing that was taught in the Consular course, Political course, or any of these courses that in anyway introduced or explained crisis management. There was no introduction to crisis management for new officers, nothing for the DCM or Ambassador. The only thing that the Department had going was the CME program and that was limited to critical and high threat posts. We would exercise 40 posts a year, but no one at the post had received any instruction on how to prepare their emergency plans. There was no continuity; there was very little preparation. It was damn near criminal as far as I am concerned. I become agitated thinking about it. Later in the interview we will talk about how that has changed in the last ten years. But that is what the world looked like in the early to mid 80's.

Q: Well what about were you seeing things with the Inman Plan. Was this you need to take a bite by the time I mean this whole idea of making them bomb proof and all that sort of thing.

HARALSON: Let me wrap up my military career, and then we will tackle Inman and what that meant because the Inman report came out at about the time I became a full-time crisis management trainer. For the two years we were in Hawaii, I spent most of my time traveling on State exercises, counter terrorism survey, things like that. I was thinking about retiring from the military about this time. I communicated that to the people I was traveling with from the State Department. They said to me, "Would you consider moving to Washington after you retire and being part of this crisis management training team?" I got along with them very well; they must have felt they I fit in. I said, "Sure." Once I received a letter of intent, I submitted my retirement papers and formally retired in July 1986. We packed up the family, moved to Washington and showed up ready to be a contractor on the crisis management training exercises at the Department of State on 21 July 1986 after 28 years of active military service. The responsibility for the CME program the previous two years had been with S/CT, the counter terrorism people. As a result of the recommendations from the Inman Commission, several things were occurring, one of which was the establishment of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, which came into being on 1 July 1986. The Inman Commission also indicated that crisis planning and guidance within the State Department wasn't very good. As a consequence they recommended that the State Department publish new guidance or doctrine. Doctrine is not a term that State Department people would use, but as a result they created what is termed the Emergency Planning Handbook (EPH), the formal title is 12 Foreign Affairs Handbook One (12 FAH-1). Dave McCabe, one of the CME contractors, wrote 12 FAH-1. As a result of the Inman Commission, State Department published its emergency planning guidance/doctrine and every Foreign Service post, all 250-260 of them, had to re-write their post-specific emergency action plans to conform to the guidance in the EPH. With the responsibility for CME transferred to the recently established Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) in July of '86, the responsibility for 12 FAH-1 and the review and approval of all post plans also fell to DS. To address both of these responsibilities, a new office of Emergency Plans and Exercises were created. We were initially located in the Vietnamese Embassy on Sheridan Circle. After the Vietnam War, the US took over the assets of Vietnam. That is where I first worked after coming to Washington in the summer of '86. It was a strange place to work, with a large ballroom, lighting from a chandelier, large fireplace, and a full kitchen. When the program was transferred from S/CT to DS the exercise program remained the essentially the same. We still had 5 two-person teams led by a retired Ambassador or DCM, usually with the rank of MC or OC, the number two was primarily from the military with a Special Operations background. Now that we were under Diplomatic Security, we ended up with new DS agents on the teams as EAP Plans Officers. These agents had not yet been overseas as RSOs, but started their careers working with us. DS was hiring people other than retired police officers; many were younger and often right out of a few years in the military. Often they were former Captains and Lieutenants; some had been in the Military Police. We were starting to obtain a more energetic, younger person being hired as a DS agent. Each team was assigned an agent and they would travel with us on the CME. Their responsibilities included reviewing the emergency action plans of the post we were exercising and working with the RSO on improving the EAP based on the post performance during the CME.

Q: Who was looking at what the threat would be?

HARALSON: That would be the contractor responsibility. We created threat files and reviewed all cable traffic to insure we knew what was happening at each one of the posts in our area of responsibility. We would meet with representatives from the CIA and DIA and other intelligence agencies. We would meet people from the USAID Office of Disaster Assistance and visited many offices and agencies to insure that we would come up with a reasonable scenario. We didn't just create a bunch of hooey. We wanted to go in and present something that people would say, "Yeah that could happen." We spent a lot of time researching and writing these exercises, this wasn't something we just pulled out of our hip pocket. We wanted the threat to come alive for the posts.

Q: Something I have been wondering, I mean here you were, you have been doing this for awhile. You are now in the State Department or contracted with the State Department. You know the military can absorb personalities more with their own problems but when you are dealing with an organization like the State Department, personality plays a much bigger role. In other words get a good salesman, somebody who can come in and you know, sell the people on what you are doing is worthwhile, not to only the prickly personalities that cause problems. But did you see personalities play a role, some teams, the wrong guy had been chosen to lead it and that sort of thing, or did that occur?

HARALSON: Oh we had a few. We had a few contractors that were asked to leave. More at the team leader level, some retired Ambassadors didn't work out in this program.

Q: That is what I was asking.

HARALSON: Yes. There were a couple of cases where people were prima donnas; they had forgotten how to work. They were used to giving directions and not doing anything for themselves. For example, if something was broken these peoples didn't know or want to fix it. I mean something simple like how to clear a copier or change a bulb. They wouldn't want to be seen doing anything that involved manual labor. When we would ship exercise materials in the pouch, these people would absolutely not allow themselves to be seen picking up a box or taking anything to the mail room for fear that some of their compadres would see them doing physical work. It used to drive us crazy, particularly the people with military backgrounds. These guys didn't know how to do anything except talk and write. They did not and would not do anything physical. Is that sort of what you were talking about?

Q: Well there were two types. One was the prima donnas. I mean they are really a problem of sitting up there on the throne and things happen around, and you take credit for it. But the other one is somebody comes in with a very difficult personality, and you know when you are doing this, sometimes people are given a job like this by people who really don't vet them very much. It is just OK; we have got this retired ambassador and let's give him a job. What the hell; he can do this.

HARALSON: I want to inject a story jumping ahead nearly 15 years. When I ended up in charge of the CME program (senior contractor/program manager), I would interview people to be hired as team leaders. When I would get someone who was a retired Ambassador, who thought they wanted to do this type of work, I kept a dolly, a carrying device that you would put boxes on and move them around in the office. I would say to them, "I want to make sure that you have the right mindset for this type of work. You see this little dolly?" He would say, "Yes." I would say, "See what is on the wheels of that dolly?" "I don't know, what is it?" "That is goose droppings." He said, "OK I understand." I said, "Would you have any problem loading two or three boxes on this dolly that has goose droppings on the wheel, putting it on the shuttle bus, taking it to Main State, wheeling it to the mail room to be shipped. Does that bother you? Are you reluctant to do that, because we don't have any FSN's that work here? And if you can't do that, I don't want you here. If you are not capable because of some exalted image you have of yourself to do manual work, and oh by the way we don't have any FSN's to clear our copy machines when they get jammed either." There were other things, little things that drove me crazy. You would be traveling on a plane, the team leader would say, "I used to be an Ambassador, I should get first class," and they would leave you in the back of the plane. They had no leadership, no sense of teamwork. We had a few of those, I won't mention any names. They didn't last long. We had one that I recall from when we were on a military exercise at Camp Lejeune. He spent all of his time playing golf, and then billed the contract for it. When word got back that he was playing golf instead of working with the Marines, he tried to say, "Well this is part of the job, I was out playing golf with so in so." That didn't fly. These people would leave the program after they realized that there was work involved. They didn't have to be fired, they found out very quickly that this wasn't a "cushy" retirement position. There just wasn't much time for taking it easy. With a two-person team, you have to be able to work closely with the other person and complement each other. The Team Leaders were very good writers, but would often write too much. When writing a background for the exercises, they would write ten or fifteen pages. It was too long; you would have to spend two hours reading it. Starting in '86, we received funding from a new source, I believe as a result of the Inman Commission findings. The funding was "fenced" money, which means Congress gave the money to State Department for the specific purpose of crisis management exercises. I think there was more funding than we were previously allocated, but there were limitations on how long this money would last. You need to think of this in mind, because as we move towards 1993, that "fenced" money was going away. In 1986 DS was just getting started and they went on a hiring binge. They were evolving into a strong position within the State Department and received significant funding as a result of the Inman Commission. Emergency plans were being written and new agents hired. The CME was transferred to DS in July 1986. There was jealousy within Department; the old hands didn't like that DS was gaining prominence and receiving significant amounts of funding. The money flowing to DS was being viewed with a jealous eye. The Inman Commission was requiring new standards for building security, armor plating of vehicles, Mylar on windows, more security agents, and increased security standards. These actions while intended to keep employees more secure; were viewed with suspicion by many in the State Department. There were tensions within the Department and some of it was reflected back on the CME program.

Q: I wonder if this might be a good place to stop because then we can pick it up, then we come to a whole new era.

HARALSON: Why don't we stop and we will pick it up in the '86-'87 time frame and then move towards the money running out of the old program and what happens after that. Q: Great. OK today is 18 January 2006. John, '86-'87. What was up for you?

HARALSON: As mentioned earlier, I retired from the military in 1986 and went to work as a contractor at the State Department writing and conducting crisis management exercises. I started work at State at about the same time that the Bureau of Diplomatic Security was established. The CME responsibility was transferred from S/CT to DS and the first Office Director was Al Golacinski. Al had been the RSO when our embassy was over-ran in Tehran in 1979, he was held captive for 444 days.

Q: John, how would you describe the state of the art of crisis management at the time, we are talking about '86-'87. What was management's attitude, because I am sure we will see a change as time goes on, but let's set a benchmark from where you were doing it. I mean were there lots of studies or were people even looking at it really.

HARALSON: It was a mixed bag, Stu. Some people were wise enough to see that they had to prepare for crises, spend time training their staffs, updating emergency plans. Others would give you lip service. Others were downright hostile and adamant against preparing for crises. They were saying, "We are diplomats, we do diplomacy, we don't do security". Those that had been through crises at one post or another was adamant about having their people trained. You have to remember, Stu, that in '86 we were not exercising all overseas. The CME in '86 consisted of going to 40 posts a year, and those posts were rated as critical and high threat. We didn't go to the nicer places in the world to do these exercises. In addition, nothing was taught domestically to prepare employees for dealing with overseas crises. If you attended a class at FSI in '86 or '87, there wouldn't have been a class that taught how to prepare an emergency action plan, test it or how to train your people. 40 CMEs a year for only critical and high threat posts was the extent of the Departments preparation for crises.

Q: Was there sort of a body of knowledge beyond the State Department, other people looking at this, oil companies or other people trying to figure out what to do? In other words was there a body of knowledge or technical development that was developing anywhere?

HARALSON: The answer is no. The only organization that was taking the increased threat seriously was the military. You recall earlier in the interview, we talked about the military conducting exercises and inviting State Department representatives to participate, the military was tasked with assisting embassies during crises. The CME program begun in '83 and three years later, we had conducted only one exercise at each critical and high threat posts, maybe not even one.

Q: We are doing an oral history here and was sort of the oral history technique, basically the interviews of people coming out of when all hell broke loose, an ex embassy or something of that nature. Did we have a body of information?

HARALSON: The answer is no. To this day, officers returning from crises like the bombings in Nairobi or Dar Es Salaam, the takeover of the Embassy in Islamabad, the Iraq invasion of Kuwait or numerous other evacuations and disasters, will tell you that the amount of debriefing they receive was limited or non-existent. One of the requirements that came about in '86-'87 was for each post that has gone through a crisis to submit a lessons learned cable. In practice, this was followed on a hit or miss basis. There is no historical or lessons learned element or office in the Department, no central effort at collection. We had to seek people out to obtain their stories, interview them to obtain their impressions. Conversely, the military has several hundred people devoted to obtaining and publishing lessons learned at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, but State Department, with the exception of what you do, does not go about in a systematic way collecting after action reports. Perhaps that is why we seem to relearn the same lesson crisis after crisis.

Q: I would have to say that we are not doing this systematically. We would like to get into that business, but we are a non profit group running sort of at the sufferance of the State Department but with no particular direction to do anything of that nature.

HARALSON: If I was king for a day, I would authorize a couple of GS 15 or 14 positions, place with the crisis management staff at the operations center, and they would be crisis historians. They would collect historical information through conducting post crisis interviews and turn the information into a historical report and perhaps publish something one or twice a year with recent lessons learned. This is not being done and likely will not be done.

Q: Well then I guess continue with the story right?

HARALSON: Before the publishing of 12 FAH-1, the Department's Emergency Planning Handbook (EPH) in 1986, there existed a document called the Escape and Evacuation (E & E) Manual and posts were required to write their E & E Plan. It was the responsibility of the Operations Center to keep the E & E Manual current and they were responsible for reviewing all posts E & E plans. It was manual with a narrow scope and limited information. With the proliferation of new guidance in the EPH, all posts had to re-write and submit new emergency action plans to DS. We used these post specific plans as a source document when researching and writing a crisis management exercise. In fact, one of the main purposes of the CME was to assist the Post to validate their plan. In those early days, airplane hijackings were very common. We would invariably put some type of a hijacking scenario in our exercises.

Q: I might add this is prior to what happened in 2001. When we were talking about airplane hijacking, we are not talking about airplanes being taken up in the air and used as missiles. We are talking about holding passengers as hostages for various purposes.

HARALSON: The threat has changed since 9/11. In those early days there were specific policies about what you would do if the hijacked plane were on the ground, you wouldn't let it take off. We had elaborate procedures for gathering intelligence about the hijackers and how we could help a host government deal with the hijackers etc. To jump forward to today, if we have a hijacking, one of the first things you consider is evacuating the embassy. That was never a consideration back in 1986, we never considered a hijacked plane to be a flying missile. A year or two ago that is exactly what happened in Paris. A plane was hijacked in the Netherlands, and we were led to believe that the intention of the hijacker was to fly that plane into the embassy in Paris. Over time terrorist techniques and tactics change. We had a total of five, two person teams, oriented on each of the five regions of the world as designated by the Department. I was teamed with a gentleman by the name of Dave McCabe. Dave was a retired SY officer, former RSO. Dave was the team leader; I was his assistant, we both were contractors. Our area of orientation was the Pacific, which made sense for me, because of my previous two years working as the counter terrorism program chief in that area of the world. We conducted CMEs at two posts per quarter. We would review the Post emergency plans, interview people who had been stationed there, speak with contacts at CIA and DIA. We would visit anyone and everyone that could provide us insight regarding how to structure the exercise. USAID was often particularly helpful in planning for natural disasters. For example, we might be preparing to exercise at the Embassy in Dacca. USAID would be able to provide us valuable information on tsunamis and cyclones that had recently hit Bangladesh.

Q: Yeah, flooding of one kind or another is the name of the game practically.

HARALSON: The office plan was for each team to specialize and work in same geographic area for several years. We would conduct research, write scenarios, and conduct the exercise. While conducting the CME, you would often encounter someone who wanted to challenge the scenario; often it would be the political officer that would indicate that the crisis couldn't happen here. As a result, you could almost count on whatever we had posited in the exercise occurring within the next year. It happened so often that it became a little bit scary that whatever we wrote, would happen. The exercises between 1983 and 1993 were classified Confidential, which means they were difficult to write, store, ship, and conduct. You had to operate in a classified environment. The exercises were quite long, 100 to 125 pages and written like a play with a script. We would write a script for a variety of crisis scenarios, what we termed implementers, would be injected from the control team to the post EAC via telephone, e-mail, fax, cable, or face-to-face meetings. It could be a telephone call for someone to come to the foreign ministry in which case we would have a simulated meeting in a side office. It was essentially a play. We would go to the post to conduct the exercises; the team consisted of the team leader, the assistant, and a DS officer. After arrival we would augment the team with a second or third tier political officer, a Marine security guard and the Community Liaison Officer (CLO). The exercises would last for two days, though we would spend a week at a post. The first and second day after arrival would be for reconnaissance. Then we would in brief the emergency action committee and set up the exercise rooms and install telephones. We would assemble the EAC in a secure room, and exercise over a two-day period. After the exercise, usually the evening of the fourth day, the controllers would meet and develop the out briefing for the EAC. We would usually out brief them on the fifth day, lasting two or three hours. Then would travel to the next post and do it over again

Q: This brings up a point. Our embassies, I don't know what the figure you used about the turnover of an embassy personnel, but it comes about every three years or so. But also the fact that you are classifying this, I mean we have our foreign service national employees, who are going to be there, know the territory a hell of a lot better than we do. And what we really are talking about is not that, we are talking about a disaster or civil unrest that they are as aware of and are going to be hit by, and know what you can do. I think we are losing somewhere.

HARALSON: Right you are. In retrospect we were going at it in the wrong way. However there is always 20-20 hindsight. The temper of the times was to be cautious, to classify everything, probably too much so for these types of exercises. But you have to also remember that 12 FAH-1 and the Post EAP were classified, often at the Secret level. Therefore, the exercises had to be classified and that meant that local employees could not participate. Classifying the EAP was a guarantee that the Post EAP would remain in the bottom drawer of the RSO's safe, never to see the light of day let alone have everybody read and understand it, not to mention the foreign service nationals having access to it. To further complicate matters, the people that participated in the exercises at these posts during the '83 to '93 time frames, were exclusively heads of sections, the senior people. They would gather and discuss what they were going to do and the junior officers and the foreign service nationals (FSN), local employees, were excluded. It was almost a certainty that many of these senior officers would be retired by the next time you would come to the Post, and what they had learned was not retained. There was a combination of things that didn't make a lot of sense. We didn't go to many places, the places we visited we only exercised top echelon personnel, and we didn't include junior officers or FSN's. Also, we weren't teaching crisis management at FSI to Officers prior to traveling to their assignments. We were only conducting an exercise to assist high-threat Posts to validate their emergency action plans. So you can see that the program was a stopgap measure to assist the most threatened posts. That is what occurred for a number of years. The money for the program was "fenced" money, meaning that it would end. In addition to the five teams I mentioned, there were two other teams. The sixth team was put together to work with the Marine Expeditionary Units prior to their six month deployments. The Marines requested the State Department participate with them on their pre deployment exercises and we created a team where a retired ambassador and a retired military officer did this. Our team would role-play an embassy and simulate how embassies and the State Department would operate during crisis. There was another team created called the nuclear team. They had two trainers, and their focus was to exercise the Embassy EAC in countries where the US stored nuclear weapons. I won't name the locations, but there were several countries where we stored nuclear weapons. These exercises were developed in coordination with the Department of Energy and the PM Bureau. They conducted exercises to test the embassy's plan in reacting to a nuclear incident or accident such as a military plane crash transporting nuclear weapons. We often had several teams traveling at the same time. One working with the Marines, another on nuclear exercises, and then others around the world exercising at embassies. I remained with the Pacific for two years. At the conclusion of our exercises, the teams were required to write trip reports. The reports were classified, but from the trip reports were drawn lessons learned in crisis management. These unclassified summaries were assembled each quarter, and DS would send out a cable to all Foreign Service posts, highlighting the lessons from the exercises and trends that we were discovering.

Q: Well during this time, I think you have sort of answered this before but was there at all any effort if a crisis happened to go and say how did our plan work?

HARALSON: Somewhat. As I previously noted, there was not much of an effort then and still isn't to collect and widely share lessons following a crisis. Occasionally the CME program would be mentioned in cables following an actual crisis. A post might indicate that because of the crisis management exercise, they were able to do respond quickly or more effectively. It is very difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship between crisis training and what a Post does in a crisis. Whatever the outcome, leaders at Post often don't think to indicate that the training they received assisted them in responding to a particular crisis. That is just the nature of training I suspect. The rewards must come from knowing you did a good exercise. The tangible rewards often are few and far between. After a two years in the Pacific I switched teams and joined the team that was exercising in the Middle East.

Q: Well that is a quiet time.

HARALSON: Very much. Being on the Middle East team, I found myself going to places where I had little expertise. During my first four years at DS, I participated in CMEs at perhaps 30 posts.

Q: I would think particularly in that area, which is a unique area, you would find one thing, and that is you had an officer who had been through an exercise in let's say Qatar, they would also end up serving in Syria or something else. It is a more cohesive group, plus the fact that they are always having a crisis.

HARALSON: That is absolutely correct. By now the program had been running for five or six years and we are beginning to see the same people, but at different posts. That was helpful, because we were encountering Officers that had developed a level of understanding and expertise. First of all, the program is considered training and therefore is "no fault". We went to great lengths not to be perceived as inspector generals. We always introduced ourselves as trainers; not inspectors and we didn't and still do not report perceived shortcomings back to the Department. Because we lived up to this billing, we developed trust between the Posts and our teams. We really were there to assist and they trusted us. Many DCM's we exercised, we would later meet as ambassadors and they would say, " I used that CME exercise that you conducted as a way of evaluating the people on my staff, those that I thought would hold up well during a crisis." The CME was being used as an evaluation tool by many of these posts. Our pledge of "no fault" was an important pledge for us; we went to great lengths not to point the finger at anyone. Something similar to the saying, "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas. If we ever violated this trust, we really would have lost our credibility. We have never done that even to this day, 20 years later.

Q: I would think there would be problems if you went to a place and the whole leadership and the participation was abysmal. I mean it is a problem.

HARALSON: Well let me ask you this, Stu. The same people would remain at Post after we conducted our CME; no one was going to be replaced based on our exercise. We didn't have that type of influence. Therefore, if you are going to have to go through a real crisis with the same people, what value is there in showing them how screwed up they are, to have them doubt themselves. The idea is to build them up, give them confidence, because that is the same team they were going to have to go through the crisis with. In many ways the CME became a team and confidence builder. Don't misunderstand, this was not a "free ride". We would sit down with the EAC after the exercise and point out things that they could have done better. Perhaps they needed to improve communications, delegation of authority, understanding of their EAP, allocation of resources, etc. We would point these things out in an "open session". Then we would have an out brief, a closed door session, with the Ambassador and the DCM and whomever they wanted included. No one wants to hear that they have screwed up. We would say, "Based on having done fifty or a hundred of these exercises, here is how other posts approached this particular type of crisis or event". This enabled us to share the experiences we had encountered around the world and assist the Post with adjusting their procedures. In addition to the quarterly lessons learned cables; we were at the same time sharing crisis management knowledge throughout the Department as we traveled from post to post. We were viewed as trainers that were competent, discreet, and were there to help them. As we gained credibility, we would ask during the initial in-brief, "What would you like us to emphasize Mr. Ambassador? What is bothering you the most at night when nobody is around? May we address some of your concerns during the exercise?"

Q: I would think that particularly dealing with the middle east, one, all you had to do was look around the corner and there was a crisis of one kind or another all the time, the mob in the street or the war or what have you was there. The other one would be that the people you were dealing with were Foreign Service professionals. I mean that is their territory. Would you get a different feeling say conducting something like this in western Europe where a lot of the ambassadors were political and might not be as interested. Was there a split?

HARALSON: It doesn't change as much as you might think. Obviously the Middle East has a lot of crises and is experienced in dealing with them. While exercising in Europe, we would encounter many political appointed ambassadors. They would take the exercise seriously, because they had not gone through crises previously, didn't know how to deal with them, and were trying to learn. Some times FSOs would tell us, "A crisis hasn't happened here; it won't happen in the future. Why are you wasting our time." There were occasions when we would be conducting an exercise and a real crisis would occur at the same time. I remember a couple of times when the DCM would jump up and have to rush out and deal with a real crisis, then return and say, "Ok is this real or is this exercise?" I remember this happening during the first Gulf War, '91 time frame. I want to jump ahead to just prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. We were exercising in Kuwait; Barbara Bodine was the DCM and chaired the EAC. The scenario we presented had Iran, not Iraq invading Kuwait. The CME turned out to be a dress rehearsal when Iraq invaded a couple of months later. Several years later, Ms. Bodine would be a key person in the survival of the CME program. After returning to Washington we were asked to conduct a Task Force exercise in the operations center for the NEA Bureau using the same scenario we had just completed in Kuwait. This was something new for us, in the past we had only conducted exercises at overseas posts. The Department was becoming concerned about Iraq threatening to invade Kuwait and wanted to prepare the NEA Bureau and the operations center to deal with it. We conducted the exercise and had the NEA Bureau send the Officers that would normally serve on a task force. Six weeks later, Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Q: Barbara Bodine had moved by that time.

HARALSON: No, Barbara Bodine was still the DCM in Kuwait when the invasion occurred. There is book called Embassies Under Siege, Ms. Bodine wrote a chapter describing how they lived and survived for several months while being surrounded in Kuwait by the Iraqi Army. The same people that participated in the Task Force exercise were the same ones that staffed the real Task Force in Washington for three days at the beginning of the invasion. Exercising our Embassy in Kuwait and then the Bureau prior to the invasion were excellent examples of providing valuable training in preparation for responding to a crisis. About this time, there were rumors of the CME program running out of money, talk of cutbacks, how to sustain the program. By early '93 the handwriting was on the wall. We were being told, "we don't know if we can keep the program going". I thought at that time, how could they not keep the program going? The feedback from overseas was positive indicating that the crisis management program was valuable. We had begun conducting task force exercises and were beginning to teach a few classes in the Department including instruction for new Ambassadors, RSOs, Consular Officers and CLOs. FSI was beginning to realize the need for crisis management instruction for personnel enroute to their new assignments.

Q: You were saying Consular officers and the CLO's. Community Liaison Officers.

HARALSON: Feedback from overseas Post was indicating that the Department should offer crisis management classes at FSI. Posts realized the value of having us come to their posts conducting CMEs and were indicating the need for additional training prior to their assignments. Our credibility and perceived value had increased during the past six or seven years as we exercised more posts and trained additional officers. Walking through the State Department and you would be stopped and recognized, "Oh Hi John. Remember me? I was in Bahrain or Bangkok or Islamabad when we exercised last year, that was really valuable." We were developing believers in the CME program. It was puzzling how the Department was indicating that they couldn't sustain the CME program, it didn't make any sense. There wasn't any mention of dissatisfaction with the trainers or the exercises. It was about funding and the program being supported on "fenced" money from the Inman program. The question was would the Department provide the money to support this program? In the summer of '92, we were notified that half the trainers would be released. Several of us were going to have to leave and I was one of them. We were told that we would be terminated in two weeks. That really hit me hard, because I believed in the value of what we were doing. I cleaned out my desk and went looking for other work. I was walking on the beach in Florida when the call came in. I was asked to return to the program and to work as the number two on the nuclear team, which still had funding from the Department of Energy. I returned to Washington after being "laid off" for about a month. Two CME teams as well as the nuclear team remained, but the funding for the CME program was rapidly drying up.

Q: Well on the nuclear exercises, again I realize we are moving into a classified area, but at the same time it would strike me that classified, I mean the nuclear team would be dealing with what would be the difference. Wouldn't this be a military thing? I mean military weapons.

HARALSON: The team would include military personnel traveling with us. Without going into classified information, let's say that there was an accident of some kind, one of weapons was damaged in transit, an aircraft crashes. Our embassy would be very involved in the crisis response, particularly working with the host nation, public affairs, possible anti-US protests, cleanup, etc.

Q: I have an account going back to the 50's of the staff aide to the ambassador in Spain who has to get out and jump in the water because a hydrogen bomb had been dropped there.

HARALSON: Palomar, Spain.

Q: Yeah and it happened to be kind of cold at the time. He had to do his duty; he had to go out there and swim with the ambassador to show that we weren't afraid.

HARALSON: That is one of the prime examples, in fact we drew on the lessons from that as well as the crash in Greenland. In late 1992, early 1993 and we are still conducting CMEs, fewer in number and with half the number of trainers. I don't remember how the posts were selected, likely only the ones we were the most concerned about. The nuclear team continued to exercise and we still conducted task force exercises. While the Marine exercise team was eliminated, we still sent trainers to work with the Marines on their exercises. In the summer of '93, the notification came that the program was going to come to an end.

Q: The whole program.

HARALSON: The whole program. The Inman supplemental, "fenced" money would run out at the end of September 1993. At the time, Tony Quainton was the head of Diplomatic Security. Mr. Quainton had previously been an Ambassador in one or two or three Posts in Central America.

Q: Nicaragua, and the Central African Republic.

HARALSON: I believe we had exercised his Post at least one or two times when he was an Ambassador. Suddenly DS was faced with dilemma, without the Inman supplemental, how would they come up with the money, perhaps a million dollars, to keep the program going? I was told that Ambassador Quainton went to the Regional Bureaus and asked if them to provide some money, as much as their posts were the primary recipients of the of the training, I was told that they said they would not provide any funding. There was talk of further reducing the program down to one team, and I understand the decision was made not to do that. Further, I understand that Ambassador Quainton made the decision not to shift funds from anyplace else in DS and to let the program die. We conducted the final exercises in September of '93. I was part of a large earthquake exercise in Tokyo. When we returned, we were given three or four days to write a report titled, "Lessons Learned in Crisis Management from 1983 to '93". That report was turned into a lengthy cable and was sent to all posts. They were further told that the CME had ended and that they would have to train and exercise themselves. On the last day of the CME program, the office director indicated, "We have enough money to keep one person on the program." I was the person that was asked to remain. Why did they ask a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel to remain and not the former Ambassadors? I am convinced that the reason they did this is because without adequate funding, we could not continue the oversea exercise program and had to put our emphasis on domestic classroom instruction. As it turned out, I was the one that had conducting most of that training. The retired Ambassadors and other trainers didn't care for classroom teaching. They preferred going overseas and conducting exercises at Posts. When it came down to who was probably the most qualified to do the classroom instruction, I was selected. They asked me to remain and everybody else left. I started teaching crisis management classes and writing a series of exportable lesson plans based on the lessons learned from the past ten years when the program was running full steam. The plan was to send the lessons plans to all overseas posts, and then they would conduct their own crisis management exercises. My responsibility was to write and ship training materials and teach at the DS Training Center. I was pleased and liked the work, at the same time I felt bad that we had lost some great people, with extensive expertise, that had been with the program for 10 years. Trainers that knew the CME program inside and out, were suddenly, in the case of the Foreign Service officers, fully retired. It took the Department many years to recover from canceling the CME program. As for me, I was I in my early 50's, too young to retire and not ready for the rocking chair. The former Ambassadors and DCMs were in the mid to late 60's and not likely to continue working. The Department lost a great deal of expertise, and there were hurt feelings. The consensus among the trainers was that Ambassador Quainton and DS didn't try hard enough to keep the program going. That has been re-enforced many times over the years when I meet people from those days and will say that Ambassador Quainton and the Department really screwed up when they ended the CME program. However, there is one more CME under the old program that I need to talk about. From September through Christmas of '93 I was teaching at DS and writing exportable training packages. Just after the holidays, I was told that Mogadishu, Somalia had requested a crisis management exercise. Ambassador Quainton sent them a reply saying, "We don't do CMEs anymore. We have stopped the CME program." Someone in Mogadishu, perhaps the RSO, had Ambassador Bogosian, reply, "We know that Haralson is still working on the program. Read my lips, we want a crisis management exercise out here and soon. We have Marines and Army all over Mogadishu, and we want someone out here to work with us and the military on a crisis management exercise." I was called to Ambassador Quainton's office. He said, "I know that we canceled the CME program, but I wonder if you would go to Mogadishu and do a crisis management exercise?" A really wanted to tell him to go to you-know-where, but I didn't. I was committed to this type of work, and said, "Sure I will go do that." I began putting together an exercise that required close coordination with the Pentagon. Unlike previous exercises we conducted, Somalia was an active combat zone in 1994. There was an Army Division in Mogadishu and two Marine Expeditionary Units just offshore. Ranger and Special Forces elements were also there. You may recall that the "Blackhawk Down" incident occurred in the summer of '94. There were many problems for our Embassy; the entire embassy compound in Mogadishu had been taken over by the United Nations. The US Embassy was reduced to two trailers, a bunker, several one person sandbagged trailers where people slept and a Marine House that was encased with sandbags, with Marine snipers on the roof. There were 15 or 20 flags of other country representatives that were encamped throughout the embassy compound. It was a combat zone, it wasn't called combat but that is what it was. There were US military units in contact and assaults on the embassy compound from vehicles called "technicals", which were Somali rebels riding around in trucks and shooting the place up. Mogadishu was wild and wooly.

Q: These were basically pickup trucks with .50 caliber machine guns on the back of them.

HARALSON: This was a wild and wooly environment. When I first agreed to go to Somalia, I was told, "You need to go over and coordinate with the Pentagon." I went to the Pentagon, as a contractor, with no State Department representatives with me, and sat down in a room with several generals and 20 colonels and I told them I am going to go do a CME in Mogadishu. They said, "We don't want you to." I said, "Why?" They said, "You are just going to screw things up if you go out there and run an exercise." I said, "You don't seem to understand. State Department said I was going to go do it, and I work for State Department. I am going to go do it. Now we can do it a couple of ways. First of all, understand that I am doing it. I don't work for you. Second of all, you can get on board and participate or not. It is up to you, but the bottom line is I am going to go do it in any case." So once they realized they weren't going to hornswoggle me, we started to work together. I think my military background worked very well in that situation; I knew how to speak their language. They became involved as I drafted the CME and decided to send representatives to participate. In March I left for Mogadishu, my plan was to be at the embassy for a week before conducting the exercise. I needed to fully understand and appreciate conditions on the ground. I flew into Mogadishu on a Russian transport plane out of Nairobi, no one was there to meet me and I had no way of communicating with the Embassy. I ended up hitch hiking a ride in the back of a military truck that was heading towards the Embassy. I walked up to the front gate, and said, "Oh by the way, here I am, you asked for an exercise?" The Embassy had a very small staff that was very busy. They were greatly outnumbered by the U.S. military and attempting to conduct diplomacy, let alone having to operate within the UN environment, was a very large challenge. I met with Ambassador Bogosian and he said, "Yes I wanted you to come out to conduct a CME, I have participated in them before. I want you to try and make some sense out of what everybody is doing here and how we can work closer together. Pay particular attention to how we can evacuate American civilians if things grow worse." After two days, I was told that the US military would like a briefing about their role in the exercise. My briefing consisted of one page of butcher paper, on which I drew a box representing the Embassy, two ships, which represented each of the two Marine Expeditionary Units, and an airfield, representing the Headquarters of the Army Division. I also drew communication arrows between them. I folded it six ways and put it inside my shirt. They sent a helicopter for me, and flew me to the command ship, just offshore. The water is very deep just off of Mogadishu, you could clearly see these ships from the Embassy, and it was awe-inspiring. I knew what I was in for as soon as I sat down with the Admiral and his staff. I must have sat there for an hour or two as they went through one briefing slide after another. As I expected, the military had about 100 V-graphs as part of their capabilities briefing. The military always believes that "more is better". If they have a thousand slides, they will show them. This was before the advent of "death by power point" generation. It turns out, if you recall back to some of my earlier comments, one of the things that we had done under the old program was exercising with Marine Expeditionary Units at Camp Lejeune and Pendleton. It turned out that some of the same Marines that I had worked with in those exercises were on these ships. Thus, I had an entrée as far as people knowing me and having some idea of what I was capable of. After they completed their "razzle-dazzle" briefing, I reached inside my shirt, removed the one piece of wrinkled butcher paper, taped it to the bulkhead, and I said, "If you want to see this, gather around." They were briefed on the exercise concept and decided whom they would send to the Embassy as a Forward Command Element. I went to the second command ship, repeated the process and flew to the airfield, and I did the same thing for the Army Commander, General Montgomery and his staff. This coordination was concluded with a handshake and a one-page diagram. I had learned to think like a State Department representative, not an Army officer. Participating in the CME was Maura Hardy, Chief of Consular Affairs; military representatives from the ships, US Naval Headquarters in Bahrain, US Army Headquarters from the airfield, and observers from the United Nations forces. The exercise lasted two days and posited a further deterioration of security in Mogadishu, a Pakistani unit being cut off and surrounded and how they might be re-enforced by other UN forces. Towards the end of the exercise we ratcheted up the situation to where we had to plan for an evacuation and how this would be accomplished including moving Americans to assembly areas. One of the more innovative parts of the exercise included bringing in military representatives that would be responsible for each of these assembly areas and helicopter landing zones. We also brought together the wardens from throughout Mogadishu including USAID people and representatives from various missionary groups. We had them meet each other at the assembly area to conduct preliminary planning and coordination. This was a step beyond the normal crisis management exercise, more of a rehearsal for evacuation. It went off very well and the Embassy was pleased.

Q: What was the attitude at that time about what was happening in Somalia?

HARALSON: Confusing.

Q: I mean was there light at the end of the tunnel? Had we gotten to the point where we were going after Aideed and all that?

HARALSON: Yes, we were at to the point where Aideed was being looked at as the bad guy. The CME was conducted two to three months in advance of the Blackhawk Down incident, when we sent in Rangers and Special Forces to attempt to capture Aideed and his key supporters. Prior to this CME, I had not spent a lot of time with the United Nations. While planning for the CME, I was invited to observe the daily operations brief that the UN was conducting in what used to be our Chancery. As a retired army officer, you could quickly size up the situation. I was shocked. I couldn't believe the sloppy staff work I was witnessing. Most of the people working at the UN headquarters couldn't speak each other's language. They were talking past each other. I was thinking as I was watching this, I didn't see how they were ever going to be able to accomplish anything under the UN charter or mandate. I don't know the UN is any better since Mogadishu, but my impressions were that it is very difficult to have any type of unity of command. It is very difficult when drawing forces from Pakistan, India, Uruguay or where ever, having them work together when they have not attended the same military schools and may not speak each other's language very well

Q: Well was there, I mean I would think the UN would be looking at you and saying the United States is getting ready to bug out.

HARALSON: Maybe they did; I don't know.

Q: Well were there other embassies there?

HARALSON: I don't think so. There might have been a representative from Italy. The representatives were UN military representatives from 15 or 20 countries. I don't recall other embassies still functioning in Somalia.

Q: Well a very important part I assume, maybe I am wrong, and of the American presence there were the NGO's. These were the people who. I mean the whole idea was originally to feed the starving Somalis who were being preyed upon by these warlords.

HARALSON: And providing protection for their distribution points and convoys.

Q: So were you including NGO's?

HARALSON: We were. We had representatives from the NGO community attend the exercise and enter into evacuation planning. As the situation in Somalia was deteriorating, it was revealing to note how little influence we had to produce a positive outcome. I felt the most important person in the U.S. Embassy and perhaps the entire UN operation was not Ambassador Bogosian or any of the UN people. It was the foreign-service national (FSN) that worked for the RSO. He was a long serving retired Somali police chief with contacts throughout Somalia. If American or UN officials wanted to meet with Aideed or his people, the RSO FSN was the only one who was able to set it up, translate, and escort the representatives to the meeting. This one person was critical to our operations. There were missionaries scattered throughout Somalia. In many cases they didn't want anything to do with the Embassy or advance planning with the military. Their headquarters were set up across the border in Kenya and were in contact via single sideband radio. The Embassy kept track of the missionaries using what I called the "yellow sticky" method. The Embassy had a huge map of Somalia, and they would keep track of these American missionaries through posting a yellow sticky that would say Mr. and Mrs. Smith, three children, ages and their names. It drove the US military crazy when they would come to the Embassy to coordinate how the missionaries might be evacuated. Often the missionaries refused to speak with the Embassy or the military. However, we could not just write them off and not worry about them, because they are Americans. You could almost count on when the situation turned nasty, that these same American missionaries would suddenly decide they really wanted to be Americans after all, and you have to attempt to evacuate them. What a mess!

Q: I talked, this goes way back, to the various crises in the Congo, where the missionaries wouldn't do anything, and all of a sudden my God you have got to get us out of here. You know, I mean it is an attitudinal problem, but it is also a very practical thing of what do you do with people who are reluctant but all of a sudden will call upon you and maybe you have no chance to make arrangements.

HARALSON: It is a real problem. In any case, the exercise went off very well and everybody was satisfied. Maura Hardy, a couple of her people and myself got a helicopter lift back to the airstrip and hopped on a Russian transport to Nairobi and laid up there for a day or two, having a few beers before returning home. That was the last of the old time crisis management exercises where you had the bank of telephones between rooms and role-played the exchanges between the EAC and the controllers. Mogadishu was the last one of that type of CME.

Q: By the way how did things play out in Mogadishu? When we evacuated were we able...

HARALSON: It was a classic military retrograde operation. The UN forces started by thinning out their troops, then pulling them out. US forces formed a bubble around the port area. Eventually the embassy personnel moved to the port. NGO's moved there as well, although some never left and stayed beyond the closing of US operations. At the very end, the last elements were evacuated from a beachhead onto the ships and they sailed away.

Q: Today as we speak in 2006, Somalia is almost a terra incognita as far as any real representation there.

HARALSON: Twelve years later and not much has changed.

Q: The classic failed state.

HARALSON: One sidelight on Mogadishu that may tie into what others have told you. The year following our departure from Mogadishu (1995), the genocide occurred in Rwanda. One of the reasons that the UN or the US failed to do anything to stop the genocide in Rwanda was because of what we experienced in Somalia. We were reluctant to commit forces; we did not want a repeat of Somalia. As we dragged our feet, 600,000 people were being killed. There was definitely a cause and effect relationship, our failure in Somalia, prevented us from stopping the genocide in Rwanda.

Q: I think so. One can refer to my interview with Prudence Bushnell who was dealing with Rwanda in the State Department at the time, and said she was left on her own because nobody wanted to touch it. The answer was look at Somalia.

HARALSON: That is a fact. I worked for Ambassador Bushnell at FSI from 2002-2005 and that was my impression. After returning from Somalia in March 1994, the next year and a half, were slow times for crisis management. Somalia turned out to be the last overseas CME until March 1997. I moved from an office downtown out to the Diplomatic Security-Training Center in Dunn Loring, VA. Chuck Runner, DS agent, remained the Office Director, but crisis management consisted of just the two of us. I was placed in the smallest office (without a window) at the training center. Since we were not conducting crisis management exercises, I became something of a "oddball". For the most part, I was left alone to do what I thought was best. I wrote exportable training materials that were sent to all posts and taught classes, but was not fully employed. By late 1994, early 1995 there was one year to go on the contract, and it was apparent that DS was not going to retain the CME program when the money ran out and I was going to be out of work. Changes were about to take place however. When it became known that DS was going to cancel the last vestiges of the CME program, others within the Department started to pay attention. One was Barbara Bodine, whom I mentioned earlier as having been the DCM in Kuwait during the Iraq invasion. Barbara was now the Dean of the School of Professional and Area Studies at FSI. The second person that became involved was Bill Belcher. Bill was a retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel who had been a trainer in the CME program until the program was shut down in September 1993 and had landed a position with the Inspector General's office. The third person was Chuck Runner, the DS agent that was in charge of the CME program when I went into Mogadishu. The fourth person was Rick Olson, who worked in the Operations Center. They came together and decided that it would be a mistake to have the CME program cancelled. To strengthen their view that the CME was needed, it was agreed to have the Office of the Inspector General conduct a four-hour tabletop exercise as part of their inspections of 15 or 20 high threat posts. The purpose of the exercise was to determine if posts were conducting their own training, since there had been no CME program for the past two or three years. Well it was humorous, we all knew that the overseas posts were not training themselves, never had, and certainly weren't now. We knew what the IG exercises would find, but we had to have proof. I worked with the IG writing scenarios for the exercises. The IG exercises were conducted with the inspected posts EAC and focused on evacuation planning. These IG exercises lasted six or eight months and provided evidence that posts were not training themselves and needed assistance with validating their emergency plans. They were not using the exportable CME material; they were just too busy with normal business. Well armed with this information, the Office of the IG, Barbara Bodine, Rick Olson, and Chuck Runner put together a series of briefings, meetings, and office visits throughout the Department. The end result was a proposal to move the CME program from DS to the Foreign Service Institute. DS agreed to the transfer.

Q: DS is...

HARALSON: Diplomatic Security. I moved to the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the summer of '95 along with several large safes full of the old exercises and records. I was the keeper of the flame so to speak for the previous exercise program. Keeping these records and exercises would prove to be very beneficial a few years later. I moved into an office at FSI, just down the hall from Dean Bodine. She later became Ambassador Bodine to Yemen. FSI had just opened the new campus and it was a great place to work. I am not sure that the Dean knew where to put me within the FSI structure, since I was the only crisis management trainer within the Department. I was placed under the supervision of Dawn Frick, who knew nothing about crisis management, and I think she was probably a little afraid that I was working for her. After I had settled in for a few days, the Dean called me in and said, " I can't tell you what to teach, but I know we need crisis management training. I want you to go and visit each of the course managers at FSI and see if you can come to some type of agreement with them to give you a block of time to teach crisis management." That is what I did. I went to every course director from the people that teach the brand new officers in the A-100 and Specialist courses, to GSO, Admin, Consular; the entire teaching institution at FSI. I would meet with them, put forth my vision for crisis management modules in their courses, and obtain a block of time for my class. At this time we changed the name of the program from Crisis Management Exercises (CME) to Crisis Management Training (CMT). We were not conducting overseas exercises at the time, only classroom instruction.

Q: What were the points you were hitting, because obviously you weren't given much time.

HARALSON: I conducted a front-end analysis by researching all 250 Emergency Action Plans (EAP) within the Department to determine what crisis positions of responsibilities were being assigned to whom. By 1995 all overseas posts had written and updated their emergency action plans at least once, based on the 12 FAH-1 guidance directed by the Inman Commission. Within each plan there is an Exhibit 121. Each post must assign 19 emergency responsibilities for crises such as evacuation, communication, bombings, and list them in Exhibit 121. Placing these assignments in a matrix allowed me to determine which positions at a post were being assigned which responsibilities. With this data, we knew what areas of responsibility to focus on in a specific class. For example, deciding what to focus on in the General Service Officers course (GSO). Most posts assigned the GSO the primary responsibility for transportation and logistics during a crisis. That became the focus of instruction during crisis management training in the GSO Course. We would teach the GSO how to plan for and conduct convoy operations and the logistical implications of responding to a natural disaster and terrorist actions. In the Consular Course, the focus would be on the Warden System and processing Americans during evacuations. Based on the front end analysis of learning which emergency assignments the students going through FSI would be receiving when they arrived at their overseas post, we were able to tailor the instruction to prepare them to take over these responsibilities.

Q: This is tape five, side one with John Haralson.

HARALSON: We were talking about how to conduct a front end analysis for conducting crisis management training, which had not been previously conducted at the Foreign Service Institute. In the classroom we were able to show the students the specific crisis responsibilities that they would be assigned after arriving at post and then provide the training they needed. This provided a strong incentive for the students to focus their attention on the training and generated a great deal of enthusiasm. Crisis management training was well received and was my primary focus for the next two years. I developed lesson plans and kept quite busy. In addition to teaching, I was able to restart the training exchanges with the Marines. We would put together teams from the Department and travel to Camp Pendleton and Lejeune to participate in their pre-deployment exercises. During this time we also introduced instruction on the Department's emergency planning handbook. We would take lessons learned from the previous ten years of our exercises and real world crisis and conduct mini exercises in the classes. The average class would last three hours; several were six hours in length. There was no stand-alone crisis management course, only modules in other section classes.

Q: I am thinking of the ambassadorial seminar. Were you able to or was somebody else doing it, getting across to them that when the chips are down, their main responsibility in a crisis is to protect Americans. I mean so often this is lot sight of and this you know back here in Washington the prime responsibility is to protect Americans. We are talking about American civilians particularly.

HARALSON: That is an interesting comment. I have definitely witnessed a change in the Department's culture in the past 20-22. When I was in the military and first started with the CME program, it would not be unusual during an exercise to observe the EAC thinking only of the official community during a crisis and not pay much attention to the plight of private Americans. The trainers would ask, "How about the private Americans?" You would often receive an off the cuff remark like, "they got here by themselves, they can get themselves out". Over the years this has changed with much more emphasis being placed on protection of private Americans. The letter that the President presents Ambassadors, their appointment letter, points out that one of their primary responsibilities is the protection of all Americans, not just the official community. The fallout from the Pan Am 103 disaster brought about what is known as the No Double Standard policy. This means that the Department must share threat information with American citizens and assist them to evacuate, even to the extent of providing them with 50 % of the seats on the last aircraft out of town. I found that teaching at the Ambassador Seminar very enjoyable. The Ambassadors were uniformly bright, and very anxious to assume their positions. I found that teaching crisis management to the political appointees was very rewarding. The political appointees, in some cases more so than the professionals, would take crisis management very seriously. The classes that I found the most difficult to teach, were the DCM's and the senior RSO types. The DCMs often felt that because they had been selected to become DCMs that they "knew it all" and in some cases it is very difficult to get through to them. With the senior RSO's, they were very much involved with crises all the time, so in some ways they would end up being a bit jaded and skeptical in a classroom setting. But the class I found the hardest to teach was the Senior Seminar. The Senior Seminar is no longer offered at FSI. It was a yearlong course with 30 students, 15 or 18 were Foreign Service Officers, and the remainder was a combination of military officers from each branch of service and people from other US government agencies. They were particularly difficult to teach. You put people in a course for a year, and the class takes on a life of its own. They were a tough bunch to spend any time with.

Q: There was a certain, I won't call it esprit, but ethos. They get very smart, you know, trying to show each other up.

HARALSON: Exactly. Sometimes a class will gravitate towards the lowest common denominator. The person with the biggest mouth sometimes overrides everyone else and the remainder of the class doesn't say anything. I found that it was a mixed bag teaching that class.

Q: Why don't we stop now?

HARALSON: While I was staying quite busy teaching classes and participating in Marine Corps exercises, I felt that we needed to bring back the overseas exercise program. During the former program, we only conducted overseas exercises and ignored the training base. Now we were putting all our efforts into teaching at FSI and not exercising the overseas posts. By this time Mary Gin Kennedy had replaced Barbara Bodine as Dean. Mary Gin had been the Consul General in Karachi during a terrorist attack that killed several of her employees in a vehicle attack while they were traveling to work. She was supportive of my efforts and we decided to attempt to restart the overseas CME program in a limited way. Without travel funds of our own, Ruth Whiteside, then the Deputy at FSI, was able to obtain \$80,000 from DS for our travel. It was apparent that I was the only person at FSI that could write and conduct CMEs. I also had a busy teaching schedule and was committed to Marine Corps exercises. If we were going to restart conducting overseas exercises, we were going to have to change the way we were doing it. Dean Kennedy had gone through one of the four-hour tabletop exercises that the IG had conducted to verify the need to retain the CME program a few years earlier. We decided to replace the weeklong visit and role-play CME with a two-day visit to the post and conduct the CME in four hours. That would shorten the time spent at a post and I could conduct the CME without the need for other team members. Further, we decided to conduct the CME using an unclassified format. The exercise included only the Emergency Action Committee at Post; no local employees or host government representatives were invited. The first "new" CME was conducted in San Salvador in March 1997. Several observers from FSI attended, like the results, and decided to continue with the exercise program. In 1997, I conducted 9 exercises, three trips of three posts each. In 1998 I was able to conduct 12 exercises through the summer. I was extremely busy teaching at FSI, traveling on Marine Corps exercises and conducting CMEs. In August of 1998, terrorists attacked our embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, leading to a sea change for the crisis management program. As a result of the resulting Accountability Review Board (ARB), the crisis management program was about to take off and become much larger

Q: OK. Today is 1 February 2006. John, we were talking about the East Africa bombing. Can you explain where and what happened and then take it from there.

HARALSON: On August 8, 1998, nearly simultaneous vehicle bombs were exploded at the American Embassy in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam by Al Qaeda. Many Americans thought that these acts were the beginnings of terrorist action against the US. It most certainly was not the start, but a continuation of a war that has been fought against us since the late 1970s. I have friends and perhaps you have as well who said, " we are at war now". I replied, "Well you don't quite understand, we have been at war since the take over of the American Embassy by Iran in 1979." There had been recent bombings to include SANG Compound and the Khobar Tower in Saudi Arabia. Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were sophisticated coordinated attacks by transnational terrorists. As the only crisis management trainer in the Department I suspected that there would be a significant reaction to these attacks. The morning of the attacks I was driving to the DS training center to teach an RSO class when I heard about the bombings on the radio. When I finished teaching; I returned to FSI around noon. I wrote an E-mail to Steve Browning, who was now the Dean of the School having replaced Mary Gin Kennedy; indicating that he should alert the FSI chain of command to expect to be involved in an Accountability Review Board (ARB) investigation. I was certain that investigators would be asking about when we last conducted CMEs at Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, what type and amount of training had employees received to prepare them for these types of threats, particularly for the people who were killed and injured? I wrote six or seven questions and answers (talking points) in anticipation of these questions and sent them along to Dean Browning. 15 minutes after I sent that E-mail, the Director of FSI, Ruth Davis, was standing in my office and her eyes were pretty big. I am not sure she and others at FSI fully comprehended that there would be questions asked regarding when the attacked posts were last exercised and what type of crisis training we provided to employees before they arrived at post. By 1998, it had been five years since we had conducted extensive exercises overseas, except for the 21 tabletop exercises that I had conducted the past two years. We went through the records that I had brought to FSI from DS back in 1995 and prepared responses. The last time a CME team had exercised Nairobi and Dar es Salaam was in 1991. I reviewed the file copy of the last exercise conducted in Nairobi and discovered that we had posited a vehicle bomb at the Embassy perpetrated by a mysterious Middle East terrorist organization. The CME program had ended in 1993 and no exercises had been conducted at Nairobi or Dar es Salaam for the past seven years.

Q: Yeah, and even if you had been there three years before, the entire American crew would have turned over.

HARALSON: It would have at least allowed the people who were there a chance to revalidate their emergency action plan. But I agree with you; unless we had been there just months before, it likely wouldn't have made much of a difference, but we can't be sure. We looked at the academic records of the people that had been killed and injured to determine if any had attended classes that I had taught at FSI and found that several had attended crisis training over the previous three years. I knew with some certainty that we would have to appear before the Accountability Review Board (ARB) to answer questions about training and exercises. About three weeks after the bombings, I received a summons, a request, asking me to appear before the ARB investigating the bombings. Retired Admiral Crowe (former Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff); was the Chair for both ARBs. Admiral Crowe was the Commander of the Pacific Command during my last two years in the military, the person that sent me on CMEs initially. I asked Steve Browning and Ruth Davis if they wanted me to appear without one of them being with me. I asked again, "Are you sure you just want me to go? I am a contractor." They said, "Yes, we are sure we want you to go. You know more about the past training programs than anyone else." I pulled together a couple of briefcases worth of records and headed over to Main State and appeared before the ARB. They swear you in, have you promise to tell the truth and then turn on a tape recorder. After about three hours of answering their questions about the current and previous crisis management program, lack of funding, transfer of the program from DS to FSI, they said, "OK, John. That is about enough." About two weeks after I testified, I was teaching a class at FSI when Dawn Frick, my immediate supervisor, walked in and said, "Pick somebody to teach your class, turn your class over to someone, they want you in a meeting with the key people at FSI." Have you ever walked into a room where you knew everybody has been talking about you because they stop talking and they look at you when you walk in? This was one of those times. It was a large meeting that included all the key people at FSI, chaired by Ruth Davis and Ruth Whiteside. They must have received feedback from the findings of the ARB, what the recommendations were going to be, because they turned to me and said, "John, we think we ought to bring back the overseas CME. We would like to do 100 a year. How much would that cost us?" Well that was a shock, in the old days we never conducted more than 40 CMEs a year. So suddenly, I was being asked to come up with a program where we would exercise nearly half the Foreign Service posts in the world every year. Using the four-hour tabletop exercises with one person going to a post for two days as the model, I had a good idea what it would cost. I asked if they had a calculator and with everyone watching me, calculated that to conduct a 100 CMEs per year, we would need eight trainers, three office staff, and that there should also be two Foreign Service officers as office director and deputy. With the inclusion of travel costs, I thought a program would cost between a million and a half to two million dollars a year. After I gave them my cost estimate, they turned to me and said, "OK we are putting together a contract. You start figuring out how soon you can do this". This was very unusual and I felt that I was "out on a limb". As a contractor, I worked for Research Planning Incorporated (RPI) and they had no idea that this was taking place. Since 1993, I was the only employee that RPI had working at the State Department. RPI was very supportive and quickly put together a team to work with me on contract preparation, spearheaded by Chuck Lyon, the Executive Vice-President. By the first part of September, Congress authorized emergency funding, the new contract was approved, and we were given authorization to begin hiring. All of the trainers who had been with us in 1993, at least the more senior people were now rather old. They were up in their upper 60's, early 70's and the ones who were younger all had found other work. So I essentially was starting from scratch.

Q: Who were the other trainers? Retired foreign service officers, military?

HARALSON: In the old program, all the team leaders were retired senior Foreign Service officers, at the MC or OC level. They would by this time have been in their upper 60's. The number twos were all retired military people, who found other work in the intervening five years. I was the only one left over from the old days. The challenge was to quickly hire trainers and put the program back on track to conduct overseas exercises. I made a couple of key decisions based on lessons learned from the previous program. First, I wanted to hire trainers that were reflective of the current employees in the Foreign Service. In the old days, all the team leaders were Caucasian, male, mostly political cone types. I didn't think they were reflective of the people that I was currently teaching and exercising. I made an effort to recruit a diverse group of trainers from all areas within the State Department. The first person I recruited, Douglas Kinney, is now the program manager. While he is Caucasian and had been a DCM out of the Political Cone, he struck me as someone that could "get up to speed quickly". After he was hired we brought in people from other areas. Jeff Lutz was the second hire; he had a Science and Technology background with a Doctorate degree. Next were people that had been a case officer with USAID, a former Consular officer and a Community Liaison officer.

Q: Were some of these women?

HARALSON: They were. It turned out that half the trainers I initially hired were women. I also hired two African American men, and one African American woman. So I was purposefully looking for diversity among the new hires.

Q: Why were you looking for diversity?

HARALSON: I wanted the trainers to look like people in the Foreign Service. I thought that hiring male and females, different ethnic backgrounds, and also people from a variety of Foreign Service experiences would bring together a different perspective than hiring only retired political officers. I was right, and they did. They had a variety of views regarding how to prepare for and respond to crises. The E. Africa bombings occurred on August 8. I had hired Douglas Kinney in early September and began working on a previously scheduled exercise trip for early October to Sanaa, Cairo and Tel Aviv. Douglas Kinney, who had not conducted CMEs previously, assisted me with the exercise preparation. Douglas and Ruth Davis, Director of FSI, went with me on the October trip. After returning from these CMEs, Jeff Lutz was hired and he worked with Douglas and they both went on exercises to India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka in February. This was the pattern, hire a new person and have them understudy with a more experienced trainer and then send them out on their own very quickly. Within one year following the E. Africa bombings, we had conducted 103 overseas crisis management exercises. We had responded quickly to the need to reestablish the overseas program, while still teaching at FSI and exercising with the Marines. I feel we met the challenge and I am very proud of what was accomplished.

Q: Could you give some idea of the perspective of this. You know sort of eliminate one-man posts or something. But out of a total of how many, you say 100 a year, how many posts did you reckon there were at the time?

HARALSON: We were using the number 256 as the total number of posts worldwide, with the initial goal being 100 exercises per year. A few years later, we added another trainer and we attempted to exercise half of the total posts every year, 128 posts a year. A trainer was expected to conduct 16 posts per year.

Q: Which would mean of course that you were allowing for the normal rotation and you would still have a cadre at each post who had been through at least if nothing else a mental drill.

HARALSON: Some of them, yes. With some posts having one-year rotations, you are always having a constant turnover. Two years ago we began exercising one year tour posts, every year. We attempt to exercise them in the September through November time frame, right after the summer rotation. This serves as both a team building experience and enables the people that participate in the training to put this knowledge to work for the remainder of their one-year tour. The program is designed to have a trainer overseas four times a year. We attempt to exercise posts in September, November, February and again in May. We try to stay away from travel during the summer turnover season. While we attempt to average four posts per trip, we always have posts wanting to cancel or reschedule the exercises. Many times we have encountered ridiculous reasons for posts wanting to cancel a crisis management exercise. Some of the better ones include, "Please don't exercise us because everyone here just arrived." With all personnel having just arrived, that would seem to be the best reason for having a no fault training exercise. We hear many questionable excuses, such as, "We are hosting a softball tournament that week, or that week we are writing fitness reports, or many of us are working on our taxes". While it is a struggle to schedule the exercises, we have not dropped below 100 exercises a year since 1999. We now have nine trainers, two Foreign Service officers, and three office management specialists in the Crisis Management Training (CMT) office. We are part of the School of Leadership and Management at FSI and have expanded into other areas. We teach in many classes at FSI and throughout the Washington region and continue to lead teams on exercises with the Marines. Additionally, we conduct Task Force exercises for regional and functional bureaus throughout the year. For crisis management training, the E. African bombings and the aftermath were watershed events. The contract was expanded, new trainers hired, and our entire program was rejuvenated. As I think back to 1993, the previous program was cancelled due to lack of funding. It was fortunate that I was retained, I ended up being the Department's insurance policy. I had retained the previous exercises, lessons learned cables, and knew how to research, write, coordinate, and conduct the CMEs. Consequently, we were able to restart the program very quickly once we were authorized to hire trainers and expand the training.

Q: Looking back on it, nobody thought that way, retaining you as an insurance policy.

HARALSON: No, they probably didn't, it just worked out that way. It was just an example of when you keep a person around and suddenly you really need him, and in this case it worked out perfectly. I doubt if they would have been able to restart the CME program within a year, if I hadn't been in place and ready to go. In the years since 1998, the CME program has remained much the same. Currently, this is January of '06; we have ten trainers, two are part time employees. One of part time trainers, Amelia Knight, is the wife of the DCM in Angola. She works half time and conducts most of the exercises in Africa. The other half timer is Richard Brown, who researches and writes the exercises for Amelia. They split one full time position, one does the writing; one does the exercising. Since late '98 we have probably turned over personnel about 100%. The only person, who has been here with me the entire time, is the first person hired, Douglas Kinney, who is now the program manager. Every other position has turned over at least once. It is a different type of work, with a lot of travel. The trainer is usually TDY between two and a half and three weeks per trip. What makes this really difficult is that they have to travel every three days and don't have time to rest between exercises. A typical schedule runs something like this. The trainer leaves Washington and travels towards Africa. Flies overnight into Frankfurt or London, changes planes, arrives at the designated location late at night. The next morning they go to the embassy or consulate general. The first thing they do is to have an in briefing with the Ambassador and usually the DCM. They review the purpose of the training and ask the Ambassador if they have anything they would like specifically emphasized during the exercise such as a particular threat or crisis that may be looming. Following the in brief with the principal officers, we teach a three-hour class called "Overview Training", primarily for the foreign-service nationals, which is a new addition to the CME program since 1998. You will recall earlier in the interview we said the exercises were classified, and that we only exercised with the senior American staff. Following the East Africa bombings, it became apparent that we needed to include local employees in the training. The FSNs had always been excluded from the training and were not allowed to read the classified emergency action plan. It didn't make much sense, because during a crisis we heavily rely on our local employees to assist us whatever the response. So it didn't make sense not to bring them into the training program. When we started the new CME program in 1998, we began including the Foreign Service Nationals (FSN). After the in briefing, we teach a three hour block of instruction, traditional classroom instruction focusing on State Department emergency planning, the role of FSNs, how Posts are expected to respond to crises and what the FSN's supervisors would expect from them during a crisis. We often show a crisis response film and conduct mini exercises. They divide into three or four groups to discuss crisis scenarios such as, "What happens if all the Americans are out of the embassy and X happens? What do you do? Who do you coordinate with? Who needs to be notified?" This type of training takes place on the first day. The second day, we conduct the CME tabletop exercise with the emergency action committee and we stress that posts should consider inviting their key FSNs and selected host country contacts such as key police officers. Some posts initially were reluctant to do this, but nowadays about 95% of the posts that we exercise bring their key FSNs to the exercise, many invite host county officials. It is interesting to note how the FSNs adapt or fail to adapt being invited to participate. If you are exercising West Africa, none of the FSN's will say anything unless the senior FSN speaks first. In other places, once you get them started, you can't keep them quiet. One thing I always looked for as we are starting the exercise, I looked to see where the FSNs are sitting. If they are sitting down at the end of the room, all together, I know that I am not going to have much participation. Consequently, we now have the FSNS sit next to or directly behind their American supervisor. That insures that they are consulted and participate regarding the plans and actions the EAC is considering. The exercise is designed to last four hours. The trainer has conducted extensive research in preparing the exercise, including the review of the Post's emergency action plan. We have spoken to the desk officers and anyone that may have interests or expertise in this specific post. We also ask the post what would you like to see us script into the exercise? The exercise usually takes four hours and consists of six or seven implementers. We normally project the timing of the exercise into the future, rarely in real time (current date). We will posit conditions six months into the future. The reason we do this is to give ourselves more flexibility as we hypothesize what could occur at the post. It also allows the participants to suspend disbelief in the scenario if required. We start the exercise with a brief overview of conditions throughout the world and within the region. It could consist of terrorist events, outbreak of Avian flu, or domestic turmoil. Then we present three or four specific warnings or threat indicators. For example, we might start off with reports of unidentified persons observing the school that American children attend. Our local employees report that they are being followed as they are coming and going from work. A third scene setter may be that we are receiving information of some type of threat such as terrorists being captured in a nearby country, and materials found had on their computer contains a description of our embassy. After having the EAC read the background situation, they are directed to several types of questions they are required to discuss and answer. The people gathered for the CME are expected to replicate the actions of the Post EAC, chaired in most cases by the DCM at an embassy, or the Principal Officer at a consulate general or consulate. They are expected to read the scenario, review the questions, and decide what actions need to be taken or considered? They work through a series of implementers and usually take the most time on the first implementer in the exercise. The EAC usually needs to "warm up"; giving everyone an opportunity to participate and feel his or her input is valued. Rather than hurrying through the exercises, I find that the most valuable discussions occur within the first hour. The role of the trainer is to facilitate the discussions if needed, take notes and insure that the exercise is taken seriously. We usually don't inject ourselves while the EAC discussions are taking place. We wait until the EAC has completed answering the questions assigned to each implementer and then ask for clarification or ask additional questions. We may attempt to include people that have not participated in the discussions by directing questions to them. For example, the EAC has been discussing a deteriorating security situation, but the Community Liaison Officer has not entered into the exchange. I might say something like, "Where is the CLO, I know your are present?" "Give us your input on what the family members are thinking, and what type of contacts do we have with the school?" Perhaps the GSO has not provided input, I may prompt the GSO by saying, "You have listened to what the EAC has to say, how are you going to support them with transportation and logistics?" It is a matter of having everyone participate, enter into the planning, and reviewing their EAP to determine its validity. Someone is designated to keep a log (record of discussions), recording differences of opinion or areas of confusion, and provide a record of issues that require "real world" corrective action after the exercise is completed. The exercise leads the emergency action committee through a series of deteriorating situations, everything from a terrorist attack, anti-US demonstrations, natural disasters and fires. The scenario leads the EAC towards evacuation planning where "trip wires" are considered leading to the EAC requesting authorized or ordered departure authority. Questions are often asked, "What are we going to do with their local employees, how might they leave?" For example, if we are playing a CME in West Africa, the EAC may have to plan an evacuation by convoy from their country across the border. In another situation such as Haiti, they may have to plan for a US military assisted evacuation. One of the things we have included in the last two or three years is paying more attention to the psychological aftermath of crises. We are requiring the EAC to reflect on the aftermath of crisis what stress-related problems may be encountered? How do you detect people that may be suffering some crisis overload or post-traumatic stress? What type of help is available, how do you deal with the psychological aftermath of a crisis? There are some of the threats we almost always put in the exercises. We play threats against the schools, soft targets is what we call them. What type of coordination has the post taken with the schools? We often play an implementer related to a chemical or biological threat, such as white powder (anthrax) in the Consular waiting room. There has been increased emphasis within the Department on training for chemical or biological incidents. We are also writing scenarios about the possibility of Avian Flu, human to human transmission during a Pandemic. The exercises are always post specific, not generic. When the exercise is completed, following the last implementer, we poll the EAC and ask them what they learned? We have them answer several written questions. Following the exercise we conduct an out brief with the Ambassador and DCM, we do not out brief the entire emergency action committee. Disagreements or questions that were raised during the exercises were either resolved at that time or were recorded for later planning sessions. We do retain the questionnaire that was answered at the conclusion of the exercise. We review the input, and it becomes part of the out brief with the Ambassador and DCM. The first question asked, "How did we do and how did we do compared with other posts?" We don't answer those questions. The exercise is a no-fault training event. I take their question, turn them around to the DCM, and ask, "How well do you think you did? What came out during the exercise? What did you learn?" I will have taken notes, but I don't single out people for criticism, as I said earlier in this interview, these people are the ones who are going to have to go through the real crisis after we have departed. The idea is to try to build them up, give them confidence, work together as a team. We discuss who the "superstars" were during the exercise. I might say something like; "That Defense Attaché is really sharp, he is was really a major contributor". If I have anything negative to say, it might be along the lines of, "I would have liked to have heard more about how they were going to support your actions logistically." Or, "I didn't hear a clear plan regarding how we are going to contact the American community during this crisis." The out brief with the Ambassador and DCM may take 15 to 20 minutes. We tell them they will be receiving a lessons learned cable from FSI a few days after we leave post asking a series of questions about what lessons were learned, what actions they were taking to address them? We ask for their evaluation of the CME and how we might improve it? This is a report card on us. We find that posts use our visit to justify requesting additional funds to address shortcomings uncovered during the exercise. We use the post's lesson learned cable and our own trip report as internal reports regarding the CME. We don't send our internal report to the IG or anyone else. Every quarter we put together cable that is sent to all posts outlining trends and lessons learned from the exercises. Since 1983 we have conducted over 1100 crisis management exercises. Since the E. African bombings, we have conducted over 700. The CMT program is stable these days, with all the trainers having at least two years experience. Extending our classes and exercises to include FSNs (local employees) has been very successful. Our domestic classes continue to increase in frequency, as well as Task Forces and Marine Corps exercise. As for myself, about six months ago I decided to step down as program manager after 20 years with crisis management. Last summer, I turned the position over to Douglas Kinney, the first hired under the expanded program in 1998 and our longest serving trainer. I now focus my time reviewing the exercises that others write; teaching numerous classes and working on special projects, allowing me to work on a part time basis. For the most part, I have given up overseas travel, but will fill in for a trainer that has an emergency or is ill. I am almost 66 years and its time for others to step forward to keep the program going. We have had a very good resurrection of the program following the East Africa bombings and the feedback we receive is uniformly positive. I believe the program is valuable to the Department during these times of increased threats. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to talk to you.

Q: I have got some questions.

HARALSON: Oh I don't get away that easy.

Q: John, what about, I would think a tricky thing is with the FSN's, I think this is a little bit of a touchy thing for obvious reasons. At a certain point you say you are going to evacuate the embassy, well this is cut and run and all us white folks go out and all of you dusky people stay behind. You know, these are part of our family...

HARALSON: Let me tell you how I deal with that. Every time I teach a group of FSN's, you can bet one of them will raise their hand and say, "What about us?" Here is how I answer that. Within our doctrine, 12 FAH-1, there is a provision for evacuating foreign-service nationals. It is not used very often and reads something like this, "If by the virtue of their employment with the US, their life would be in danger, there are provisions for evacuating these people." There are many instances where we in fact have evacuated large numbers of FSN's, including Belgrade a few ago.

Q: Right next door is Jack Zetkovic who was the DCM there at the time and was saying he felt the European Bureau did in his diplomatic terms, a piss poor job. Because they were not reaching out to talk to the African Bureau for example, which had lots of experience. In Europe you just don't have evacuations of embassies.

HARALSON: I am not sure that talking to the African Bureau about evacuating FSN's would be valuable, because most of the time we do not evacuate FSNs in Africa. First of all, let's take a positive example. I know of instances where we have evacuated FSN's. I was thinking of one FSN in Karachi who assisted us in locating the terrorist that killed the people outside of CIA Headquarters in McLean, VA. His name was published in the Karachi newspaper, and his life was threatened. It does require extensive coordination between the Post and the Department to set this up, because there are a lot of questions such as to where do they go; what do you do with them, who is evacuated with them? Do you include their family? In some of these places, the family includes the entire village. I have come to the conclusion that when the FSNs ask about what we plan on doing for them, they are not necessarily asking to be evacuated. What they are looking for is reassurance about their job. There have been 262 evacuations since 1988, meaning that we have evacuated, on average, one post every three weeks for the last 18 years. Out of 262 evacuations, only 20 of these evacuations have resulted in post closures. That means that in 242 out of 262 evacuations that at least the core staff of US officers remained at the embassy or consulate and continued to work. Most of the official Americans evacuating are family members or persons in non-emergency positions. As these employees evacuate, the work left behind is often shifted to the FSNs. My point to the FSNs is that all of the Americans are not leaving, your jobs are secure, be prepared to work harder following an evacuation, we are going to be here with you. That generally satisfies them. There are examples where the FSNs continued working, kept the embassy operating, after all the Americans had evacuated and were there to greet us when we returned a month or two later. In most cases, the local employees don't want to evacuate; they want to be reassured that their employment will continue if Americans have to evacuate.

Q: What about documents and the destruction of them, something that concerned me when I was consul general in Seoul was that you had a very oppressive regime to the north, which if it got hold of our visa files for example, I mean this would have been a number one list of people to be persecuted.

HARALSON: Absolutely.

Q: And we are 30 miles away from 40 divisions of troops. Is destruction of documents part of your training?

HARALSON: We don't make them show us if all the shredders work, but part of the exercise covers the destruction of classified and sensitive information. We have them review their destruction plan including the amount of time required to destroy all sensitive files. While some of the files are not classified, but they may be very sensitive. I think your refusal lists in the visa section is a good example. We do make them identify who has the responsibility for destruction, and as they go through the CME, we ask them to review their trip wires for beginning the destruction of their classified and sensitive documents. They need to identify how much material need to be destroyed, what shredders are available, and how long will the destruction take? Identifying the level of classified information that sections are allowed to retain is a problem and requires discipline on behalf of everyone.

Q: Do you have any tie into inspections? I am not saying the IG does this poorly, but these are things the inspectors we have to notice, the inspectors should notice, because they are the ones who have to make a judgment. Do they have the ability to burn documents; I mean that whole thing.

HARALSON: If you are asking if we say something to the IG about a post having too much classified information? We don't. However, once a year we will meet with the IG. One of the lead inspectors comes to FSI and we will discuss what they are seeing and what we are finding, but in a generic way. We will discuss trends and areas that may need to be emphasized. However, we do not provide names or identify posts to the IG. I think that one of the reasons this program has been successful is that we are trusted when we say we are from FSI and not IG. We are trainers, not IG inspectors.

Q: What about the military because you know, the military particularly in Africa has been called in to get people out of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mogadishu, and God knows where else. I would think that sometimes they are really not going to be that knowledgeable of what to do. How do you work this?

HARALSON: Well a couple of ways. First of all, recall that I said that we spend a lot of time exercising with the Marines. Part of these exercises always focuses on the evacuation of Americans. We have two or three hundred people as role players that we assemble, screen, process, and evacuate to Navy ships and out of danger. We take Consular Officers on these exercises and have them work with the Marines and on occasion we will take Marines with us overseas on exercises at Embassies. For example, a few years ago I had just returned from an exercise with the Marines in California and the threat was increasing in Indonesia and Jakarta requested a crisis management exercise focused on evacuation. I called the Marines I had just exercised with and asked, "How about sending a representative with me on an exercise to Jakarta." The Marines provided two officers, one from Camp Pendleton and the other from Okinawa. We linked up in Singapore and they went into Jakarta together. While I was teaching a class for local employees, the Marines were visiting designated helicopter landing zones and assembly areas. When we conducted the exercise, the Marines briefed on how they would support an evacuation. Another example took place in Pakistan. The Executive Officer from the Marine Expeditionary Unit that I just exercised with at Camp Lejune requested to travel on the Pakistan CME. He went with me and briefed the EACs in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar on evacuation operations. While we don't take the military with us very often, it does happen on occasion.

Q: Well I am going to run out of questions now. This has been fascinating John. I take it like Avian Flu is brand new. We don't even know if there is such a thing. We don't know if it is going to become a problem or not because whether this will become transmittable between humans. Everybody in the world is taking a hard look at this.

HARALSON: I was at a meeting this morning attempting to understand the dynamics of a pandemic and how we want our trainers to portray this possibility as part of the CME and in our classes at FSI. Many embassies are already formulating plans. It reminds me of the saying; "We must hurry and catch them for we are their leaders."

Q: This will probably be interesting to look at in the future. Let's say this happens. Is there any thought about around the world of shutting down travel?

HARALSON: I think there is a very good chances there is going to be a shut down. I don't think airlines are going to fly.

Q: OK if you are there, it's too bad. We will try to deal with you in place, but let's not bring people in.

HARALSON: I think there is a very good chance that is going to happen. The reason I think it could happen is that as soon as we see the clustering effect, where transmission of Avian Influenza (AI) is being passed easily from human to human, everybody is going to recognize it at the same time, and I think the airlines are going to stop flying. I think unless you are very lucky, you are going remain where you are, until this pandemic subsides. If you are in Thailand when AI starts to spread, you are not going to be leaving Thailand. You are going to stay there until it is over. That is going to cause all kinds of challenges and repercussions, not only in our country but also throughout the world.

Q: But everywhere you know.

HARALSON: There will be security concerns in addition to health issues. If you have Americans living or traveling in an unprotected mode, who is going to keep the locals from taking their supplies, their medicines. I don't know if you have ever seen the movie "Mad Max Under the Thunderdome", I could foresee that type of scenario occurring, should we ever, "God Forbid" experience an AI pandemic.

Q: It a fascinating world. That is where the fun, I guess fun is the wrong word, in dealing with these things instead of worrying about sewerage in Peoria or something.

HARALSON: I always tell the trainers when they are applying for a CMT position, they will end up with the best cocktail stories in town after a year or two of this type of work.

Q: Well thank you very much.

End of interview

HARALSON: Postscript. The above interview occurred in late 2005 and early 2006. At present (July 2007), the CMT program continues. Four of the eight trainer positions have been converted to Government Employee (GG) status and four of the trainers (including me) remain contractors. In the past 18 months I exercised all of the Pakistan posts, as well as Kingston, Jamaica. Funding for the CMT program is becoming an issue and we are attempting to conduct some of the exercises via Digital Conference Video (DVC). While DVC does not replace visiting the Post in person, it is more cost effective. I expect that funding will continue to be an issue until the Department experiences the next disaster similar to the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings. The resulting Accountability Review Board (ARB) and Congressional investigation will result in additional funding and expansion of the CMT program to the point where we will end up exercising every post, once a year.

I continue to work on a part time basis at the Crisis Management Training Division, School of Leadership and Management, Foreign Service Institute, Department of State. My wife Sharon and I have been married almost 40 years and continue to live in Fairfax, VA. Our daughter, Stacey, works for the Department of Homeland Security, is married to Andrew Street and they have a son, Caleb. They live in Burke, VA. Our son Derek became a paratrooper and spent 9 years in the Army. He also lives in Fairfax and works with computers. My sister, Margaret Anne Haralson, lives in Wilmington, NC.

I would like to close with the motto of the US Army Special Forces; "De Oppresso Libre", which means, "Liberate the Oppressed".

End of interview