The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROBERT ANDREW

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INTERVIEW

Q: So, today is April 23rd, 2021. We're beginning our interview with Rob Andrew. So, Rob, where and when were you born?

ANDREW: I was born on July 25th, 1967, in Norman, Oklahoma. My parents lived at a house that they rented at 335 Merkle Drive, Norman, Oklahoma.

Q: Now, there's a Norman, and there's a Normal.

ANDREW: It's just Norman. It's the home of the university and the Sooners and all that.

Q: Okay. There is some place in the U.S. called Normal, but maybe not in Oklahoma. Anyway, is that where you were raised, as well?

ANDREW: No, it's not. What's funny is that I'm living here now, which is really interesting but unrelated to my birth. I was born there at the end of my dad's tour as a Naval ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) professor of naval science at OU (University of Oklahoma), of all things. Then, we moved shortly after I was born, a couple of months later, to Kingsville, Texas, where I lived for about five years. But I was really raised in northern California near a town called Chico.

Q: What was Chico like?

ANDREW: I should say that I grew up in Chico and the surrounding area. I grew up on a ranch called Mills Orchard near Hamilton City, about twelve miles west of Chico. Chico is about an hour and a half drive due north of Sacramento, to give you a geographical reference there. It is in the northern part of what is called the Great Central Valley of California, which basically extends north and south through most of the state. It is primarily an agricultural area. We grow a lot of fruit and nuts, as we like to say. Almonds are probably the biggest crop – almonds and walnuts, fruits, particularly the plums that you make into prunes. I think they are called French plums if I'm not mistaken.

There is a university there, California State University, Chico (CSUC, often called Chico State). I will talk more about my hometown university later, which I graduated from in

1989. Chico is now a town of roughly 100,000 people. The other marker that kind of puts it on the map is that it is the original home of the Sierra Nevada brewery. For people who like to drink beer, they will know about Sierra Nevada, though they may not know that it comes from Chico. The brewery has since expanded beyond Chico to Mills River, North Carolina. Then, our other claim to fame, at least in modern days, is Aaron Rogers, the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, is also from Chico.

Q: Beautiful.

ANDREW: The terrain in that part of the north valley is mainly flat, with the large Sacramento River running through it about 10 miles west of Chico. That's the big river in northern California.

Q: Okay. Let's go back just a moment. Have you done any ancestry research? Do you know where your family came from?

ANDREW: We've done a little bit. Let me talk about my mom first, because hers is more complicated, in a sense. My mother's name is Thurza Barbara McDermid, and she was born on June 3, 1936. She was adopted. Mom, by the way, was Canadian. She was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, but raised in Vancouver, British Columbia. She never knew, in her lifetime, who her biological parents and relatives were. Of course, we consider her mother and father who raised her to be our family. While my mom was hesitant to find out more about her birth family in her lifetime (though sometimes she really wanted to know), she gave my brother Howard and I permission to try and track down her biological parents after she died (which happened on July 3, 2014). Indeed, Howard was able to track down her birth mother's family with just a few months' work. Her birth mother, of course, had long since passed. However, we found out quite a bit about her birth mother and her family and have visited them in Canada. Unfortunately, we don't know too much about her biological father.

What we do know is that my mom's birth mother, whose name was Doris, was English. She had been an English immigrant to Canada, which was very typical, but we don't really know who mom's biological father was. Having done a DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) test on my brother, there were markers in it that we did not anticipate, which might relate to the father. Those unanticipated markers were Eastern European of unknown origin, Portuguese, Congo, and Cherokee. We did not expect those markers, so he may have had that background.

What we did expect in our DNA background was Scandinavian and English. The Cherokee could be from Dad's side. Dad grew up as a Mormon, but we understand that if you came to the New World before 1800, the chances that you have Native American blood in your past are actually quite good. If you looked at me you probably wouldn't see a Cherokee, but there are DNA markers for it.

As for Dad, whose name is Neil Harding Andrew and born on August 21, 1929, he grew up in a Mormon family, and Mormons are well known for their accurate research into

their genealogical charts and background. We know that Dad's background is predominantly Scandinavian with lots of Danish as well as English, Scottish, and some German. That's the main background. We can actually trace back Dad's side to about 400 to 500 years ago. Thus, we have a rather good genealogical chart going back hundreds of years on Dad's side. Dad passed away on December 28, 2018.

Q: Now, where did your father grow up?

ANDREW: Dad was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. His dad (Reed D. Andrew) was originally from the Salt Lake City area – not surprising as they were Mormons – and his mother (Lillian Burton), who was also a Mormon, grew up in the Burbank area down near LA (Los Angeles). They had moved to Detroit for my grandfather's work. He was a lawyer for American Standard if you remember that corporation. Here is a little humor--my dad always used to say when using a public urinal that was made by American Standard, "thanks dad"! I got a kick out of that growing up, so now when I see a urinal (or other bathroom fixture) made by American Standard, I always say, "Thanks, Grandpa"! To get back to your question, my father was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, and he later went to the University of Utah.

Q: But your father was ROTC in the Navy. Did he then go into the Navy as a career?

ANDREW: Upon graduating from the University of Utah in 1951, he entered the Navy as an Ensign. His time as an NROTC (Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps) Professor of Naval Science came much later from 1964-1967, when he was here in Norman at the University of Oklahoma. At that time, he was already a lieutenant commander in the Navy. He was doing a NROTC tour as an instructor for the naval midshipmen. This assignment at OU was actually near the end of his career. I was not born until 1967, so I was not around when he and mom moved around a lot during the majority of his Navy career. He was a pilot, by the way, a Naval Aviator. He flew many different types of aircraft, including fighters, off of aircraft carriers in his Navy career. Those aircraft included the propeller driven planes F6F Hellcat, F8F Bearcat, TBM Avenger, and AD Skyraider; and jet fighters F9F Panther and F9F-8 Cougar as well as the attack aircraft A-4 Skyhawk.

His next and last assignment in the Navy after his time at OU NROTC was in Kingsville, Texas. There is a NAS (Naval Air Station) in Kingsville and it is where the Navy has their advanced jet training; he was a flight instructor for them there. That was his last assignment before he retired in 1971 when I was four years old.

Q: So, what brought the family to California?

ANDREW: That's a really good question. So, Dad's favorite Navy assignment and place to live in the world, from his time there in the 1950s, had been at the Naval Air Station North Island, which is on Coronado Island in San Diego, California. It's an incredibly famous area there. Mom was from Vancouver, BC, and she really wanted to live there after they got out. So, they geographically compromised, and northern California is about

halfway in between. No kidding. That's the truth. They would not be too far from their favorite happy places. Mom and Dad have both passed away now, but over the 40 plus years they lived in northern California, we visited both San Diego and Vancouver dozens of times. That's why they decided to live in northern California, halfway in between.

Q: Okay. What about brothers and sisters?

ANDREW: I only have one brother and no sisters. Just the two of us boys. My older brother's name is Howard Russell Andrew, and he was born on May 14, 1958, so he's nine years older than I am. Unfortunately, he passed away after a six-year long battle against leukemia on August 24, 2021, in New Zealand.

Q: Okay. So, before your parents got married or even after, was your mother working?

ANDREW: Yes. Mom, before she got married, was actually a stewardess – that's the term they used back then – for American Airlines. She had been based out of LA and Dallas, and maybe somewhere else, but it was in LA where she met Dad. It was in Hollywood, believe it or not. It sounds like a movie, right? She met Dad in Hollywood at a party, one of the parties in the '50s. He was a dashing young Navy pilot and she an attractive young stewardess. They got married within four months of meeting.

Q: Wow.

ANDREW: She also both volunteered and worked later on in life. Obviously, I don't remember everything she did before I was born. I wouldn't say she was really a homemaker—she was while we were young, but as soon as she could she either worked or volunteered. When my brother and I were finally grown up enough, she got into the real estate business, and she was a real estate broker. She was also a stockbroker and later on a mortgage loan officer. Her primary profession was in financial work later on in her life after raising us boys.

Q: Fascinating. Had she studied it before, or did she work her way up?

ANDREW: She worked her way up. Mom did not have a formal college degree. She had a high school education. She was self-taught, after that. I suppose that's the right term. She had so many accreditations in her career while working her way up to be able to do all of these jobs. She would get the appropriate training. A lot of it was either on the job training or getting sent to training by various real estate and mortgage corporations.

She was quite respected in her field a little bit later in life, I would say, in the mortgage loan industry. She had been contacted, over a number of years, to edit books, like mortgage loans textbooks for universities. After a while, they got tired of doing that, and they said, "We want you to write the book." So, she actually ended up authoring a thick book on mortgage loans for the State of California.

Q: Fascinating. Just to go back for one second to working as a stewardess, back then, when jet travel was just beginning to get underway, being a stewardess was a very sought-after career for a woman.

ANDREW: It was. There were a lot of rules and regulations, back then, that today we would view as dinosaur-aged. For instance, you could not be married. You could not have children or be pregnant. There was definitely a certain physique they wanted, basically, if I could put it that way. They wanted young, nice-looking women. Very trim. Yes, it was a different era, certainly. She flew mainly in the old propeller passenger aircraft, but I think in some of the first jets as well.

I remember her telling a story about the most famous passenger on any of her flights, which was the actress Elizabeth Taylor, who among other movies starred in *National Velvet,* one of my mom's favorite movies. I think that was the most famous person she met when she was a stewardess.

Q: That's definitely fun. All right, so going back to Chico, did you go to public school? Private school? How did that work?

ANDREW: I went to public school, and it was actually in a small town about 12 miles west of Chico called Hamilton City. You wouldn't know it from anything. I actually grew up on a ranch called Mills Orchard just west of Hamilton City. I had kind of a country upraising. It was in Hamilton City where I went to elementary school, from 1-8th grade. That was how long elementary school was in that community. Then, after that, for high school we had moved to Chico proper by then. I went to Bidwell Junior High for one year in the 9th grade. In Chico, Junior highs back then were seventh through ninth. So, I went for one year in ninth grade. Then we moved again and bought a home at 780 Sierra View Way and switched districts, and I went to a three-year high school called Chico Senior High School. It was tenth through twelfth grades.

All of my schooling was in public schools.

Q: I have to say, I'm really curious. Growing up on a ranch must have been fun.

ANDREW: It was great! We call them ranches, but some other folks may just call them farms or orchards. In California, we tend to use the term ranch. This particular ranch, called Mills Orchard (the owner's name was James Mills and was both our landlord and our neighbor) was 2000 acres in size. The primary crops grown there were navel oranges, pears, peaches, olives, almonds, walnuts, and those French plums I was talking about that they would make into prunes. We owned a few horses back then and rode them often on the ranch. As a matter of fact, I rode competitively for more than 10 years until 1989. I can talk about that in a minute.

I have to say, it was an ideal childhood, and I cannot complain about it at all. I had great adventures exploring around various parts of the ranch, riding my horses, riding my bike, swimming in creeks, hunting, fishing. It was great fun. I had many friends, mainly

Mexican migrant workers' children. Hearing Mexican Spanish being spoken was my first exposure to a language other than English. My best friend growing up back then was Marc Sanderson, and he and I explored almost every inch of this ranch. His background was interesting as well, his father was a white guy and his mother was a Pueblo Indian. His stepfather was a Mexican on this ranch who worked in heavy machinery. I got to know a lot of the migrant workers back then, too. I grew up on this ranch from 1973-1981, from age 6-14.

As I said, this was my first exposure to people who did not necessarily speak English. That's when I first started learning Spanish, in fact.

Q: Okay. So, in the K-8, were you also… You mentioned riding horses. I'm curious, did that begin in childhood, or was that something you did a little later?

ANDREW: It began in childhood. Mom had me on a horse at age three for the first time, I think, in 1970 back in Kingsville, Texas. Mom and dad brought our three horses from Texas when we settled in California. It wasn't until later in the '70s that I got a little bit more serious in it. I would say that from '79 to '89 was really my heyday of riding. The particular competition I used to ride was called three-day eventing. It is also known as combined training.

We used to say, "We do it three ways over three days." The first event was dressage. Then, the second day was cross country, and the third day was stadium jumping. It's based on cavalry-type training for the old horse cavalry. I was actually a pretty good equestrian rider and competed in various 3-day evening competitions for about 10 years until I was about 21 years old. The level would have been "Junior Olympics" which went to age 21. I rode in many horse events and shows in those years, and won several of them, in several U.S. states and some provinces in Canada.

In the summers of 1980 and '81, I lived with my mom's cousin, who was also my godfather. His name was Robin Hahn, and he was a very well-known, famous Canadian Olympic equestrian. We bought a new horse through him later on, and I rode that horse (named Glider, whose official American Jockey Club name was County Bid) throughout the '80s. Robin rode in many international horse competitions. He was the Canadian Three Day Event Champion several times in the late '60s and early '70s. He rode in the 1968 Mexico Olympics, the 1972 Munich Olympics, and rode as Captain of the Canadian team in the 1976 Montreal Olympics. He would be as well-known as anybody at the top of their sporting profession. He just passed away in August 2021.

It was also in those early years, in '80 and '81 when I was 13 and 14 years old that I really remember being in a "foreign country." Though it was Canada and did not seem that foreign, it was still a little bit of exposure to international travel at a youthful age.

Q: Fascinating. Of course, equestrian sport and horses can get in your blood. There are plenty of people who never give it up. Was there something else that grabbed you later on that made the horses fade away?

ANDREW: Well, I stayed with horses through university. It was only when I entered the Army in June of 1989 that I left the horse world. We will get to this later, but I went through Army ROTC in university, and I got commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1989, and my first assignment was in Germany later that year. That's when I really left the horse world professionally. I've ridden for pleasure now and again since then, but not as a competitor. I suppose I could always go back to it, but it's a sport that demands a lot of money, and it's a money pit. Very rarely do you make money. It's a love. That's what it is. You're quite right that people tend to stay with it. To the chagrin of my mom, I left it when I "grew up" and joined the Army.

I did compete in other sports in school. In elementary school, up to eighth grade and especially in seventh and eighth grade, I played flag football and basketball. I was the tallest guy in my age group in my school at that time. I spurted up noticeably young. I'm five foot eleven, and I was five foot eleven by the time I was 12, so for a 12-year-old, I was very tall. I stunted at that point. But for about two or three years I was particularly good at basketball. No one could get me, right? I also played Little League baseball from 8-12 years old. My team's name was the Bears, so sometimes when we played terribly we were known as the "Bad News Bears" just like the TV show/movie. However, the last two years I played we were a winning team and the last year I played, at 12 years old and 5 foot eleven, I hit the only out of the park home run! My batting average was also well above 700, and I played first base as well as pitcher.

Later on in high school, when I went to Chico High, I played football and rode horses at the same time. I learned how to manage my time early on in life! My time after school was remarkably busy, but I played junior varsity and varsity football for three years. We were a good team. We didn't win the state or anything like that, but we usually won our league championships, and we were a high school football power to be contended with.

I swam when I was a kid, as well, from ages six to 10 in a swim club called the Chico Aqua Jets. The interesting thing is that one of the guys I swam with back then, his name was Roque Santos, ended up going to the Olympics later on in his life for swimming. I don't think he medaled or anything, but he was an extraordinarily talented swimmer. I also swam for a year in high school, but I was not that good and left it. I'm trying to think if there were any other sports. I think that was mainly it. Football took up a lot of my time, and then there were horses. Those were the main sporty extracurricular activities that I did.

Q: Right. They do take up a lot of time – training, care of horses, and so on. It's very time-consuming. Aside from Canada, did your family travel much?

ANDREW: We did. What's interesting is that my very first memory in my life, not quite as a toddler but as a three-year-old, was when Mom and Dad had driven us down to Acapulco, Mexico. This was when Acapulco was kind of like Cancun is today. Acapulco was where the "jetsetters" used to go. Gloria Gaynor and others, for example, had places down there. Believe it or not, I remember being down there as a three-year-old! We

stayed at a well-known hotel called Las Brisas. A lot of the beach cabanas had their own little pools. I remember jumping into our pool, into my father's arms and my older brother Howard's arms. That's my first memory. I didn't associate it with Mexico, but later on, I did. On that trip, we visited the famous Anthropological Museum in Mexico City, and apparently, I got into trouble when playing with my little string-driven helicopter toy and it flew all over the place there. I vaguely remember being yelled at in more than one language.

When I did my first tour in the Foreign Service, which I'm telegraphing forward here a little bit, my parents came to visit me in Mexico City and on one trip we actually stayed at Las Brisas hotel and reminisced about the 1970 visit over 30 years later. No, I did not try to jump into my parents' arms in the early 2000s!

I don't remember traveling anywhere else when I was younger, but another event that got me interested in all things international was a summer trip my brother took after he graduated high school in '75. He went on an AFS, American Field Service, exchange to South Africa. He did that for six weeks, came back, and was so excited about it and talked about it all the time. A year later, he ended up moving there to attend veterinary school, to the disappointment of my parents, because they naturally wanted him around and he had been going to veterinary school at UC Davis. He did end up becoming a veterinarian. He went to veterinary school in Pretoria. Then, he married a girl from what was Rhodesia back then. It became Zimbabwe by the time he married her, but she was a descendant of the Dutch settlers – the Boers and the Afrikaners. Then, he ended up living in Zimbabwe until the mid- '90s.

My brother's international connection made a significant impact on my life. I never got to visit him, unfortunately as Mom and Dad never took me there. They were somewhat concerned for my safety as a child. The first time they went in the late '70s, the civil war was going on in Rhodesia, and it was a bit dangerous to be on the roads, so that was probably a smart decision on their part.

To sum up, I don't recall with any detail going any place other than Canada. We would go to Canada for family reunions every few years. I remember there was a big one in '73 and a big one in '83. I still stay in touch with my Canadian cousins today, and we do reunions up there every few years. We did go to Hawaii, but that is still in the U.S., so it doesn't count. It wasn't until I was in the Army that I really left the country.

Q: Alright. So, you're in high school. Lots of sports. Are there other recollections from high school that stand out in your mind as important or consequential?

ANDREW: Related to my interest in horses, my mom and I attended (as spectators) some of the Three Day Eventing at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. The fellow who won the individual gold medal for Three Day Eventing was Mark Todd from New Zealand. He rode his horse named Charisma and he won an individual gold medal. I got an opportunity to meet him, hold his gold medal, and that kept me motivated to stay in the horse world for another five years.

One of the things I did in terms of some early employment during my high school time frame was also in the horse world. I was a stable manager, which meant that I shoveled a lot of horse manure. It is called "mucking out." I took care of about 20 head of horses at a horse farm owned by a gentleman named Steve White. I didn't exercise all of them, but I exercised many of them, cleaned out their stalls, and made sure they were all okay. That took a lot of time.

I had quite a few "horse friends" and one of them was a girl a bit older than me whose name is Melinda Goslin. Her father, Dennis Goslin, and I actually became really good friends. (I never dated Melinda, we were just very good friends and had a "brother/sister" type of relationship.) At any rate, Dennis got me into a little bit of part-time construction work. I did some roofing and ditch digging in the summers as well as some other manual labor activities. It was enough to make me think, "Maybe I don't want to do this all of my life," but I enjoyed the experience. I'm not a good handyman today, but I can handle some typical home repair problems and it is thanks to those experiences with Dennis that I'm able to do it today. Sometimes I felt like I was an apprentice to Dennis' master work. He also remodeled our home that we had in Chico. To sum up, I learned quite a bit from him, from sheet-rocking to roofing to tiling and a little bit of everything in-between.

Q: Interesting. You know, in high school, you get woodshop or metal shop, maybe, for a small while, but that is really a serious introduction to what it really takes to make a house livable.

ANDREW: Yeah. It was interesting. I didn't know what insulation was, and Dennis trained me how to put insulation in the walls. I didn't do the blow insulation that gets blown into an attic, it was more like tacking insulating into a room's walls and ceilings. When you do that properly, it makes a substantial difference in terms of keeping a room cool in summer or warm in winter. There was also a lot of landscaping as a kid. Like many kids do, I mowed yards, trimmed bushes, doing little fix-up things here and there. I did all of that. I would make the piddly two dollars that people would pay me for a job, but back then, two bucks went a little further.

Q: Yeah, sure. Aside from sport – and I can't imagine you'd have time for anything else – did you do Boy Scouts or any of the other community organizations that high school kids might typically become involved with?

ANDREW: I did participate in the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) for some time in high school. I did a little bit of circuit board design and making (I was terrible at it), but the main event I did with VICA was prepared and extemporaneous speaking at various competitions. The big VICA competition was in Sacramento; I did okay, but not too spectacular at it.

I was a hunter at a young age, mainly pheasant and fowl/duck. I was fairly proficient at using rifles and shotguns and firearms in general. I haven't gotten into that more in my adult life, but as a child, growing up in the country, you kind of had to know how to hunt.

I also did skeet shooting and trap shooting a bit. I was good at that. I never did competitions or anything as it was more about hunting when hunting season came around. I enjoyed shooting and hunting with my childhood and high school pals.

Q: Were there animal dangers? Were there cougars, bears? Did you have to worry about that?

ANDREW: Not where I was at. The Chico area is mainly located in the valley, but we're right next to the foothills that go into the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Just to give you a little perspective, you might recall in November 2018 the so-called Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise. Paradise is only 10 miles from Chico, and it's up the ridge into the foothills and very heavily forested. We get bear and cougar in there, which means there are occasionally cougars (also known as puma or mountain lions) that come into Chico, but it's relatively rare.

Where I grew up until age 14 on Mills Orchard, there really weren't any large animals except occasional deer. However, we did have rattlesnakes out there, so we had to be a little bit careful of them, especially with the horses. Other than that, it was just regular small game: rabbits, hares, squirrels, things like that. But there were no large predators, usually. Occasionally we would hear, "Oh, they found a mountain lion in downtown Chico," once every 10 years. It was a rare occasion. So, I never ran into that. I think due to terrible fires over the past few years, there may be more predators like mountain lions coming into Chico a bit more often.

Now, when I would go hiking and camping in the various mountain ranges in northern California, such as the Cascades or Trinity Alps or Sierra Nevada, I would run into bear now and again as a youngster. Generally, though, they're as afraid of us as we are of them. Usually, they'll turn the other way as well. When they don't turn away is when you really have to be cautious of course. I recall one time on a camping trip in June 1985 when I ran into a bear and there was still a lot of snow around. I remember hiking up this small mountain, and right up at the top, there was a black bear right there. I was within 10-15 feet of him. It was right there. I was like, "Woah!" and I think he did the same thing, so I turned around and ran and actually "skied" down the snow in my snows successfully. That's probably the worst thing to do, right, to run? But he turned around and ran the other way, too.

Q: Oh, good. Alright. So, now, you're approaching the end of high school. A couple of things are going on. You're thinking about college, maybe thinking about professions. How does that go?

ANDREW: Yes, I was in awe of my father. As you know, he had retired from the Navy as a naval aviator, but I didn't tell you about what he did after he retired from the Navy.

Q: I forgot about that. Go ahead.

ANDREW: He still flew. He got his private pilot's license, and he flew actively until about 10 years before he died. As I mentioned earlier, he died on December 28, 2018, at the age of 89. He flew for a long time, and he used to take me up in small airplanes (like Cessnas or Pipers) and let me fly a little bit and do takeoffs. It was great father-son type of stuff.

Thus, I got interested in flying. My problem was that when I was about a sophomore in high school, my eyesight really deteriorated. Myopia, shortsightedness, came into effect for me. So, I was never going to have the eyesight to be a pilot in the Navy. I wanted to be a Naval aviator like my dad, but was not going to be able to do that unfortunately. However, the idea of service had always been there, military or national service, so I started thinking about going into the Army, or maybe the Marines, something like that. As I was moving along in high school, I would talk to my high school counselor, my dad, my mom, and my friends. Some of my friends enlisted in the Army right after high school, and I almost did that with them, but Mom said, "Well, why don't you go to university, and if you want, you can go through ROTC?" They had it at my local university at the time.

It was in high school, then, that I started thinking seriously about going into the service. I would say it was really not until the last year of high school, which I graduated in 1985, that I thought, "Well, I'll go to university and try to do the Army ROTC thing." I hadn't really decided up to that point. I was so focused on horses and football and all of that that I hadn't really thought about what I might do when I grow up. In some respects, I still don't know what I'm gonna do! I would say it was probably when I graduated in '85 and started university that fall when I decided to join Army ROTC, but I had only thought about it my last year in high school.

Q: Okay. What went into your decision to go to Chico?

ANDREW: My high school GPA (grade point average) was not terrible, but it wasn't wonderful. I had a 3.2, which was kind of respectable, but not even a 3.5, right? My parents and I thought I might go to my local community college, which was called Butte College. By the way, Aaron Rodgers, the current quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, played football at Butte College. We'll come back to Aaron. Mom, by the way, ended up teaching there at Butte College later in her life. Back to me, my grades were good enough to get into my local, hometown university of California State University, Chico. We just call it Chico State, but it's part of the CSU system.

To be honest, the only other school I had thought about was the one I'm teaching at now, OU (University of Oklahoma). My mom and dad were here for three years, and I was born at the end of Dad's tour here. I grew up admiring the OU Sooners because of Mom and Dad's time here. They had attended every home game when they lived here. They loved it here; Mom and Dad had an active social life here and hobnobbed a little bit with the folks here. I think it is fair to say that I was indoctrinated from a young age to love OU. I thought about it, but I didn't really have the grades to get accepted. When I applied to Chico State, they accepted me there.

Also, it worked out for a number of reasons. I was able to live at home. I was a hometown boy, so I did not have to move into the university dorms like many people do. If you're from the hometown of the university that you attend, they usually don't make you move into the dorms. I was also able to continue my horse eventing career throughout college. That was another major factor in my decision to stay there. Mom and Dad supported me with that. Like a lot of kids, I owe almost everything to my parents. They supported me through high school and university. Those were the main factors that went into staying in my hometown.

Q: Was going to university a big change? In other words, the challenge of going to high school is one thing, but when you get to college, a lot of new things happen all at once – discipline, timing, research, all these other things that might have been relatively light in high school suddenly all come together when you start a university career.

ANDREW: I agree with that. The only "non-challenge" was the commute as my high school was literally across the street from my university. I would ride my bike and go across the street instead of going to my high school. Thus, there was no culture shock, in that sense. I had grown up around the university, so it was not unusual for me to be around college students.

It was different, though. The mentality, of course, is different. The instructors only care about you as much as you care about the topic. That was a lesson to learn – they didn't care if you passed or not. That was up to you. I actually did not do that well in university my first year. I think the freedom of coming and going to classes was a bit much for me to handle at first. There was also the fact that I was going to university and felt like I was growing up…there was probably a little bit of underage drinking as well. Bad Rob.

After that first year, though, I cleaned up my act a little bit, my GPA started going up, and I was a good student, after that. University was substantially different. I was meeting people from different backgrounds and more exposure to students from various parts of California and the U.S. as well as international students. I ended up becoming a political science major. I was going to be an aeronautical engineer but boy, I tanked on calculus and physics. So, I said, "Let's see if I can pick a topic that I can pass."

Because I had this idyllic childhood and uprising on a ranch, I was very protected, in a sense. It was a protective bubble in many ways. The university exposed me to many different aspects of American society that began to get me ready for the world.

One of the most influential and favorite classes that I took was on the sociology of human sexuality. It was quite an interesting class. I remember that probably my favorite roleplay was when we had to switch genders in our class. Men had to pretend to be women, and the women had to pretend to be men. It really opened my eyes up to how different people see the world differently and to gender stereotypes. That was quite a new experience for me. I was, after all, raised to be the all-American red-blooded male in a male-dominated

society. It really opened my eyes up that, wow, it all depends on your perspective of how you view the world.

Q: Yeah. A question I generally ask everyone, but it doesn't seem to apply to you, is, in university, were you in any way exposed to the counterculture, or had that sort of passed by?

ANDREW: That had kind of passed by, by then. I was in university from '85 to '89, so this was definitely the Reagan era. There were military buildups, SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative), Star Wars, Ollie North, that type of thing. I was generally aware of the counterculture movement, but more so during elementary school in the '70s. My mom would dress me occasionally in bell bottom pants back then. You remember all the styles from the '70s. Mom had wild hair, and she'd use that leather thing with the poker to put it up in the back. I don't think women do that anymore nowadays. That was more in the '70s. My brother was exposed to counterculture more than I was. He was born in '58, so he definitely remembers the latter part of the '60s and early '70s better than I did. To summarize, I wasn't really exposed to counterculture. The only culture I was exposed to was all the long-haired rock bands. I loved them all!

Q: Okay, that's fine. So, the sociology class stands out in your mind. You started university immediately with ROTC?

ANDREW: I did. I ended up getting a three-year scholarship, beginning in my sophomore year in 1986. My first year, Mom and Dad paid for my university, but back then, it was not too expensive, even inflation adjusted. It was a state public university, and it never put them in debt or anything like that. It was a four-year ROTC program, and I started that fall of 1985 as a first-year cadet not knowing anything.

Q: Okay, so the experience of ROTC… Obviously, you have military in the family. What were the things that surprised you or perhaps made you wonder, "Did I make the right decision?"

ANDREW: It's funny you should ask that. The first time I had to run a PT test, a physical fitness test, I had to run two miles. I was like, "I don't really like this running stuff." I had played football in high school, and I was still in good shape from football and other sports, and we ran and exercised a lot, of course. We would run sprints, jog long distances. I was in great shape, but I was not a huge fan of running. I did not realize, when I signed up for ROTC, how much emphasis the Army would put on running and physical fitness. I was interested in going to shoot at stuff and doing other "Army-like" things that I thought were more fun than doing pushups and sit-ups and running around.

I don't think I ever regretted it as it was an education. I was surprised at how seriously they took being in top physical shape. However, I didn't really like the Army PT training in the beginning. However, the dislike was never enough for me to walk away from the Army, so I had to learn to like it a little bit. And I did; it was fine. Eventually, I got into it. But I think that the thing in ROTC that I had the most fun with in terms of acquiring

skills was map-reading with topographical maps and orientation. That was the most fun and one of the skills that I enjoyed the most from my early Army training.

Q: Right. That was my next question: Thinking back on the ROTC training, were the skills you learned already beginning to be the ones that would be helpful throughout your career, both in the military and beyond?

ANDREW: For sure. There's a lot of emphasis in ROTC on skills. They want you to train all the time, especially if you're going to be an officer. One of those skills is leadership training, which definitely helped me throughout my career, whether in the Army or later on in the Foreign Service. One of the first Army manuals they give you is on leadership, and the first story you read in there is about Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Chamberlain and the Battle of Little Round Top at Gettysburg during the American Civil War. That's the first thing you read in that leadership manual, and of course, that stuck with me throughout my entire life. Every year, I read the book called *The Killer Angels,* which is a historical novel (based on true events) version of the Battle of Gettysburg. I don't know if you've read it.

Q: I haven't read it, but one of the Civil War documentaries was based on it.

ANDREW: Yes, there have been several documentaries made about Gettysburg as well as a movie version of *The Killer Angels* book called *Gettysburg*. Martin Sheen starred in it in the role of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The movie came out in the mid- '90s. It's a historical novel, so everything was true in there, but they livened it up. That was a fascination of mine, to study leadership in history – mainly U.S. military history, but others, as well. That was one of those skills, I think, that ROTC definitely made me appreciate. I was teaching leadership, learning leadership, being a good follower, as well. As I said, there were also practical stills, of course. All of the Army skills you're supposed to learn. But of all the ones that I learned from them, the one that I enjoyed the most and keep with me to this day is orienteering and land navigation. I admit that in today's day and age, I like having a GPS (Global Positioning System), but I also like being able to find things without it. I think I was always rather good at navigation.

I'm thinking about my university years, seeing if there was something I missed there. Oh, one of the things while I was in ROTC at Chico State was to go airborne school as a cadet. That is actually quite risky as the chances of getting hurt are not that low. Airborne school is also known as jump school, which takes place at Fort Benning, Georgia. I learned how to do static line parachuting. I was a contracted cadet by then, which meant that if I got hurt, they'd still have to take care of me, but I might not be able to get commissioned. It is a school that you can get hurt at – you can twist your ankle, break your leg, break your arm, potentially lose your life if you chute does not open properly, etc. But I successfully completed it, more or less injury free, in August 1987, when I was in the middle of my university education.

Q: Wow. Okay. That takes nerve.

ANDREW: Or just being a dummy. There are nicknames for people who become paratroopers. One of my favorite nicknames is "wind dummies," but there are all sorts of other names for those going to paratrooper school. Obviously, I have a lot of respect for anyone who goes to airborne school. I should note that that's all the airborne that I did, just in jump school. What they call a "five jump chump" which means that I only did the qualifying five jumps from aircraft to get my Airborne Wings. We can talk about the military stuff later, but I enjoyed doing it and being exposed to Fort Benning. There were international students there, and that was another intersection that I had early on with wanting to learn more about the countries that those students had come from.

Another very seminal event during university was doing the Model UN (United Nations) class. That got me really interested in international relations/affairs. It certainly helped out later on for the Foreign Service. For our Model UN trip, which took place during the semester that I graduated in spring of '89, we went to New York City for 10 days and we actually did the big national Model UN event there. I remember we stayed at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, right above Grand Central Station, and we were able to go to the UN. I have a picture somewhere where I'm at the big podium at the UN and I'm waving my arms like some leaders do when they address the UN General Assembly, and someone took a picture of me doing that. Of course, there's no one in the chamber other than Model UN students. I think I was pretending to be Arafat or a president or something like that, chewing out the world, like Khrushchev or something. I loved Model UN. That was a great exposure to the international scene.

Q: Okay. So, now you're approaching the end of college. What happens with ROTC as you approach the end of college? You're going to be commissioned, but there's also the question of what specialty or what area of the Army you're going to be commissioned in.

ANDREW: In our junior summer – and it's generally, I think, still applicable today – and in my case that was the summer of '88, the year before I graduated, I went to the U.S. Army ROTC Advanced Camp at Fort Lewis, Washington. It's a six-week camp. You're in the barracks and doing lots of field exercises. This is the advanced training that we get, and it's the last big training we get before we get commissioned a year later. I should mention that there are two things that stand out to me that I think are very appropriate.

First, as part of our training, I led a night reconnaissance patrol to set up an attack on an "enemy" position, and I actually got recognized for how well I did that night recon patrol. I turned 21 in 1988, and my birthday happened to take place while I was in a field exercise at Fort Lewis. I liked to tell people my story about turning 21. Whereas your typical friends and acquaintances would say to you, "Oh, I went to the bar and legally drank for the first time and did this and that shot, etc.," I would tell them, "Well, on my 21st birthday, I was carrying an M60 machine gun, and I was set up next to this big anthill at Fort Lewis getting bitten by ants, waiting in an ambush position as part of my Army training." I didn't exactly enjoy my 21st birthday so much, but I wanted to mention those two things.

Back to your question. The next year, your senior year, you start thinking about what particular branch you're going to enter. For example, in the combat arms branches of the Army, there's infantry, armor, aviation, artillery, etc. In ROTC, they kind of encourage everyone to want to become infantry officers. We always need lots of infantry, right? That's the so-called "Queen of Battle," where you're actually occupying land and you're doing intense ground fighting.

I said, "Okay, I want to do infantry," and I was recommended to go infantry, but I was assessed into field artillery. So, I was commissioned as a field artillery officer. I know this is a jump to the next profession, but the home of field artillery in the Army is Fort Sill, Oklahoma, only about an hour and a half from where I'm living right now. As a matter of fact, if I shift my camera a little bit, you can see over my shoulder that those are crossed cannons from a unit that I commanded at Fort Hood, Texas, which was later on in my career. But that's what I became, a field artillery officer in the U.S. Army.

Q: The last question I have for the college experience was, you guys are watching the closing years of the Reagan administration as Gorbachev takes over. Is there any thinking, either in ROTC or in the university, about what's going to be happening to the world as you enter the Army?

ANDREW: That's a really good question, because I – I think along with everyone else – did not anticipate the fall of the Soviet Union or the end of the Cold War. So, my year group, '89… That's what they call it in the Army, the year group that you get commissioned in. Our year group, '89, was the end of the Reagan buildup and was the biggest class of lieutenants that was commissioned in the Army at that time. We thought that we needed to keep pumping people into the military. Afterall, we had to face the Russians down in Europe! Most U.S. Army troops back then went to Germany, and I had a feeling that due to the world situation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, I would be assigned there as well for my first unit. That is what happened.

Once you've received your commission, you are assigned to the "Officer Basic Course" or OBC of the branch that you were selected to go to. In my case, I went to the Field Artillery OBC at Fort Sill, Oklahoma for five months from June to November 1989. I knew that I would go to Germany in late November or early December of '89. Of course, I had no idea what would be happening then. I was thinking, "Oh, I'm going to go to Germany. I'm going to be on the front lines of the Cold War." I grew up being very aware of the Cold War. You probably remember thinking about how the Russians are out there, and what's wrong with them, and why do they want to kill us? Nuclear war felt somewhat inevitable earlier in the late 70s and to at least the mid-80s. I was watching movies like *Wargames* or the TV movie *The Day After* on TV and all that kind of stuff. I definitely had a little bit of that Cold War mentality. We had to be tough. So, that was what was going through my mind at that time.

I was paying attention to the news, and I knew that Gorbachev was a new kind of leader. He was an engaging and younger leader and so very different from the traditional Soviet leaders that we had dealt with previously. By the time I was in the U.S. Army, George

H.W. Bush had become president, and he had taken office in my last semester as a senior in university.

For a quick backstory, my mom, back here in Oklahoma when I was born, had been what they called a Bush Belle. Mom was a lifelong conservative Republican, and she had campaigned for George H.W. Bush when he ran for both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives back in the '60s. She was a big fan of George H.W. Bush. When he became president, Mom was quite happy, of course. For me, it was fine. It was cool that my mom was happy about it, and we all kind of liked him. I grew up in a conservative family, so it seemed like a personality that we would favor and follow. The question that ultimately came about was what would happen with Bush's political career? So, he finally took office as President of the United States in January 1989 after all of his time as vice president and CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) director before that. As Mom had met him a long time ago, we were big fans and happy for him. It made it especially great as he would be the first president that I would serve under as a Soldier.

Q: Absolutely. So, you graduate, and you go to Germany.

ANDREW: Yes. I graduated and was commissioned in May of '89. Just four short weeks later, I would have to report to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for training. In those four weeks, I had to sell my horse and do all the last minute things to get ready to move and travel to start a new life away from mom and dad. It was a hard thing to do to sell my horse and leave that world, but I knew I was going to Germany and it would have been difficult to stay with the horses. I reported to Fort Sill, OK in mid-June and started the Field Artillery OBC. They have a different name for it nowadays, but this training was like, "Okay, you've become an officer, but now we need to train you on your chosen specialty." There was more intensive land navigation, training on the mathematics and physics of artillery fire, many field exercises, training on specialized computer systems, live artillery shooting, etc. The training was designed so that you would become either a platoon leader, a fire support officer, or a fire direction officer. These were the main types of initial second lieutenant jobs for young field artillery officers.

I did all of that training and finished in early November of '89, right about the time that the Berlin Wall fell in Germany. I took some leave and then arrived in Germany on December 4th, 1989, less than a month after the wall had fallen. Within three days, I was out on the border between East and West Germany doing some familiarization training and learning how to patrol the border. It was winter and I didn't have good snow boots yet, and found myself up to my waist in snow. I was freezing because I was not personally well-prepared yet to live and operate in a very cold climate (remember, I came from a temperate to hot climate in California). Mainly it was because I was still young and dumb and not thinking things through yet. As they say, youth is definitely wasted on the young!

I could hardly believe that I was now in Germany, the first real move away from home and now I was a young Army officer as well. It was a big change for me personally. I

enjoyed the challenge, but was still nervous about being in a foreign country and away from home.

Getting back to the actual assignment of being in Germany and preparing for patrolling the border, I had a lot to learn. Even though the Berlin Wall had fallen, and many countries were shedding communism, we still did not know what the Soviet Union was going to do yet. We did not know that they were going to be pulling their troops out of East Germany a few years later, and we thought that there was still a possibility that there could be a repeat of Hungary from ’56 or Czechoslovakia from ’68 or some other interventions that they’d done in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Thankfully, they didn’t, and in early 1990 I ended up being one of the last Americans to patrol the old East-West German and Czechoslovakian border before it finally really opened up.

I recall doing a joint patrol with some of my West German comrades in March 1990, and while we were not crossing the border, we were close to it. I could see the East Germans on the other side. They had the tallest black German Shepherds that I’d ever seen in my life. I was like, “Oh, Lord, please don’t let any of them loose to come and bite me.” Even though things were loosening up on the border, we were still cautious at that point.

Here is a little bit of a war story during one of my patrols. One of the West German officers I was with on a particular patrol in mid-March 1990 said to me, in perfect English, “Lieutenant?”

I said, “Yeah?”

He said, “I’m going to cross the border.”

I said, “You’re not supposed to do that, man.”

He said, “You may not realize it, but we’re going to become one country here before you know it. We know what’s going to happen. I’m going to go and have a cigarette with my East German colleague over there.”

I said, “You know I’ve got to report this in.”

He said, “Please don’t.” I made a decision not to report it, at least not yet! My eyes were wide, and I did a radio check to ensure that I had good communications with our base, just in case something happened. So, he went over there and, sure enough, they shared a smoke, and had a good laugh, slapping each other on the back, and then the West German officer came back over. Of course, I was sweating bullets the whole time, thinking I should be reporting this. What if the East German kills him and shoots at me? A year or two before, a U.S. Army major had been killed on the border or somewhere in East Germany. I don’t know if it was in Berlin or elsewhere, but it was serious, right up until then. It was a huge deal. Thankfully, nothing happened, and it worked out well.

Q: Were you aware that at the same time you're doing your watch, CFE (Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe) was opening, and the reductions in artillery that you have been trained to use are going to be going on pretty quickly?

ANDREW: Yeah. It's interesting that you mention that. I was vaguely aware of the treaty in a general sense. Afterall, I was a young officer, 22 or 23 years old, and wasn't too schooled yet on all arms control treaties yet. This was also before I went to the First Gulf War, which came in another year, deploying in late '90 and the war starting in early '91. But I was vaguely aware CFE existed. The unit I was in was First Squadron, Second Armored Cavalry Regiment. This was the border patrol unit that I was a part of when describing the actions above along the border. The only thing I remember about CFE was that we had to let the Soviets come and count our tanks on our base at some point.

I don't remember escorting them around, but I knew that they were going to be on base, and they were going to be coming and counting our tanks. I think we had one or two extra tanks that we were not supposed to have according to CFE, but apparently there was a good reason why we did; one was a new tank and the other needed to go. I guess it wasn't a violation, but we were worried about it because we were like, "Oh, we might be in violation of CFE," for that particular time period. I want to say that that was probably in that summer/fall of '90.

I definitely remember it two years later in '92, right before I departed Germany for an assignment back in the U.S. The Russians came in again, but we had turned in our tanks, so we said, "You're welcome to count what we don't have in our motor pool."

They were like, "Oh, you don't have any?"

"Well, we got rid of them. They're going into storage, back to the States." I think we shipped some to Saudi Arabia in case Saddam Hussein decided to attack again. I don't remember for sure. But we didn't have them in Germany anymore.

Q: Interesting. Okay. Now, the question becomes, is this a good place to break? You're in your first tour, and the more historic, the more active duty in a real fire area is coming. So, I'm wondering if we might break here and then pick up again with that at the next session.

ANDREW: I think so. There are one or two things I wanted to mention that I think might be interesting for you and the memoirs, especially when talking about some world events that affected me and that I was aware of. I'm going to go back a little bit in history – I hope you don't mind that. One of the first things I remember as a young boy was the last moon landing. I did not see the first moon landing in July of 1969, but I saw the last one that took place in December of '72, which was Apollo 17. I remember seeing that on our old black and white TV set. That memory helped expose me to the idea that there was more than just this Earth. That there was also this white blob up in the sky that was somehow important to us. I wanted to mention that.

There were some important international events going on that I recall happening in my childhood that affected me as well. Though I don't remember the Arab-Israeli War of '73 – the Yom Kippur War, I think it's called – I do remember the Camp David Accords with Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat meeting.

I remember the Iran hostage crisis quite well, wondering what was wrong with these Iranians and what was going on. But what really hit me in my early teenage years was the assassination of Sadat in 1981. I had started to look up to him a little bit… I won't say it was as strong as an idol, but I remember that he made peace with Israel. I think he was highly respected by many people. The Muslim Brotherhood murdered him if I recall correctly. I remember actually tearing up when I heard about his assassination. I said, "I need to go to Egypt one day. I need to go to that country." And I have, since then. That really stuck with me for all my life as a seminal event in focusing on international relations. That was also the same year that Reagan got shot and survived.

Of course, I remember the Russians! We boycotted the 1980 Olympics, and I remember them boycotting the '84 Olympics in LA. I remember Iran Contra and Ollie North getting up in front of the Senate and testifying. The last thing I want to mention was the 1987 INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Agreement with Reagan and Gorbachev. I remember it clearly. That's when I started my, "Hey, maybe this guy Gorbachev is not all that bad," opinion. I was thinking about what a momentous occasion it was, though I probably did not understand all of the deeper implications of it. I was 20 years old when INF happened. Even for a young, dumb 20-year-old, I was thinking that this was a really big deal, and I got some motivation. I wanted to be a part of that.

I have had a lifelong fascination with the Russians. In the seventh grade, I was writing a report on the Soviet Union, and I wrote to the Soviet consulate in San Francisco asking if they could send me information about their country. They sent me a big packet of propaganda, which I still have to this day.

Q: That's amazing.

ANDREW: So, this is a good place to stop, Mark. Sorry to keep going.

Q: No, these are the consequential memories of what began to get you interested in international relations and the world outside of your town.

ANDREW: Yeah. Again, thanks to my parents and to my brother, who was in Africa… Mom and Dad would go there, and they would go up to Canada… Mom and Dad loved to travel, and they did a lot before I was born and from when I remember. So, it was really thanks to my family that I got into that mentality. Otherwise, I might have never left the county. Who knows?

Q: Right, exactly. It's always hard to say. Alright, so we'll call it here. I'm just going to pause the recording.

ANDREW: I think for this next part I'll primarily talk about my time from when I got commissioned in the U.S. Army. I was an Army ROTC cadet throughout university, and I graduated in May of 1989 as a second lieutenant in field artillery. That's the branch that I was assessed into in the Army. I did my officer basic course – it's not like regular Army basic training; it's more like Army training for lieutenants. Once you get your commission, they do about four or five months of training and they trained me to be a field artillery officer. I did that at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

I should also mention that when I was commissioned, when I raised my hand and recited my oath, my dad was actually the one who did it. You can have any commissioned or former commissioned officer do that. He dressed up in his Navy uniform, which he easily still fit, even though he had retired nearly 20 years before, and commissioned me. That was kind of a special father-son moment, and then both of my parents pinned on my new rank. That was back in Chico, California when I graduated from California State University, Chico with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

Then I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for my officer basic course (OBC) training and my field artillery and cannon battery officer course (FACBOC). There are lots of long words in the military. What the heck do they all mean? I think I mentioned earlier that year, just before I got commissioned, that I went to a Model UN conference.

Q: Yes.

ANDREW: Good, I did mention that. I went to a big Model UN conference in New York City. That was pretty neat and continued my attraction towards all things international. Also, as I mentioned, I left the horse world upon graduation from university and my entrance to the Army. I sold my horse. It was a big change wrapping up that chapter of my life and going to the next one, which was the Army. I arrived in Germany in early December of 1989, a little less than a month after the wall fell in Berlin.

I have a short story on how I was picked up after my initial arrival into Germany, and I'll share that with you. This is an embarrassing story. It's a lesson learned type of story. I didn't know anything about Germany other than what I'd learned from history books. I also didn't speak any German. That's kind of stupid to do; my first assignment was going to Germany, and I didn't know any German. I knew only one phrase I think, "A beer please," or something similar to that.

Here goes the story. Another lieutenant who was already in the unit that I was about to join picked me up in his car at the location where I was processed, Nuremberg, after having first arrived in Frankfurt. It was about 7 or 8 p.m. at night and very dark, being winter. He drove me about an hour and a half to get to my unit, which was in a small town called Bindlach, close to a more famous town called Bayreuth. We were driving north on the autobahn. I'd heard of the autobahn; it was famous for not having speed limits, so we were going very quickly. But I kept seeing this sign that said "Ausfahrt" as we were driving for about an hour or two to get to where we were going. I couldn't figure

it out. I thought that it was the name of a city in Germany, but had never heard of it. I thought I knew the major German cities – Berlin, Nuremberg, Munich, whatever.

So, I turned to my buddy – his name is Jack Schwetje, by the way – who had picked me up. At that point, he was brand new to me, but quickly thereafter became one of my Army buddies. I said, "Hey, Jack, I've never heard of this city called Ausfahrt, what is that city?"

He looks at me and he says, "You're joking, right?"

I said, "No, I have no idea what that means."

He goes, "You're an idiot. That means 'exit.'" So, from that point on, I made it a point that whenever I was going to go to a country, I would learn some basic words and phrases, or at least the word for "exit" from the highway. I thought I would share that story with you because that was another learning experience that prompted me to get my stuff together before I go overseas. That's a totally true story.

The next day I reported in to my first unit. I was in Howitzer Battery, First Squadron, Second Armored Cavalry Regiment. (Or HWB, 1/2 ACR). As I mentioned, it was located near the town of Bayreuth, Germany. Some people mispronounce it as Beirut. It's not Beirut; it's Bayreuth. It is famous because it is the hometown of the famous German composer, Richard Wagner. He's probably the most famous son of that town. He is probably most well-known for his work "Ride of the Valkyries."

My unit leadership got me out into the field very quickly. In early 1990, I did one of the last joint patrols with the West Germans on the old border. The borders had loosened up by then, but the Russians were still in East Germany, and we weren't sure what was going to happen. It wasn't too bad, though. I think I told you a little story last time about how my West German colleague crossed over? Yeah? I don't need to repeat that story.

We were in the field a lot. My unit, 1/2 ACR, was famous for being in the field all the time, either training to do the border mission or to go to war against the Soviets if they decided to invade West Germany. There's a well-known gunnery range or exercise area called Grafenwoehr where we did a lot of our field and live-fire training. Any U.S. Army Soldier who has served in Germany has either trained at Grafenwoehr or at least heard of it. It was actually an old Nazi training area; we took it over after World War II. There were also various other training areas, such as Hohenfels, which was not a live fire range but a "force on force" training area where we wore "laser tag" type gear and fought against live human beings. No real casualties, of course, but it was a realistic approximation of combat without actually being in combat.

During my time in Germany, I lived in a one-bedroom apartment in a small town called Weidenberg, about 10 miles from our base in Bindlach. My address there was Obermarkstrasse 5. It was a typically beautiful, small German town set amongst picturesque mountains and streams. This was northern Bavaria and quite a lovely area.

The next major item of interest that affected me and my unit is when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August of 1990. Those of us in Germany didn't think it would affect us. They deployed some units that were located in the U.S. to protect Saudi Arabia. As late as early November 1990, our VII Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Fred Franks, told us, "I've just received word that there's no way we're going to the desert." The very next day, we got orders to go! Our three-star general, Franks, didn't even know the day before. The way he found out – no kidding – was on TV when George H.W. Bush said, "We're deploying these units," and one of the ones that he named off was ours. That was the first word we got – on TV.

Q: Wow.

ANDREW: After an intense month of preparing to deploy, which included shipping our armored vehicles and tanks by sea, we flew to Saudi Arabia. I'll never forget the day we flew; it was on December 7th, 1990. Of course, December 7th is an "infamous" day in history when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in 1941. With that date, it already felt a bit ominous, but then it got even more interesting because we flew on a contracted plane that belonged to…you guessed it…Hawaiian Airlines. I said to myself, "You've got to be kidding me. Is this a bad omen or what? What's going to happen to us?" After a refueling stop in Rome, we arrived in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. A few weeks later, just before Christmas, we reunited with our tanks and other armored vehicles and supplies at the Port of Jubail.

We did conduct desert training after our arrival, as we were better suited for combat in Europe. This included getting desert color uniforms and painting our tanks and armored vehicles a desert tan to cover up the green camouflage patterns as they would be "less useful" in a desert environment. We did manage to find some time to do recreation now and again, but we mainly stayed focused on the upcoming mission. On Christmas Day, since we didn't get too many care packages yet, my Soldiers and I decided to give each other presents. In this case, we shaved all of the hair on our head and faces, even our eyebrows! Later on, as our hair grew in, we also grew mustaches.

Here are a few things about the main combat operations that we conducted against the Iraqi Army. By mid-January – I think it was January 17th – Operation Desert Storm began. Desert Shield had been the name of the operation to defend Saudi Arabia, and Desert Storm was the offensive operation to eject the Iraqis out of Kuwait. It began with an air operation that lasted for roughly five weeks, and then a ground operation, famously, of 100 hours or just over 4 days. I was in the ground forces, of course, and on February 24th we in the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment (2nd ACR) crossed the Saudi-Iraqi border well to the west of Kuwait. The basic battle plan is that the 2nd ACR, as the lead forces for the Army's VII Corps, would cross into Iraq well to the west of Kuwait to catch Iraqi Republican Guard units that were waiting to strike Allied units as we went into Kuwait. To explain it simply, our plan was to strike them before they struck us and without them knowing our plans. We were quite a way west. Some people called

it the Hail Mary pass. A lot of us went way to the west and north into Iraq and then turned east to come behind Iraqi units that were focused east on Kuwait.

It was on February 26th that we engaged in major armored combat with the Tawakalna Division of the Iraqi Republican Guard unit. They were equipped with T-72 tanks and BMP-2 armored fighting vehicles. They were fairly capable, but still not really a match – it wasn't quite top of the line Russian equipment – for us and what we were equipped with, as well as our training. We also faced elements of the Iraqi 12th Armored Division. They were equipped with older equipment, T-54/5 tanks and BMP-1s.

It was a rout and over in just a few hours. The particular battle that I was a part of was called the Battle of the 73 Easting. There were no mountains or cities. It was just a grid reference as it was relatively flat terrain with few rolling sand dunes. What's kind of interesting are two things from this particular battle. One particular Army officer made a name for himself during this battle, and that was H.R. McMaster. You might have heard of this fellow. He was a captain at that time, and later on, he became a three-star general and national security advisor for Donald Trump. He also went back to Iraq in the second war. But this Battle of the 73 Easting is really known as "his" battle, in a way. He did very well, he and his cavalry troop were just to the north of where I was at, but it was the same general battle. This was the largest tank battle since the Battle of Kursk in World War II in terms of number of tanks and armored vehicles on a battlefield.

For me, it was four days of very intense combat, but it was over so quickly. I've never really felt like I suffered, so to speak, from that. I think that soldiers who go through much longer terms of combat, like Vietnam, the Second Iraq War, or Afghanistan, where you're there for a long time and you're fighting an insurgency, that's a lot more difficult. I'm not saying that what we did was easy, but I'm saying it was over so quickly that I was really thankful, to be honest.

Q: You mentioned that the Iraqis did not have the very best of the Soviet equipment, like tanks and so on…

ANDREW: They still had good equipment, but yeah.

Q: If they had had what might be considered the best, do you think it would have made a significant difference?

ANDREW: Perhaps but not really, and I'll tell you why. I think that if we had been equipped with their equipment and they had had ours, while it would have been tougher, I still think that we would've won. This was an issue of training and doctrine. The concept of war that we had been training on for decades after the fiasco of Vietnam was a concept called Airland battle. A point of fact, our regimental commander of the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment was a then Army Colonel by the name of Leonard D. Holder. Later on, he retired as a three-star general. He had helped develop this concept of battle in the 1980s, and it was designed to fight the Russians in Western Europe.

Air-land battle, to make it easier to understand, is a form of what the Germans called blitzkrieg in World War II, or "lightning war." You are concentrating every available amount of power on the battlefield, combined arms – air, ground maneuver forces, artillery, deep maneuver. We had trained against a Soviet-style enemy for decades. In the desert, we had several advantages. One, we'd been training against a Soviet type of enemy for many years. Two, it's really difficult to navigate in the desert with few recognizable terrain features…I would say that at that time, no one in the world knew what we knew about how to conduct desert warfare. We also had the newly field Global Positioning system (remember, this is early 1991, well before it was available to civilians and the public) or GPS. It had just come out, and that's how we were able to maneuver in the desert. It was secret at the time and the public/our foes did not know about it yet. That's how we were able to maneuver around Iraqi units. GPS gave us a technological edge. The Iraqis were not too willing to go too far away from main roads, or else they'd get lost in the desert. We were quite willing to maneuver hundreds of kilometers into the desert just for a tactical advantage.

This point is really important. To better answer your question there, it was training, it was discipline, it was superior equipment. And look, the Republican Guard Unit that we faced, the Tawakalna Division, displayed an ability to adapt to the battlefield. I'm not saying that they all gave up. Many of their soldiers had been battle-hardened during the recently concluded Iran-Iraq War. They had trained to fight in chemical environments, and we were dressed up in our chemical gear, as well. We were concerned that we might get gassed by them, though we do not believe that they actually used any on us. (Though there is a lot of evidence that during/after the war, we destroyed a lot of their munitions, and some were nerve gas shells and that could be a cause for the so-called "Gulf War Syndrome" that has seriously affected thousands of veterans of that war.) I believe that at a high level we warned the Saddam Hussein regime – "If you use gas on our troops, it's going to get very bad for you." I think that was an implicit threat of using nuclear weapons. I don't think we were ever seriously planning to use them, but it was like, let's fight a conventional war and see what happens. If you go biological and chemical, we're going to go worse.

In some ways the war was surreal. When it was clear that the Iraqis would lose Kuwait, their retreating forces lit all of those oil wells on fire. Talk about an environmental disaster! We believe that these oil wells might have had side effects on many soldiers – probably on the Iraqi side as well as our side – and contributed to Gulf War Syndrome. A lot of soldiers had sicknesses that seemingly came out of nowhere. I didn't have any particularly serious issues except that my hands and ears peeled for years for no reason. They were very red and peeled on a regular basis, about 1-2 times a year. I would say that this lasted for about 10 years. I don't know if that was a parasite I picked up or some little skin disease that eventually my body overcame, or mild effects of exposure to chemical agents or smoke from the oil wells, but it took a little while for my body to overcome it.

Due to the oil well fires and the smoke that they produced, the skies at the end of the ground war were black. In the middle of the day, sometimes it was as dark as midnight. That's well worth noting. We were breathing all that in, too, so I'm not surprised that a lot

of people have been sick from, basically, exposure to toxic fumes. I think that's kind of the main highlights there.

There are other types of war stories, like eating food and not feeling very well – kind of the equivalent of *Montezuma's Revenge*. Fortunately, that was after combat operations. So, there was that. Then there were snakes to deal with out in the desert. You wouldn't believe it. There were white vipers and Egyptian cobras. You wouldn't think that they would be out there, but they were there. There were scorpions, white rats, dung beetles, and flies everywhere. You'd see this flat desert terrain and think, "Oh, there's no way that anything can live out there," but there's actually quite a bit of life. Life finds a way, to quote another movie. Life finds a way, even way out in the middle of the driest desert.

Q: I am curious about one thing. You are wearing full battle gear. Does your full battle gear more or less protect you from a snake bite?

ANDREW: No.

Q: Oh, it's not that strong?

ANDREW: Not really. To be clear, there weren't snakes everywhere. This wasn't like a snaky jungle. The thing is just that you had to be cautious of it. I remember clearly, one day – and this was not during combat; this was when we were waiting… A lot of people say that fighting in a war is 90 percent boredom and 10 percent abject terror, and that's about right. Before the war began, I remember just one day looking out into the desert, and I see something a long way away, perhaps a few hundred meters, kind of coming right at us. I'm like, "What the heck is that?" It turned out to be a white viper snake coming right towards my tent. I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" It just went right on by, but I couldn't believe it.

It would probably be hard for them to get through some of our boots, our better boots. But there was nothing really to protect against that.

The other thing I remember very clearly is that there were a lot of flies. Whenever we had hot chow delivered, what we would do is try to eat the food as quickly as we could without flies landing on it. If you sat and ate, flies would just come on you and onto your food, so I learned the technique of eating and walking. If you walked fast enough, flies wouldn't be able to land. So, I would walk and eat my tray so no flies would get in it.

Q: Okay. That's one story about the desert that I never would have guessed.

ANDREW: There was a lot of camaraderie, too. I mentioned *Montezuma's Revenge* types of issues. One of the things that we learned or that we were taught before we went into the desert is how important personal hygiene is. We reviewed some experiences that the U.S. Army had in World War II in North Africa, as well as the British Army and the German Army and their Africa Corps. We read some of the lessons learned on the British and American side. Of course, eventually the Germans lost, and they withdrew from

North Africa, but one of the things the Germans did not do well is they did not practice personal hygiene very well. So, we had learned that you need to stay as clean as possible in the desert. If you are sick, you cannot fight well. If you are feeling well and thinking straight, you will have an automatic advantage over a sick enemy. Good to learn from what others have learned before us.

To add to this, and this is going to sound a little gross, but I'll go ahead and mention it. It is relieving yourself in the desert. Say you just go relieve yourself on the open desert floor without covering it up. What's the big deal, right? Number one and number two? What happens with that? Well, the wind picks it up and blows it into things – it blows it into your food, your air. So, what do you do? You make sure you dig holes, and you put all of your body excrements into these holes. The Germans didn't do that during World War II, and I guess the Brits didn't do it as well, and they all got sick. So, this was one of these lessons learned, that in the desert you really have to take care of your personal hygiene.

You think about all these things, and it's not necessarily intuitive, but you have to learn from what has happened in the past and lessons learned and after-action reviews. We were careful about making sure that we practiced good hygiene before going to the bathroom. Even though we didn't really have access to showers, you found ways to improvise and clean yourself. You wouldn't believe it, I do have pictures that I took (well, we all did it and got bored out there sometimes). There would be a guy standing on a tank, we'd all be naked, and he's holding a five gallon can of water, and we'd take a shower that way. You did what you had to do to stay clean.

Q: Oh, yeah. That happened with American forces in World War II, depending on the location. You had to just figure out some way to have waterfall. I mean, a garden hose was like a dream.

ANDREW: Absolutely. We were there from December to late April, so we were there for roughly five months. Most of the time we were there was during wintertime, and believe it or not, it can get cold in Saudi Arabia and that part of the world in winter. It did not freeze, and it did not get particularly hot during winter days. The issue was the 30-40 degree temperature drop every day, from temperate highs such as in the mid-70s to mid-80s Fahrenheit to 40s and 50s at night. Definitely not freezing, but the temperature drop would get to us sometimes. You could really feel that cold at night. The reason I mention it is that we got these little shower bags. So, you could put them on your vehicle and the sun would heat it, and then you'd have hot water. You could do that. But some days, it was cold because of no sun, so we just washed/showered with cold water. You get used to it.

It also actually rained in Saudi Arabia at some points during the winter. One day, you would have nothing but brown wasteland desert, and then a day or two after a rain, you'd have all these wildflowers and grass pop up, and it'd be really pretty. There were definitely experiences that I did not expect to have in the Saudi Arabian and Iraqi deserts.

Of course, Saudi Arabia, in terms of being developed and being a more progressive society, was far less progressive than Iraq. It was far more conservative, I should say. We noticed, when we went into Iraq, and we would go into some villages where the women weren't as covered as they were in Saudi Arabia for Islamic customs. It was kind of funny. They seemed friendly, in many ways, the Iraqis did in southern Iraq.

Here's some more history that I directly experienced that I would like to share. At the end of the war, I think we as a country kind of encouraged the southern Shias, also known as the marsh Arabs, to rise up in rebellion against Saddam, just like the Kurds had up in the north. After the ceasefire, which occurred on February 28th of 1991, we withdrew partially and established a demarcation line in our area to separate our forces from Iraqi forces. The line happened to be a railroad line, so it was easily identifiable for both sides. At this time, the Iraqi army was trying to reconsolidate after taking the beating we had provided. We had not totally destroyed it, but we had definitely defeated it and destroyed a lot of their equipment and, unfortunately, a lot of their soldiers.

But they were able to reconsolidate, and Saddam's Republican Guard units that escaped our wrath conducted a vicious counterinsurgency campaign against the southern Shias. It happened on the other side of our demarcation line. I could see it with my own eyes. I would see a village and then watch it get bombarded by artillery and be like, "Uh oh." Of course, we were not happy about that, but it was on the other side of the demarcation line, and that was Iraq's internal issue. I always thought that we encouraged them to rise up in rebellion, as I understood it later on, but we didn't back them up.

To do a quick fast-forward to the Second Iraq War that started in 2003, I remember when people like Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld said, "Well, the southern Shias are going to be happy to see us coming back," and I thought to myself, did you not pay attention in 1991 to what happened? We betrayed them, to a degree. They're not going to be looking at us as liberators; they're going to look at us as betrayers. I think they did. At the very least, they weren't all that happy that we were back in Iraq in 2003, as they remembered what had happened 12 years before. That fact always went down with me a little hard, that we weren't allowed to do anything about that. Our betrayal of the southern Shias reminded me of what happened at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in 1961. It was not exactly the same, but it kind of felt like it – like we'd betrayed these folks who had responded to our call to rise up against Saddam and then did not back them up. That has never been easy to deal with.

Another story I'd like to share has to do with a potential international incident after the cease-fire that occurred in early April 1991. This story is not about being competent per se, but not always paying attention to what you are doing. This took place near Suq Al-Shuyukh, which is just southeast of Nasiriyah. After the ceasefire, we had this demarcation line, as I said, this railroad line. I went on a patrol to make sure that there were no ceasefire violations. We were patrolling this area, just like we used to do for the old border patrol in Germany. This would be sometime in March. I don't remember exactly, but it was early to mid-March of 1991. We had gone on this patrol, and it was a two-tank patrol. I wasn't leading the patrol, but I was the ranking officer that was on it

and was observing as the artillery officer. One of the B Troop platoon sergeants was in charge of it. Well, we crossed over this railroad line, and remembering our briefing and the map, I got a little concerned that we had just crossed the demarcation line. I said to the platoon sergeant, "Hey, sarge, I noticed that we crossed a railroad line. Isn't that the demarcation line? Aren't we in trouble?"

He goes, "No, no." He pulled out his map, and sure enough, it looked like there was another line. He said, "We're not to that one yet."

I said, "Okay." Then we come into this little town (what we later learned was the above-mentioned Suq Al-Shuykh…behind enemy lines), and we're driving in our tanks, and there are some buildings around us, and I see Iraqi soldiers. I'm saying to myself, hmm, this is probably not good. Then I notice that they have weapons on them, though they are slung on their shoulders and not ready to be used. I'm like, okay, what is going on? Then I see them starting to run into buildings located on the outskirts of this settlement. As we drive into this village, I see two vans going out and as they pass us in the opposite direction, one guy sticks out his hand with his thumbs up. I'm now saying to myself, this is very odd, what does that mean? Then, I see in the distance a Russian-built tank, a T-62. It's not aiming its cannon towards us, but I'm like, "Ok, I think we're really not where we should be."

I mention this to the sergeant, and he looks at me and goes, "Yeah, I think you're right" about not being the right place and crossing that railroad line. I called in on the radio but not exactly a report on what was going on. I didn't want to panic anybody, but I called back to my artillery battery, and I gave them a grid coordinate where that tank was. I didn't mention that it was an Iraqi tank, I was merely updating them with a new potential target, though I did tell them "I want you to be ready to fire at my command."

The person that I was talking to at the artillery battery was that lieutenant that I had first met in Germany, Jack Schwetje, remember the "Ausfahrt" story? He said to me "Rob, the war's over. What are you doing?"

I said, "Just trust me and do it."

Jack said, "Okay."

What we did at that point is what's called a pivot steer with the tank. Right in place without moving forward or backward, we turned the tank around to get out. Then, we turned the tank's cannon to point towards the back, aimed at that Iraqi T-62 tank. If anyone had gotten in that tank or its cannon started to move (it wasn't pointed at us), we were going to take it out. We got back out and over the demarcation line, that railroad line that I had worried about, and then we sat down and said, "Okay, we just created an international incident." But no one was hurt, no one fired, and we made an agreement to never tell anybody.

Q: Wise.

ANDREW: Now, at that point and after we returned to base, I told my captain, my cavalry troop commander, the story that I just told you. I said, "I probably failed, and if you want to fire me that's fine, because I probably should have called this in over the radio, but I didn't want to get a big incident going." I continued, "I thought we could manage it at our level."

He goes, "Yeah, you did. I've got it from here. Don't worry." I don't think he ever told anybody else.

Q: Wow.

ANDREW: One more short story. After our big day of battle on February 26, 1991 (the same day as the Battle of the 73 Easting), we stopped late that afternoon/early evening to prepare for larger American units to pass through our lines and continue the battle. In the area where we stopped, we did not notice until the next morning that there was a semi-concealed bunker that we had run over in the middle of the night. Remember that the terrain here is just all sandy desert, not necessarily dunes of sand, but just very arid sandy land. We did not even check the bunker out when we stopped that evening as we did not realize it was there. The next morning, once we realized that it was about 20 feet from my armored vehicle, one of my soldiers went into it to check it and came back out yelling that there were two Iraqi soldiers in it and that they were alive! We sent another team in to extract them and they came out peacefully and became prisoners of war. They were absolutely scared to death, especially since one of our tanks had run over the top of their bunker. It's a good thing for us that they didn't come out that night and attack us, it could have been bloody. That's the last war story for now.

Q: Yeah, that's good enough.

ANDREW: To think back on that demarcation line incident, all of these strange things happened and once added up, it was clear that something was wrong. Once I had a chance to analyze some of the events of the action, I think that the people driving in the vans going out of that village of Suq Al-Shuykh stuck their hands out with their thumbs up to mean "You're coming to take it to the Iraqi army that's occupied this village" and they approved of that. They were probably Southern Shia members of the rebellion. This was the same village, by the way, which had been shelled, that we had watched. Also, the Iraqi soldiers in the streets going into the buildings, running, thinking we were coming to get them…probably scared the hell out of them. The shock value of tanks is pretty impressive in war. On the other hand, driving up into an urban area with buildings, in a way we were sitting ducks, with our heads and torso outside of the tank. A sniper could've taken us out. I'm glad we got out of there as quickly as possible.

Q: Right. All true. That's quite the story.

ANDREW: Did you have any questions about that, or shall I move on?

Q: That is as well-described as I could possibly do. I get it.

ANDREW: So, we re-deployed to Germany in April of 1991.

Q: So, a relatively short time from…

ANDREW: Yes.

Q: But action-packed.

ANDREW: Yes. We did a lot while we were there. On Christmas Day 1990, as I mentioned earlier, we didn't have any gifts to give each other, so we shaved each other's heads. We even shaved our eyebrows. Then we let everything grow out. So, by the end of the desert war, we all had mustaches and our hair was growing out. It was just another world, you know? It was another, alternate reality.

But the interesting thing is, not even a week or maybe 10 days after we got back to Germany, my buddies and I that had served together and knew each other very well went skiing in the Alps just to get a totally different outlook on life and say, "Yay, we're alive!" We had left this environment of Saudi Arabia. Well, we flew from KKMC, which is King Khalid Military City in Saudi Arabia. Eventually we left Iraq and came back to Saudi Arabia, got our equipment ready to ship back to Germany. Then, we flew from there. But what a change in terrain! We'd seen no terrain features for five months. We came back to Germany, and everything was green. There were mountains, roads, cars, people. It was a bit of a shock to be honest.

I didn't want to give up my weapon or my gas mask. When I was driven home that first night back, I felt like I should be standing up on or through the roof with my weapon out looking for the enemy, you know? It's hard to make that transition, sometimes, from a combat environment to a non-combat environment. I understand why soldiers sometimes have a hard time transitioning back to civilian life. I can't imagine what it was like for soldiers going on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) from Vietnam to Hawaii for a week or two and then going back into the jungle to fight. That must have been traumatizing for them, much more than it was for me.

The rest of my time in Germany was relatively uneventful. I had been a fire support officer during the war, which meant I called in artillery. Then, when I came back to Germany, I changed jobs and became a fire direction officer. That's one of the people who helps make sure that the artillery guns are aimed in the right direction and get the proper information on where to shoot. Remember, artillery is not a direct fire weapons system; it's indirect fire. It has a long range. The people at the guns don't see what they're shooting at, unlike in a tank. Artillery is usually many kilometers behind the front lines and shoots from there with forward observers (or fire support officers) providing target locations.

I did the fire direction officer job for a while. Then, eventually, I left Germany in the middle of 1992. I redeployed back to the U.S., to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. However, before we left Germany, the CFE Agreement, the Conventional Forces… I can't remember what exactly it stands for.

Q: Conventional Forces Europe.

ANDREW: Right. We had the Russians coming again and counting how many tanks we had in our motor pool, that type of thing. I helped out during one of those CFE inspections just before I deployed back. After leaving Germany, I took some leave to see my parents and friends and other family, but then I reported to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I became a platoon leader for 5-17 Field Artillery. As opposed to a fire direction officer who's responsible for the direction and distance that the guns shoot at, the platoon leader is kind of just in charge of the guns themselves – make sure they get in the right place safe and sound every time. You're more tactical in that sense.

Q: Very quickly, for an artillery platoon, about how large a group is that?

ANDREW: A platoon in general is going to be roughly 30 to 40 people. It depends if you're infantry, artillery, tanks, whatever. For my artillery platoon, it was about 30 to 35 depending on personnel rotations. As I mentioned above, I became a platoon leader in the Fifth of the Seventeenth Field Artillery. The type of equipment we used was the old eight-inch self-propelled artillery. Eight inches is the diameter of the shell, so it's 203 millimeters. These are really big artillery weapons. They were old. My howitzers in this unit dated them back to the Vietnam era (remember, this was 1992, so they would have been at least 20-25 years old by then). As a matter of fact, I was one of the last eight-inch platoon leaders in the entire U.S. Army. We did a lot of live fire exercises there at Fort Sill, but I didn't deploy again. The only war I went to in my Army career was the First Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield/Storm). Everything else after that was training and deploying for training at various stateside locations.

After my time serving in that unit, 5-17 FA (Field Artillery), I went to the Officer Advanced Course or OAC for field artillery. When I first came into the military it was the officer basic course, and now I went to the officer advanced course for field artillery, and then I also did it for armor (tanks). I did the artillery OAC at Fort Sill and then armor OAC at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Fort Knox was the home armor/tanks back then. It's changed to Fort Benning, Georgia now, but it was at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

It was in the 1993 time frame that I met Pam, my future wife, and we dated and eventually got married later on in 1994, about a year later. I got assigned to my next Army posting which was in Fort Hood, Texas, and I was part of the First Cavalry Division there. It's a very storied unit. It has probably one of the most recognizable Army patches in the world. You've probably seen it before.

Q: Oh yeah.

ANDREW: That was the large unit that I joined at Fort Hood, Texas. The 1st Cav was a famous unit during the Vietnam War when they were an airmobile division. They've been immortalized in movies such as the fictional *Apocalypse Now* and the fact-based *We Were Soldiers.* That was all the First Cavalry Division. But after Vietnam, they traded their helicopters in for M-1 Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles, heavy artillery, and associated units. I was with the First Cavalry Division for four years, from 1994 to 1998.

Q: At that time, were you also promoted?

ANDREW: I was. I should mention that not long after our return from the Gulf War, I was promoted to First Lieutenant, and then before I left Fort Sill and went to Fort Hood, I was promoted to Captain. I was promoted to Captain in late 1993. That is a very recognizable rank in the Army. You have the two railroad tracks and it's really the last time at the officer rank that you serve with troops on a close day-to-day basis. Once you become a major or higher staff officer, you are less likely to serve in combat units. As a battalion commander at the lieutenant colonel level, one does command, but you're not really close to the troops anymore. Captains are really your last tactical level of command.

Q: Okay. As you got these promotions, did the size of the military group you commanded increase as well? Did you go from platoon to squadron?

ANDREW: Well, in artillery it's called battery command, but it's exactly the same as a "company command." They call it battery command just because that's artillery language.

Q: So, a company is approaching 100?

ANDREW: Yes, or more. So, when I was in my "company" level command, I was the "service battery" commander for Second Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery, one of the artillery regiments that was organic to the First Cavalry Division. I had 132 men under my command. At the battalion level, it depends on the organization, but it can be 500 to 1,000 depending on the type of unit in a battalion. I never got to that level as a commander. I commanded at the company level. So, I had roughly 130 troops.

One of the more interesting units I supported at Fort Hood, Texas was the Second Battalion, 7th Cavalry. I mentioned that in Germany and the First Gulf War I was a fire support officer for a cavalry troop (troop is the same as "company"). At Fort Hood, Texas, I became a battalion or task force fire support officer. I was a captain supporting a maneuver elements lieutenant colonel in his command. The main unit I supported was the afore-mentioned Second Battalion, 7th Cavalry. That unit has an interesting lineage. That unit – the 7th Cavalry – that was commanded by George Armstrong Custer and was famously defeated by Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. I cannot recall the name of the Indian leader… he was that famous for that particular battle up in the Dakotas.

Q: Sitting Bull.

ANDREW: Sitting Bull, yes, and Crazy Horse. We traced our unit lineage back to that era. The other interesting aspect about that unit is that it was the unit commanded by Hal Moore at the beginning of large American troop deployments to Vietnam in 1965. Hal Moore was a lieutenant colonel at that point in Vietnam and the very first big battle of the First Cavalry Division was at the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley, at LZ X-Ray, Landing Zone X-Ray. This was the first major battle between American forces and the North Vietnamese Army in the highlands in South Vietnam in November 1965. This was the famous lineage of this unit, 2-7 Cav at Fort Hood, Texas, that I now supported.

I made a reference to the movie *We Were Soldiers.* You've probably heard of that movie with Mel Gibson. It's based on a book called *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* by Joe Galloway and Hal Moore.

I did not go to war with that unit, but we did deploy to the Army's National Training Center out in Fort Irwin, California. We did a full force-on-force against the OPFOR, or the opposition force that was based there. As usual, we lost to them. It's their home terrain. But it's meant to train us. At that time, still, we were training against a Soviet-style enemy and desert warfare and mountainous desert as well, there in the Mojave desert of California.

In our live-fire exercise, though, we did very well. I actually won the designation, with my precise planning of artillery and the live-fire execution of artillery fires, of "Desert Hero" for that particular exercise. I did a good job with my fellow officers, and especially my intelligence colleague, for the live fire. Of course, in live fire training, you don't fight against real people. We call it the "Plywood-ian" Army. It's plywood targets and stuff like that, of course. But it's serious. When you do live fire, there's always a chance that you might injure your own people in training. It's controlled, but you still have to be flexible and practice good safety measures in live fire exercises.

Q: Sure, these are deadly weapons.

ANDREW: They are deadly weapons, yes. Just to come back to the Gulf War for a moment, something happened – and I like to believe that we didn't kill anybody friendly – before we engaged with the enemy. Before we went into major combat operations or before we engaged the Iraqi enemy, there were some vehicles at a distance that we could not identify easily in a so-called free fire zone, and we didn't know what they were doing there. They were where the enemy was supposed to be. We shot them, and they ended up being British ammunition carrying vehicles.

We didn't know it at the time, but we thought we had killed some British soldiers in these vehicles, because they were full of artillery ammunition, and it just blew up like a Christmas tree for hours. We were reassured by the British that they were abandoned vehicles and there was no one in them, but I tell you, we were really concerned that we had killed some of our allies in a friendly fire incident. That had bothered us quite a bit.

Of course, when we engaged with the enemy, it was hard to tell exactly what was happening to the enemy soldiers. Going back to the Gulf War for a minute, during the Battle of the 73 Easting, did we kill Iraqi soldiers? No doubt about it. But it was from a distance from our tank cannons, so it wasn't even within rifle range. We'd shoot a tank and see the turret pop off of it, and we're going, "Gosh, that guy has just had a really bad day." But that's the nature of war. That was basically it for that.

Fast-forwarding back to the unit that was based at Fort Hood, Texas, our unit in the First Cavalry Division, we did the intense force on force and live fire training out at Fort Irwin, California. I went there a couple of times for training. I went there as a commander when I became a company-level commander (remember, as a "battery commander"?). It was a good rotation out there.

I should mention that in 1996, on March 8th, my daughter Jessica was born. It was shortly after her birth that I went on several of these training exercises at Fort Irwin, California. During one of my rotations out there in late '96 and early '97, I was concerned that I would be gone when she would take her first steps to walk. We got back in early February, when she was about 11 months old, and my wife had probably not encouraged her to walk right at the 10-month point. It was the day after I got back that she started walking. That was when I got back from that deployment. It was a daddy-daughter thing!

I guess we probably held her back for a couple of weeks from walking. My wife didn't encourage it. You can encourage kids. They cruise. When they push a little stroller, they call that cruising, or they stand up next to the couch and walk along it. My wife didn't let her do that until right when I got back, and then she just started walking. When my daughter reads this, she'll be like, "Dad, you held me back." She was born in '96. So, when you met Jessica, she would've been 11 or 12 years old.

I talked about command. I told you about the unit that I commanded, Service Battery, 2-82 Field Artillery. I was in command for a little over a year, which is typical when you're at that level of command. I can be longer, even up to two years, and I was right about the 15-month mark.

Q: Were there… I guess the only other question I have is, you mentioned GPS. Were there other changes – obviously not confidential ones – that were going on in the military that really left an impression on you?

ANDREW: There were definitely some technological advancements in my own branch of field artillery in terms of being faster and more precise. I'll explain that. When we were in the desert in Saudi Arabia and Iraq (remember, I was a forward observer and fire support officer, so I was with the maneuver guys), I would call for artillery fire. If the artillery pieces were moving when I called for fire, it could take several minutes for them to stop and to get set up before they are ready to fire. The artillery guns have to get laid into position. They had to do what they now called the "old fashioned" way to lay your

weapons, where they used an aiming circle, and you figure out where you're at by some means. It takes some time, upwards of 5-10 minutes or more, which are precise minutes in battle. For example, let's say that I see the enemy and the artillery is still moving and hasn't stopped to be able to shoot. Back in the old days, it could take 10 to 15 minutes once you put that call in. That's a lifetime of combat and movement for frontline troops in that amount of time. You generally tried to send a fire mission to an artillery unit that was already set in place and ready to fire.

To get to answering your question, one of the most interesting technical achievements was the development of the Paladin Howitzer. The official designation is M-109A6 Paladin. I think that's a reference to trusted members or knights from Charlemagne's court back in the 8th Century. The old Howitzers were called M-109A2s. The A2s were from the immediate post-Vietnam era. That type of self-propelled howitzer has been around a long time, and they've just kept upgrading it, essentially.

The difference with this Paladin, for instance, is that it could be on the move and receive a fire mission, and it would have the first round down range in about a minute. That's impressive. That's based on GPS technology. Each gun, instead of needing a fire direction center to figure all of the aiming data and then send that firing information to the guns…the gun itself could figure it all out between the computer and the crew inside of it. That was an amazing leap in lethality, speed, and agility; to be able to put artillery rounds downrange in under a minute from an initial call for fire is literally "space age" technology.

The First Gulf War was also famously called the First Smart Bomb War. They were dropping smart bombs on particular targets in Baghdad. There were cruise missiles. That only got better in my time. Throughout the mid to late '90s… I never personally went to Bosnia or Kosovo, but when we did, our air campaigns there, the weapons were just that much better than during the 1991 Gulf War. Of course, nowadays, they're so much better in terms of precision. That's a good thing for many reasons. Precision fire reduces civilian casualties and hitting unintended targets. In World War II, we would drop thousands of bombs just to hit a factory. There could be 10,000 bombs. Nowadays we can drop one, maybe two and get the same effect. I saw that kind of revolution in technology and military affairs in my time in the military.

I'm trying to think if there were other major advances in my time in the military. Drones were not largely in use yet before I got out in 2002. Something else that came to mind is soldiers are soldiers no matter the age. I'd have soldiers griping about working, and I'd think to myself, I'm sure Roman centurions were griping 2,000 years ago about having to dig foxholes or whatever. Soldiering never really changes. We have a saying: "If soldiers aren't griping, something's wrong." Also, GIs (which stands for "government issue" but means American troops) in particular, but I'm sure soldiers from every nation across history, are amazingly inventive with whatever tools they have on hand to either make their life a little bit better or to be clever on the battlefield.

When I was in command, I also dealt with the same problems that we have in the world and society. I had soldiers get DUIs (Driving Under the Influence), and we'd have to deal with that. They would get drunk at a bar and get in a fight. I was fortunate; I never lost anybody under my command. But people die for various reasons. I, fortunately, did not have to deal with any troops who died while under my command. We also do urinalysis tests once a month, so we had soldiers come up positive for marijuana, cocaine, and all of that. We'd have to deal with all of the judicial issues that we could at my level.

The higher rank that you get, the more authority that you have to impart UCMJ, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which is separate from civilian justice here in the U.S. You've seen TV shows like NCIS (Naval Criminal Investigative Service) and JAG (Judge Advocate General's Corps) and all of that. That's a Hollywood version, of course, but it's generally correct. Soldiers generally fall under different jurisdictions, depending on where they commit the crime. If they commit it downtown, then they're usually subject to civilian punishment. We would coordinate a lot with our civilian counterparts. Some soldiers, God bless them, were great soldiers in the field, but you'd get them back in garrison, back in the barracks, and they would do stupid things. They would go to loan sharks and get loans, and then we'd have those loan sharks calling me or the first sergeant trying to get them to pay back their loans. We would try to take care of these soldiers.

My wife, Pam – you know Pam – became the leader of a family readiness group (FRG) for when we would deploy. It was a big deal. When we would deploy, either for training or for whatever it was, she and the FRG would get all the wives together and say, "Do you have all the groceries that you need?" A lot of our lower-ranked enlisted soldiers who did not make a lot of money, their wives would often not have enough money to take care of their families. We would do that through our FRGs and take care of them. That was more for our younger married soldiers than our single ones. Single ones, we'd have them in the barracks on base. They're always going to get fed; they have a house. We worried about them less. It was our younger married soldiers that we were more concerned about.

Q: Often, I think the public doesn't realize how much military spouses do to maintain the cohesion of the force when they're not doing whatever their job is, when they're off-duty.

ANDREW: Let me tell you. When we deployed to the National Training Center (that is, the desert training area of Fort Irwin, California that I mentioned earlier) when I was in command, my wife and my first sergeant's wife ran the family readiness group. They were good friends. A few other NCOs' (non-commissioned officers) wives who were a little more senior would assist as well. They were a little more grown up. I'm so thankful that they were there, because I could not have been able to deal with issues while I was deployed. They could really help families.

Q: Speaking of which, this is a little bit of a digression, but I heard on the news yesterday and I was kind of surprised that there's a fair amount today of vaccine resistance among the troops. What's your take on that?

ANDREW: I don't know what it is. There's a significant percentage of Americans who I think are willing to take the vaccine but want to wait and see more results. I don't know if that's factored into that or not, or if this is just another vaccine the military's telling me to get? There may be a little bit of that, too. I remember getting shot full of things before I went off to the Gulf War and not knowing what it was, really. I don't have any particular side effects, but they would only kind of tell you what it was, and you'd be like, "Okay, whatever." You just weren't paying attention. It was like, zap, zap, zap.

So, you wonder what it is, sometimes. I don't know. Is it because the institution is a bit more conservative? Let's look at the institutions of DOD and the State Department. DOD tends to be more conservative and the people in it tend to be more politically conservative. State Department people tend to be more liberal. That's just as a rule, not for everybody, obviously, in both cases. Is it because conservatives identified more with President Trump and Trump was not necessarily anti-vaccine, but he maybe didn't do the best leadership response towards the whole Covid thing? Is there that influence there? It's possible. But I like to give soldiers some credit to being able to think for themselves on these issues.

It's a bit of a mystery. If your leadership says, "This is a very good thing," you generally trust your leadership. Those who serve are generally trusting of the system, and you would think that they would trust getting the vaccine. That's a bit of a mystery to me regarding all the resistance. I don't understand why.

Q: I know that if I were in any level of command, I would just call them out and show them that I'm getting it so that they can see I've got it. Hopefully, that would be encouragement enough.

ANDREW: Well, you know, the military as a whole has been very… I don't mean Conservative politically, but very conservative in terms of locking down their bases. They won't participate in group sessions with civilians. They'll Zoom in, even more so than we do. They've been very draconian in how they've approached their lockdowns. It's surprising to me, all of that.

I'm also wondering if we know the resistance to the vaccine by service – by Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines – and I'll tell you why that's important. I think some young people don't quite take it seriously, and there are a lot of young people in the military, particularly in the Marine Corps. When you think of Marines, most of them, probably around 70% of the Marine Corps are people under 25. That's the recruiting pool they're looking for to go fight in Marine warfare. It could be young people either being lazy and not getting around to it or being a little resistant to authority.

Q: Yeah. I go to a gym here in the D.C. area, and there are definitely younger military either officers or enlisted who go to the gym, and I hear them talking. They're not getting vaccinated. They're laughing; they think it's a joke; they don't believe it.

ANDREW: Yeah. That's really a shame. I have some of my old buddies who are retired from the DOD… We're not talking privates here. They retired as colonels. They believe it's a hoax. They believe this whole thing is a hoax, and I don't understand it. This is a health issue. This is not political! Lots of people have died. I know people who have died of Covid. Granted, everyone who I know – and I didn't know them very well; they were my wife's family members – did have underlying issues, so it's quite possible Covid was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, but at the same time, you look at the amount of people getting infected, and you see what's happening in India today. This is serious. I don't understand it. It befuddles me.

Q: I didn't mean to go too far into that discussion but given your experience with troops and leadership and so on, it just was one of those things that kind of struck me and I was curious.

ANDREW: Yeah. I just don't understand it.

Q: Alright. Back to Rob Andrew's life.

ANDREW: That's okay. I don't know how far you want to go today, but I thought that I would finish out my Army stuff. Is that enough for today?

Q: However much you would like to do. Any time where you reach a natural break and you want to go back over your files and figure out what topics you want to address next, that's a perfect place to break.

ANDREW: Let's go a little bit more and finish my Army time, and then I think we'll break before I go to Foreign Service. Does that sound like a plan?

Q: Perfect.

ANDREW: Our time in Fort Hood, Texas was from 1994-1998. For a geographical reference, Fort Hood is just about smack in the center of Texas, about an hour and a half north of Austin. The area where we lived, the GI town next to Fort Hood, is called Killeen, Texas, and I lived in another city/town right next to it called Harker Heights. Our address there was 1504 Chardonnay Drive, Harker Heights, TX 76548. Soldiers and their families generally lived in Killeen, Harker Heights, or Copperas Cove if you didn't live on the base. By the way, Fort Hood, Texas is the largest Army base in what we used to call the free world. I mean the West, as opposed to Soviet or Russian bases. It's huge. I think we have 45-50,000 troops there at that one location. We have the First Cavalry Division, the Fourth Infantry Division, and other units. The larger organizational structure there is III Corps Headquarters, which is a three-star Army command. That's the big, armored corps of the American military in the continental U.S.

As a quick aside, another interesting story, and this is a slight diversion, about this general part of Texas. It's not all that far from Waco, where the Branch Davidians, with David Koresh, had the standoff with the federal government and many died in a fire

there. This is kind of terrible and I shouldn't make a joke of it, but we used to call it Wacky Waco because of what happened there. We also called Killeen, Killer Killeen. It unfortunately had a mass shooting incident about two years before I got there. In 1992, there was a Luby's Cafeteria – you might recall this – and a guy drove into this Luby's Cafeteria. It was kind of like Golden Corral, that type of place. It was buffet-style dining. A guy drove into the building with his truck and came out with an assault rifle and killed about 20 people in this Luby's Cafeteria. Wacky Waco and Killer Killeen.

I'm going to connect the Killer Killeen to me, in a way. I wasn't there, of course, and I won't use any names, but one of the ladies who survived that, and her mother who didn't… They were there together, and her mother fell on top of her. They were both adults. The daughter was of adult age, probably in her 30's or 40's when this happened. She, the daughter who survived, ended up being my real estate lady when I sold my house. She told me about that incident. It doesn't have too much to do with me and my career, but there are all these eventful happenings in the area where I lived. When you have a connection to a terrible event like a mass shooting, even if secondhand, it makes it all more the real. Of course, mass shootings were not unknown back then, but it seems like they're much more common now. This was one that affected me personally because I knew someone who was affected personally by it.

Of course, where I live right here in Norman is not that far from Oklahoma City. We're only 20 miles from where the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was that was blown up in 1995. A personal story/connection on that: One of my wife's brothers – my wife came from a big family – was in that building the day before. He was an Army recruiter dropping off paperwork. He was there a day before at the exact same time. Of course, he lost a lot of friends in the Oklahoma City bombing. It was difficult for him and others who could have been killed as it was a kind of "survivor's guilt." I don't want to focus on that too much, but it's worth noting, for the record.

Right. I was finishing up my time at Fort Hood in 1998, and I knew about a year before that we would be leaving. It was kind of like the Foreign Service when you bid on your next assignment. You start working with your assignment officer – that's what we called it in the military, instead of career development officer – to figure out where you're going to go next. Now, unlike the Foreign Service, in the Army you can send in a wish list, but there's no lobbying and it's a crap shoot where you're going to go next---until you get to substantially higher levels. You just go where Uncle Sam tells you you're going to go. You do have some input, but it kind of depends. The assignment officer's going to say, "Nope, sorry Rob. We need you to go be a work horse over at that base, and you're just going to have to live with it."

"Okay, yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

We were fortunate for our assignment after Fort Hood. This really started my transition, so to speak, to thinking about the Foreign Service. I got a career field designation to leave artillery and become a Foreign Area officer, or FAO, in the Army's FAO program. I was going to be what they called a 48 Charlie. That's just a numerical designation. 48 stands

for FAO and Charlie stands for Europe. I was going to be sent to learn French to go and do a tour in France as a FAO.

We finished up our tour in Fort Hood, Texas in late summer of 1998, and we were sent to the Defense Language Institute out in Monterey, California. Terrible place to have to go, by the way. For the record, that's a joke. It's one of the best places you can go in the Army. We get assigned there, and essentially what's going to happen is a number of steps in the training for a FAO, which takes a few years. You get your language training, and then the Army sends you to what they call advanced civil schooling, which is basically getting your master's degree somewhere. Then, you do a year of in-country training in the region where you will be assigned, and then you're considered a trained FAO. You might do a tour in the Pentagon, but generally we try to put you at an embassy. This is where your defense attaché folks come from and your security cooperation folks. In Costa Rica, we had the Office of Defense Representative. In other embassies, as you know, that's called the Office of Security Cooperation. Same thing.

We drove from Fort Hood out to Monterey, California. I'm also more or less a California homeboy. Even though I was born in Norman, I was raised in northern California, so that was nice, to be close to my parents and to be back in California. I took French for six months. The Defense Language Proficiency Test, the DLPT, is almost the exact same test that we do in the Foreign Service. I can't remember the name of it, but it's similar. The grading's the same.

Q: The… No, you're right. It has a name in the State Department, and I've now forgotten.

ANDREW: The name escaped me, and I don't know why I remember the Defense one. The Defense one is called the DLPT. This is where you get your 0 through 5 scoring in a language. So, I got my 3/3 in French. That would be the same 3/3 that you would get from the Foreign Service Institute. I had a delay of time on when I was going to be doing the rest of my training; I had six months when I wasn't going to be doing anything. They said, "We're just going to keep you here and we'll send you to another language course." I stayed there, and I took Spanish formally. I had spoken street Spanish in my youth because I'd grown up in an immigrant community. I'd had four years of high school Spanish and three or four years of university Spanish, so my Spanish was not bad, but I certainly wasn't fluent yet. After taking that course, I got a 3/3 in Spanish, as well.

Then, for my advanced civil schooling, I went to Naval Postgraduate School. I did not have to go there, I could have gone to some civilian university somewhere, but it was very convenient. I didn't have to move because it was right there in Monterey. It took me a year and a half to two years to get it, but I got my Master of Arts in National Security Affairs at Naval Postgraduate School.

Here comes a twist! Before I graduated from Naval Postgraduate School, the Army had actually decided that they didn't want me to be a FAO anymore. They do this all the time. They said, "We're going to send you back to artillery," because they needed artillery

officers back in their original field. I said, "You know, I could do that" but I was kind of through with the muddy boots Army, and I wanted to do something else.

That is when in the summer of 2000 when I got the itch to take the Foreign Service Written Exam. I said to myself, "I really want to serve in an embassy, and if I can't do it in the Army, what other opportunities are there?" That's when I started to research a little bit more about the Foreign Service. I took the test – back then, it was called the Foreign Service Written Exam, the FSWE, and it was literally written on Scantron forms and blue books. I took the FSWE in November of 2000. I found out I passed, and then I was scheduled to take my orals. They didn't have the qualification evaluation panel that they do today.

I was invited to the orals, and it was in San Francisco. I'm kind of previewing this a little bit, and I'll come back to it. I took my orals in July of 2001 and I passed that. I got on a list, and it was in early 2002 when I got the offer to actually go to A-100.

Q: When you passed, was that at a time when they offered you positions in particular cones, or did you enter when they were doing no cones?

ANDREW: They made me choose a cone. To be honest, I don't remember when I actually chose. I think it was before the first test. Nowadays, today, when you register you have to choose your cone. I think that's what I did, as well. I had to choose, and I chose political. That's what happened.

They wanted me to start my A-100 course in June of '02, and I was actually graduating from Naval Postgraduate School then. I said, "Is there any way you can defer me?"

They said, "Oh, that's easy. You're military. We can easily defer you. We want you. You've got a good score." My veteran's points added to my oral score. So, they offered me a class in September of '02.

I said, "That's great. I can resign from the Army after I get my master's degree."

They said, "Oh, you're getting a master's degree?"

I said, "Yeah."

They said, "Oh, we're going to send you a new offer letter because with the higher level of education that you have, we're going to offer you a better paycheck." I got a couple steps up from what they were going to bring me in as. I still came in as an FS-04, and when they found out I was getting my master's, that made a big difference of about 6,000 bucks a year, just by having that master's when I first came on board.

Q: Let me ask one thing about the master's. At that time, what did they focus on at the Naval Postgraduate School in terms of national security? What were the key topics or issues?

ANDREW: Thank you for that question. Before I answer it, let me back up and talk a little bit about NPS itself. It's not really an institution known for their national security affairs department, though it is an important part of their curriculum there. However, NPS is far more known for its engineering and naval sciences programs rather than liberal arts degrees.

The major topics included terrorism, how to best manage the relationship with Russia, etc. This included NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and NATO-Russia relations. I ended up authoring my thesis on "The Implications of Russian Federation Membership in NATO." Hard to believe nowadays, but it was a serious topic at the time, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Speaking of 9/11, that horrific event occurred about a year before I finished my degree. This became an intense time to see how far the U.S.-Russia relationship might go in the wake of this "uniting" attack (causing the U.S. and Russia to unite together to fight a common foe). There was definitely a "honeymoon" there between Putin and Bush on many aspects of the relationship. There was cooperation on terrorism in Afghanistan, including intelligence sharing that was real. It seemed like the spirit of the World War II alliance was coming back, that cooperation that we'd had with the Soviets during World War II to defeat Nazi Germany. I don't think that there was any serious consideration, but at least for a moment, there was a serious look at whether Russia could or should ever join NATO. That's what I wrote my thesis on. That topic of NATO-Russia relations was quite popular back then. Of course, because it was 9/11, a lot of my colleagues wrote about 9/11 issues. Other issues such as Kosovo and the aftermath of the wars in the Balkans were also in that timeframe.

Because of 9/11, also, a lot of folks started focusing on Middle East issues. Some of my friends who had been taking Russian at the Defense Language Institute there in Monterey were transitioned instead, after nearly taking Russian for an entire year, to take Arabic language training. There were 30 or 40 officers of them at DLI who this affected. Almost to a T, all of them got reprogrammed to be Arabic FAOs. Thus, after training in Russian for nearly a year, they stayed there at DLI for another 18 months learning Arabic and then went off to the Middle East to become FAOs at our embassies there. That was a challenging time for those affected by that; it didn't affect me, fortunately.

As I mentioned, terrorism was a topic that was "hot" due to events such as the attack on the USS (United States Ship) Cole, which had occurred in the year 2000. Also, President Clinton launched cruise missiles against Afghanistan in 1998 to try and get Bin Laden if I recall correctly. Terrorism was a popular issue even before 9/11 occurred.

Q: I think you're correct. It's now really far back there. I think we had perhaps identified some caves in an area and knew that they were inhabited, and we believed that this was likelier than not a place that Bin Laden might be. We shot the caves, and he wasn't there.

ANDREW: Yeah, I think that's right. A couple of other things from the last part of my Army career that I kind of want to mention for the record. Just to reemphasize, I took two languages instead of one – French and Spanish. I did my one and only triathlon in Monterey. It was a sprint triathlon, so it was a short one.

Q: Oh, so it's running, biking, and swimming?

ANDREW: Yes. So, the order is, you swim, then you bike, then you run. I swam in Monterey Bay, and it was cold water! I did wear a diving suit, but there were some crazy people who did not. They were locals. They had grown up in that water. It was around 50-degree water and quite chilly. If I remember correctly, the sprint triathlon distances are a half mile swim, a 12-mile bike ride, and a three-mile run. It's meant to go fairly quickly. Iron Man, which is the big triathlon, is I think a two-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and a full marathon. I didn't do anything near that, but I did do a triathlon, so that was kind of fun. The date was interesting, too. I remember. The date was September 11th, 1999, two years before 9/11/2001. I recall that when 9/11 occurred, that date seemed to have some "meaning" me, and I thought back on it and realized it was the date that I had done the triathlon back in 1999.

One other thing I want to put on there, and it's not really related to my military career but more to my personal life. I made my first trip to New Zealand in December of 1999 to visit my brother. My brother had moved there in 1994 from Zimbabwe. I think I told you a little bit about my brother.

Q: Yeah, he had gone to South Africa and Zimbabwe, married there, had a family.

ANDREW: Yes. Then he moved in 1994 from Zimbabwe to New Zealand. He was a veterinarian, and found one in New Zealand. They didn't really want to leave Zimbabwe. His wife was from there. She was born there when it was Rhodesia. It was her country. But they didn't really see any future for their kids there. Then President Robert Mugabe never left power once he got it. My sister-in-law's family were also white farmers, and they lost all of their farmland. My brother was going to, with his wife, take over one of the farms, and of course they couldn't do that, then. At any rate, I made my first trip to New Zealand in 1999. That was the first time in 10 years that I had seen my brother. The long gap in visiting each other had a lot to do with just how life goes, and we couldn't believe that we let it go so long. I was in the Army in Germany and at war when I finally left home and never made it to Africa to visit him there. We had never figured out a great time to see each other with our complicated schedules. We should have made it a higher priority, but at least we finally re-connected.

Sometime in late 1998 or early 1999, we finally said, "We've got to see each other," and it was the first time in 10 years. Ever since then, we haven't let more than two or three years go by, either one way or the other. But that was a great trip I did with my brother. He lives on the South Island of New Zealand, south of Christchurch in a town called Ashburton. Christchurch is the big city on the south island. (Howard passed away on August 24, 2021, after this interview was conducted.)

Some other things that were interesting that were going on back in that timeframe was the Y2K issue. You remember that, with the computers.

Q: Yeah. In the past, I've asked interviewees about that, and since it had become a big nothing, I gave up asking, but please, go ahead.

ANDREW: Well, it really was a big nothing, of course, but we had worked diligently at the Defense Language Institute to ensure that our computers had software patches. Like everyone else, I remember doing silly things like filling up water containers in my bathtub in case the water shut off. Of course, it did become a big nothing, but apparently there were some legitimate issues in some computer systems that they had to fix. But it was not as bad as what we thought was going to happen. I thought I would mention that because there was a significant effort at the military base there to address it, at the Defense Language Institute there in Monterey.

I should mention that when I was at school, at Naval Postgraduate School, I made a lot of international friends with international military students. In particular, there were some Russian and Ukrainian students who I got to know well. To this day, I'm friends with them. Indeed, I met up with them later on in life on my Foreign Service tour in Russia. One of my tours was in Moscow, and I met some of my Russian friends there, and then to see some of my Ukrainian friends I did a trip to Kiev and other parts of Ukraine. It was a fantastic experience, once again, to be exposed to international students, military students at this point. I made Egyptian friends, Turkish, Greek, German.

This one Russian fellow that I met back then, who is my lifelong friend now, he actually didn't come from their armed forces. He came on a J visa, an exchange type of thing. He ended up becoming a professor at Naval Postgraduate School, and he still is now. He's an American citizen now.

Q: I was about to ask you what happened to some of these guys. Okay. That's great.

ANDREW: There was one bona fide Russian military officer at Naval Postgraduate School when I was there. He was an Army guy. I got to know him relatively well and stayed in contact with him for a couple of years. He was there from '99 to 2001, something like that. But when we bombed Kosovo in '99, the Russian Army recalled him because they were not happy that we were bombing their Serbian friends and allies. They did let him go back and finish his degree later in 1999 or 2000.

One of the conversations I remember having with him, before he went back to Russia, was quite revealing on what his assignment to NPS meant for him career wise. If there could be a person who was open to ideas and working with the American Army, he was one of them. He said, "Look, I'm probably not going to be treated very well when I go back to my regular unit in the Russian army because they're going to see me as a traitor. My leadership is going to say that all I've done the last couple of years is "f-ed off" in California, out living the good American life."

I don't know if he ever got battalion command. He was a lieutenant colonel in their army. He eventually had to retire because there was just no future for him. It was really too bad. They sent him for this assignment, and then they basically said, "Well, there's not much of a future for you here in the Russian military." Really? He may have been the leading edge of better cooperation and joint military training, and it just never got off the ground, which was really a shame.

One of my Ukrainian friends that I met there had been in the military for a while. This was probably the year 2000 or 2001. He had been in the Soviet army before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and he had fought in Afghanistan in the mid to late- '80s. It was quite fascinating to talk to him about it. Then, of course, after 9/11 occurred, we would "interrogate" (in a nice way) him and say, "Tell us what your experiences were and what we should be doing!"

That was a really interesting connection. I'm still in contact with him. He lives in Kyiv, Ukraine. He retired from the Ukrainian armed forces; after the split of the Soviet Union, he went to the Ukrainian military. He retired and I think he works with the UN now. He does peacekeeping operations. He was actually a UN peacekeeper in the Congo for a while. Now, I think he's retired, but he came back to work for the UN or the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Ukraine. He's dealt with some of these issues in the eastern Ukraine along the line of contact. He's not fighting there but trying to coordinate border stuff. (June 2022 update: He is a territorial defense commander, helping to coordinate and train new Ukrainian soldiers to fight the Russians.)

He's originally from the town of Vinnitsa, which is southwest of Kiev, probably on their roads about three to four hours southwest. Vinnitsa is kind of interesting historically. Hitler had an underground bunker there during World War II, and I believe it was the furthest east of any of his wartime bunkers. Local Ukrainians built it, about 1,200 of them, but of course the Nazis wanted to keep it a secret, so every last one of those workers were executed after they built it. It's in the woods and not an obvious site or destination. When the Soviet Army reconquered and drove the Nazis out of there, they totally destroyed this bunker. All you see today are just big hunks of concrete sticking out of the ground. You get a kind of eerie feeling in this forest. It's not quite like Auschwitz, but it's a little bit like that.

Another interesting feature there is that there was a pool outside of this bunder. They built a swimming pool there for Eva Braun, because apparently she loved to swim. I don't even know if she ever swam there, but she was always with Hitler, so it would make sense. She would go with him to the eastern front in the Ukraine and the Wolf's Lair and all of that. The amazing thing is that this swimming pool still stands. It's overgrown with brush, but it's still there. You can clearly see it. That was kind of an interesting thing that my Ukrainian friend showed me in this area when I visited him later on in the Foreign Service when I was posted in Moscow.

Q: Fascinating. I actually had never heard of that. It kind of surprises me that there was a bunker that far into the east.

ANDREW: There is another "famous son" of Vinnitsa, his name was Dr. Nikolay Pirogov, who is credited with discovering anesthesia and using it as a surgeon, along with other advanced surgical techniques of the era, during the Crimean War in the mid-1850s. There is a nice statue dedicated to him there.

Q: Interesting. There are these little facts of history that get lost, and then you're there. Very interesting.

ANDREW: I'd never heard of Vinnitsa before meeting my Ukrainian friend from there. However, I knew that anywhere in the former Soviet Union, especially the areas from either the Napoleonic Wars and/or the Hitlerite Wars, there were going to be battlefields, massacre sites…so much history going on.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Alright. So, now it's early 2002. You finished the orals. You've been hired in the political cone, and you're tying things up and, I guess, getting ready to go to Washington.

ANDREW: Correct. As I did not have enough years in to retire from the military, I had to resign my commission. I had 13-plus years in, so I did not have any further obligation of service. When I had first come in, I had eight years of obligation – at least four years active duty, and four years reserves. But with the 13 years of active duty, I had no further obligation to the Army. There was no problem with me resigning. I had to resign. That's not a bad thing; it just means that I had to go through a formal separation instead of retiring. Of course, I have my veterans benefits and all that type of thing, but no retirement, no privileges like many military retirees have for medical and dental and all that stuff.

It was busy wrapping things up with the Army. The DD-214 – you've probably heard of that piece of paper – is your proof of service, so I got that. There has to be a break in service between active-duty Army and active-duty Foreign Service. You can't be both at the same time. You can be a reservist, but not active duty. My A-100 Foreign Service Orientation class started on September 9th, 2002, and my last official day in the Army was September 7th. That was my one-day break! Now, I was on what they called terminal leave that began in early August, though I was still technically on active duty until my separation date of September 7th. I told my family on that one day of break in service between the Army and the State Department, which was September 8, 2002, I told them, "Although I think we'd probably be able to get coverage, technically, today, we have no medical coverage, so don't anyone go outside. Don't pick up any sharp knives or anything." We were fine, but it was kind of funny!

Of course, before we left Monterey, we got our household goods packed up. We had the State Department move us, in this case. A lot of our stuff went to storage, of course, and only up to 7,200 pounds was allowed to go to DC for training. I actually don't even

remember how much it was that we shipped to D.C. It wasn't that much. Most of it went to storage. We packed up our cars with as much stuff as we could. We had two cars at that time, a 1991 Red BMW 318is and a 1994 GMC Jimmy. We drove from Monterey, California all the way to Northern Virginia, and we took a month to do it. We made this big trip I called the "Trek Across America." On this month-long trip, we saw my parents who lived in Northern California (we saw them frequently during our posting in Monterey); we drove to Utah and saw Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon, as well as Moab where they have the Canyonlands and Arches National Parks.

We enjoyed getting to know our own country a bit more before heading off to the Foreign Service. We went to the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert, the Petrified Forest, and many other sites in Arizona and New Mexico. We drove on to Denver and saw my wife's sister, Robin, who lives there. I don't think I'd ever been to Denver before, believe it or not, so we were there for a day or two. Then we came down here to Oklahoma to see Pam's parents and family.

I should mention that while we were in Colorado, we stopped at the National Sand Dunes Monument, which may be an official National Park now, which is located not far from Pueblo, Colorado. There are sand dunes! You would almost think you're in the Middle East like Lawrence of Arabia! It was quite wonderful actually. I never knew that we had sand dunes like this in the U.S. It's quite an amazing stop. We stayed there a couple of nights, and had great views of the sky at night since we were not near any city lights or other pollution. What clear skies!

We also went to Jackson, Mississippi. It was August, so it was hot and humid there. But just west of Jackson is the town of Vicksburg, not far from the Mississippi River, and a Civil War battlefield. Being a military guy, I'm a bit of a Civil War buff and like to enjoy experiencing that history. My wife and I ended up doing a self-guided tour of the battlefield there at Vicksburg. I suppose it is a bit like going to Gettysburg, to a degree. It's not quite as famous, and it actually occurred at the same time as Gettysburg. This is where Grant really made his name, I think, in Vicksburg in July of 1863. It was really neat to visit.

We drove through Nashville and much of the rest of Tennessee. Then, we went into North Carolina and saw the Smoky Mountains. Very pretty. I think that's where they get the term "purple mountain majesty," because they look purple along the skyline.

Q: Yes. I was there briefly, and I can attest to that.

ANDREW: Oh, good. I try not to fib on this official memoir here! I think our last stop before the Washington, DC area was in Virginia Beach, VA. One of Pam's brothers lives there. We arrived in time for Labor Day Weekend (2002) and had a nice weekend there at Virginia Beach, which included a beach concert with Hootie and the Blowfish. Then we drove up to where we were going to stay. I had rented an apartment in the Buchanan Apartments in Crystal City. It's right off of 23rd Street and Jeff Davis Highway in the

Crystal City Area there. And that was the start of our new life and career in the Foreign Service.

Q: Okay. Well, we will then pause here. Great place to break. I'm going to pause the recording then.

Q: Okay. Today is May 17th, 2021. We're resuming our interview with Rob Andrew. Rob, you wanted to add something before we begin A-100?

ANDREW: Yeah. I guess you could call it a little bit of a war story from early on in my Army career that I think is worth mentioning for this memoir. I have to say, it's not necessarily the most complimentary story about myself, but it shows my young, adventurous, stupid self, and I think that it's worth sharing. It goes back to early 1990. I don't think I shared it before, because I was debating whether I was going to do it or not, but it just kind of shows youthful stupidness.

To give you the setting, the Berlin Wall had fallen in late 1989, and I think I already told you that I participated in one of the last joint patrols with the Germans on the old inner German border. That was in March 1990. About a month or so later in April 1990, a buddy of mine and I went into East Germany to see the town of Plauen. It was "okay" to do that then and was no problem, but it was still early on in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. You were supposed to have your passport with you, which we did but the East German border guards just waved us through. As I mentioned, we decided to visit the East German town called Plauen. That was near what we called the old trizonal point between East Germany, West Germany, and Czechoslovakia. That was where we used to do our border patrolling.

Our border camp on the West German side was called Hof. It's a common German word. That was the name of the town. During the Cold War time period, our Soviet counterparts were based in the city of Plauen, and they had some sort of military unit based there. We weren't quite sure what kind of unit it was. It was either what we called an unidentified motorized rifle regiment or an independent tank regiment. That's a little bit of the setting for this quick war story.

My buddy, whose name is Ben, and I made a little trip to Plauen at the time. Ben and I drove in his then brand-new BMW – he had a beautiful black 1991 318is. It's the last year that they made that distinctive boxy front-end style of the BMW. We drove across the inner German border, which six months before we'd have been shot for doing. We went to this town of Plauen for two reasons. One was to go and find a local bar, which we did. We had more than a few beers. Now, he was driving, so I did not participate in any drunk driving, but there was certainly probably some impaired driving later on, which was very stupid.

But the second thing we decided to do was to see if we could find the Soviet army base there in Plauen. We found it without too much of a search. We even saw some Soviet soldiers or civilians on their post, but also briefly met this one guy running in his jogging

outfit. We spoke to him. Through our broken German and his broken German – I'm not sure he realized exactly who we were – we figured out that he was a Soviet army captain. We asked him how he felt about what looked like the end of the Cold War. He said, "Oh, it'll be very sad, because we really like our assignments in Germany."

Then, we drove around part of this little base, and we could see a motor pool, a fleet of armored vehicles. Now, the alcohol had set in a little bit. Your natural inhibitions tend to go away. Ben says to me, "Hey, Rob, I dare you to go out and take a picture of that Soviet motor pool."

And I say, "Okay." I get out of the car, and I walk along the side of this fence. It's kind of a solid wall. But then there's a gate, and there's an opening underneath the gate of, say, 18 to 24 inches. I had seen that there was a manned tall guard tower nearby and that there was a Soviet soldier up there. He didn't seem to be paying any attention to anybody. There were other people about as well. So, I very quickly duck under the fence and take a picture with one of those disposable cameras. Now, unbeknownst to me, the "flash" was turned on and it went off when I took the shot. All of a sudden, my eyes went wide because I thought that maybe that flash would get the attention of the guard. Even if he's not looking at me, he might see something, right?

I very quickly start to walk away. My friend's actually starting to move the car. I'm like, "You better not leave me here."

Soon enough I jog over and get in the car. We hauled ass back to West Germany. We were not "drunk as skunks," but were definitely impaired. My friend was like, "I don't care. We're getting out of here." We get on the road as fast as we can, and it's not all that far to cross the border. We're talking 30 to 45 minutes, no more than an hour for sure. Then we get back to our respective apartments. He dropped me off. I get in my apartment and put a chair up against my door. I'm convinced the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti,* Committee for State Security) were going to come for me that night.

This is almost the end of the story, but there's an epilogue coming. Fortunately, nothing happens from our "Incident in Plauen." We agreed never to say anything about it, and it was one of those things that we swore to go to the grave with. Well, we're here 30 years later. I think I can tell the story now. Here's the epilogue to that story: I had that photo developed, and I went to our military intelligence section at our unit to show it to them to see if they could identify the vehicles in the photo. In the photo, you could see armored vehicles and one that was quite different looking, one that I did not recognize. I said, "Man, I wonder what that is. That doesn't look like a normal tank or a Jeep type of vehicle." When I took it to my intel folks, I said, "Hey, I'm not telling you how I got this, but can you guys figure out what this is?"

They looked at it and said, "Well, we really don't want to know how you got this."

I said, "Yeah, no. I would disavow ever having given it to you."

They told me a few weeks later that they had the photo analyzed, and what it actually did was it helped them identify exactly which Soviet unit was there. It was a picture of a mine-laying vehicle. The mine-laying vehicles are only organic to certain types of units. I actually felt a little bit like James Bond in this silly stupidness. I thought I would share that story, though. I helped complete the picture of who we might have fought against. Of course, things were over by then, though.

But the crazy thing about this and why it's so stupid what I did is that people had been killed doing that kind of thing just a couple of years before that. Even six months before that, if they had caught me, they could have shot me on sight and been totally justified. That was youthful stupidity, and I survived it somehow.

Q: Phew. It's funny; when you first mentioned it and said you were taking a picture of a motor pool, I was thinking of an embassy motor pool and wondering how many cars they had. But now I realize what you were talking about was a motor pool that was much more specialized.

ANDREW: Yeah, it was a Soviet military motor pool with tanks and armored personnel carriers and that kind of stuff. I have the picture here in my collection somewhere. I made two copies of it, and I have it. But it's a good story, and it goes to youthful stupidity, to a degree, and indiscretions, as well as the dangers of having a few too many beers and going and doing stupid stuff. 99 times out of 100 you're going to be fine doing stupid stuff, but it's that one time when you do something stupid like, "Hey, check this out," and then something fatal occurs. I'm incredibly lucky that that didn't happen.

Q: Yeah. It's an amazing story, also, because to go within a six-month period from where you literally could've been shot going over an internal German border, to that border no longer existing… It's just amazing to think how much change the world has gone through just in the period of your career.

ANDREW: Yeah. The Cold War ending was at the beginning of my professional career, with joining the Army and traveling to Europe. But I'm old enough, obviously, to remember growing up during the Cold War in the '70s and '80s. I remember thinking about the Russians and whatnot. I suppose it's a good segue to say that I kind of had a love affair with thinking about what the hell the Russians or Soviets were up to all my life. One thing I want to emphasize as you may recall, in the seventh grade, I wrote this report on the Soviet Union, and I wrote the Soviet consulate. Maybe I did mention this. I wrote the Soviet consulate in San Francisco, and they gave me information and I put together a report on it. It was from that point on that I said, "Man, I've got to get to Russia someday," which I eventually do in my Foreign Service career.

Q: Great. In that case, let's get back to the present…

ANDREW: Yeah, I'm all set. Just wanted to get that on there. Thanks.

Q: Sure. Alright. So, you're now arrived in Washington. What year is that?

ANDREW: That was September of 2002 when I started A-100.

Q: How many were in your class, as best you recall?

ANDREW: There were 93, if I recall correctly, so we were a fairly large class. We came in under the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, DRI, under former Secretary of State Colin Powell. The room that we had there at FSI was packed. We were shoulder to shoulder in that room. I can't imagine doing that in the Covid pandemic now. We were so close together. I think we even got issued laptops while we were there. The class was very large, and the room was warm. It was September, so it was still pretty hot. The A/C was working overtime and we were in our wool suits.

Q: For the daily attendance at the A-100, did they allow spouses along?

ANDREW: I do not specifically recall them allowing spouses or not, but there would not have been room for them anyways. I know that there were some spouse events. We certainly did get together after work with spouses, and there were some spouse-related activities, but I can't recall what they were, to be honest, off the top of my head.

Q: Okay. So, you've come from a military background, and now you're being introduced to a civilian bureaucracy. As you recall from back then, what were the major impressions you had?

ANDREW: The work culture is different between the two. It doesn't mean they're incompatible, but DOD tends to be – I think I may have mentioned this – more conservative and the State Department more liberal in every sense of those words, both politically and how you view life. That took a little bit of getting used to. Of course, not everyone in DOD is conservative and not everyone in the State Department is liberal in that sense.

The other thing I thought was really interesting about it is just how diverse my A-100 class was. We talk about diversity a lot more these days, but I have to say that our class, I thought, was fairly diverse. It's not that the military wasn't; the military actually was surprisingly diverse. But I remember meeting people in A100 from all aspects of life and all ages, which is not something I would have seen going into military training. We had people from their young 20's to their mid-50's. About 10 percent of us were former military, either retired or had served for some amount of time like I had.

But I think one of the biggest impressions I got – and this came along with a couple more years' experience in the State Department, but I started to notice it then – is that there are a lot of truly smart people. I don't think any dumb people get into the Foreign Service. Not that I'm making judgements about people, but in terms of brightness, they're sharp. One thing I noticed immediately though is that as smart as a lot of people were, there weren't many who had a lot of natural leadership training or abilities. I certainly noticed that from some of my colleagues. The people who ended up becoming leaders of my

class were people with similar backgrounds to me, who had had military leadership training or who had come from a civilian job where leadership traits were encouraged.

That was definitely something that I noticed. That's not to say that military folks weren't as bright as some of my Foreign Service counterparts, but as a whole, I was impressed with how smart some of my colleagues were. I was actually taken aback, like, wow, these guys were really bright. Of course, I should've known that.

Q: Take a second to… When you say leadership skills, what traits or talents or skills are you grouping under that category?

ANDREW: Well, things like being able to organize for an activity, to problem solve, to be able to decide in a timely manner. I think military people tend to get as many facts as they can in a short period of time and make a decision and then execute the mission. I remember famously calling it the "70 percent solution." Get the 70 percent solution and go execute it violently, right? Whereas I think State Department people are a little bit better about gaining a few more facts. But what might happen sometimes is that the horse has left the barn by the time we've decided about what we're going to do. I felt that sometimes we (State Department folks) needed to be a little quicker in our decision-making and not be afraid to make a command decision. If you make a mistake, just learn from it. That type of thing.

Q: Yeah. I subsequently read, after Colin Powell retired, one or two of his books, and he called it the "60 percent solution." Same thing. If you have 60 percent of the data, he said, you should be ready to make a decision. Otherwise, it's paralysis by analysis.

ANDREW: Excellent and catchy way to phrase it! Leave that to Colin Powell! I don't necessarily want to get back to the military part, but I will say that the American military, throughout our history – and less so today, interestingly enough – has always been a little bit chaotic on how we approach doctrine and warfare. Apparently, we drove the Germans nuts during World War II because the Germans would say, "They never follow their own doctrine. They're constantly surprising us." That's something that I think is instilled. I don't know where it's at now. Unpredictability has been one of our traditional advantages, either by design or mistake. Taking that 60 percent solution and adjusting on the fly is important.

Some of our allies, like the French, are exceptionally good at what they do in the military, but they plan everything to death. It's one of those things where they have the perfect war plan to defend Paris, but by the time they've decided to implement it, the Germans are already occupying Paris, right? It wasn't quite the same with my State Department colleagues, but it was a similar idea where we were looking to get to a better than 60 percent solution. That's probably the right thing for diplomacy, to be fair, but not to analyze to paralyze, as you said.

I really appreciated being one of "Powell's boys," because I came in during DRI. He also initiated more formalized leadership training at the Foreign Service Institute. I thought

that that was really, really good, and I think that that has helped build better leaders at State Department. At the least, it has formalized leadership training. I don't know where things are at now. It's been a while since I took my last leadership course at FSI. But I thought it was a good thing to do. I think most State Department folks did.

Q: As part of A-100, there are these practical exercises where they take you out and have you do a visit from a VIP or something. Was that useful for you?

ANDREW: I'm not quite sure I understand the question, if you could say it again.

Q: Oh. Often, in A-100, they have these off-sites where they have everybody take a role in some major event. That's supposed to prepare them for not just that kind of event, but for what you do in an embassy. Did you find that helpful?

ANDREW: I did, no doubt about it. I think I was successful in leaving any military prejudices behind and being open-minded to learn how the Foreign Service and State Department view the world and how they conduct operations, so to speak, and how they do things. I found it helpful. I remember the offsite at West Virginia, for instance, and putting us in various simulated situations where we had to figure out how to resolve them. Some of those may have seemed kind of hokey, to a degree, but they actually promoted teamwork, so I enjoyed that. It also built a sense of camaraderie doing those leadership and situational activities. When you're not in the leadership position, you're watching and observing and wondering how I would've done that better. Could I have done that better? Then, when the onus comes on you, you forget all that great analysis you did in your head and just try to do the best you can. I think it helped teach me that when you're in that situation, do the best that you can and use your previous knowledge, but as they say, the hot potato belongs with you, and you need to be able to figure it out.

Q: Okay. While you're going through A-100, are you beginning to get ideas about where you would like to go, the areas of specialization you want to pursue?

ANDREW: Right. Well, of course, I knew that I would be a political officer in my career, but I think I went in a little ignorant to A-100. I didn't even realize that our first tour was going to have to be a consular tour. I was like, "Wait a second, what? I didn't sign up for this." But it was fine. Pam, my wife, and my daughter Jessica and I had been fairly open to worldwide availability. I think Pam wanted to stay a little closer to home, to North America or at least in the Western Hemisphere. I was a bit more adventurous than that. Of course, until the bid list came out, we didn't exactly know what would be available. But again, I had had that interest in Russia in my head at that point. I wanted to learn Russian. I wanted to go and serve over there. That was of interest. I was also a bit interested in Africa. I think I told you that my brother had spent a large part of his life there, so I was kind of interested in finding out what he had found so attractive about Africa.

There were no particular negative parts of the world, but we were focusing, a little bit, on Eastern Europe – meaning Russia – and Africa, to a degree, and the Western Hemisphere.

We got the bid list fairly early in the six-week A100 course. Obviously this was well before Flag Day. We took the time we had to do research on posts that we might be interested in. They had the Overseas Briefing Center at FSI, and we had started to do research there as well. As a matter of fact, I think part of A-100's official class time was to go and do some of that.

Q: Okay, so these are all of the things you're thinking about. Where do you end up going or where is your first assignment?

ANDREW: Right. Let me talk about the bid list just briefly and what I submitted. As we know, the first two tours of an entry-level FSO are fairly straightforward-you submit your "wish list" and then the career development officer does the rest for you, unlike bidding on your assignments after that. Our number one choice was Bamako, Mali. I said, "Let's go and do a tough assignment right off the bat. Let's start off swinging."

What we were told at the time, as I recall is, "If you put anything in your top 10 locations, expect to go to one of them." I thought, great. I'm quite happy to do this. It was family-friendly, the post, or at least it was at the time. I don't know if it still is; Mali's had a lot of problems since then dealing with terrorism. But we put that in there. But we were also told, "If you put Mexico anywhere on your list, you're probably going to go." I had Mexico City as number six on our list. I figured I would put it in there because Pam did want a Western Hemisphere post.

I don't remember all of the countries that were on my first "wish list," but on Flag Day we ended up getting number six. We got Mexico City. My wife was happy about that, because Mexico City's not all that far from southwest Oklahoma, where she's from. It's not all that far from the U.S., for that matter, if we wanted to come back. It's easy to travel back to the U.S. if needed. Our parents were starting to get elderly at this point, and while there was no imminent danger of them passing away in the early 2000s, there was always that thought in the back of your head as your parents really start to get older. If they have a sickness, it's nice to be able to get back and help them if they need it without taking two days to travel there and being useless for a few days.

Mexico City was our first post. We were quite excited and happy about that on Flag Day.

Q: Did you get Spanish language training?

ANDREW: Good question. I had had formal Spanish language training at the Defense Language Institute out in Monterey, but when I tested at FSI, I tested at a 2+/2+ in speaking and reading. After A-100, we went to ConGen, the consulate general course, and then I got six weeks of refresher Spanish and that easily got me to a 3/3. I just needed a little bit more practice, and we got to it very quickly. Yes, I did get a refresher, but I didn't need the whole course. That was fine. That was enough.

Q: Did Pam speak Spanish?

ANDREW: She did not. Obviously, she was not able to take advantage of the space available program for spouses to be able to take a full language course. However, she did do that later on for Russian and Swedish. For Spanish, she started some sort of quick basic course on it that FSI offered. She did that, but it was very brief, and she picked up a little bit, and then more when we were actually at post. I would say that it was enough for her to be able to exist, to live, to shop, to be able to do things when we were down there. In a way, it was too bad that I didn't take the full course. As I had tested very well, they were never going to give me the full course, but that probably would've been better for Pam. It's nice that FSI offers that when available.

Q: Okay. You had mentioned being able to, as a leadership talent, make a decision. When you took the consular course, did you find it easy to make decisions about visas?

ANDREW: You have put me in a minefield there, Mark. I have to tell you, I like to think I'm a nice guy. I realized this more when I got to post, and in ConGen, maybe I was fooling myself a little bit. "Oh, it'll be no problem! I can make a decision on yes or no to someone for a visa." I was concerned about making an informed decision and not using any unconscious bias and taking relative factors into account when making decisions on adjudicating visas, for instance. At Mexico City all of the visas that we did there were non-immigrant visas (NIV). Of course, at ConGen we were trained in non-immigrant visas, immigrant visas, and American Citizen Services.

You know, it's a little unnerving, the first time you do the practice window there at ConGen. You're nervous. But I'm so glad that we did it because it did kind of get you into that mode where you are going to have to decide, even if it's a decision that's not going to go the way that the client wants, so to speak, if I could call the applicant a client. To answer your question, yes, I was more than willing to use that military decision-making, but it's quite different when you're dealing with a person from another culture, another country, and you are a little-A ambassador in every setting that you're at. You start thinking about things like, gee, you don't really want to be a jerk here, right? Those were thoughts that were going through my mind. I wasn't afraid to make a decision, but it was also like, wow, my decisions are potentially going to have some ramifications. Maybe not like on the battlefield, but they were going to have ramifications. I was aware of that.

Q: Alright. So, you and family go down to Mexico City in about January or so?

ANDREW: Yeah. It was February of 2003. I don't remember the exact date. You know what, it was shortly after the Columbia space shuttle disaster. I remember watching that terrible tragedy, and I think that was in early February, so it was a couple of weeks after that when we drove down to Mexico. I remember that being in my brain. We crossed the border at Nuevo Laredo, and then we drove down to San Luis Potosi, stayed the night there, and then the next day we finished our trip on to Mexico City and the embassy.

I can tell you, just to finish that little driving in story. Thank goodness we had no incidents driving. It was a little nerve-wracking to go through Nuevo Laredo because

there were lots of armed men on streets, and I was like, "Holy smokes, I know what kind of weapons system that is. Please don't point it at me." We were fine. I will say that when we finally arrived at our apartment in Mexico City upon arrival, we had a bit of a surprise. It had a beautiful view, and it was an unusually clear day that first day. We were on the eighth floor of this nice apartment building in the Colonia called Lomas de Chapultepec, so Chapultepec Heights. It's a famous area and a nice area there in Mexico City. We had this beautiful view looking south. On a clear day, you could see Popocatepetl, the famous volcano. That very day that we arrived, it puffed smoke, so I thought it was the volcano welcoming us.

Q: Okay, that's an interesting way to look at it.

ANDREW: Well, the other way I was looking at it was like, "Do we need to evacuate?" It wasn't really an eruption, it was just puffing some smoke, but it was like, ooh, this is different. So, yes, we drove down in February 2003.

Q: Okay. How was the experience as… I assume they put you on the non-immigrant visa line first. How well were you prepared from the training?

ANDREW: I was fairly well-prepared, but what the NIV (non-immigrant visa) section chief and leadership did for all the newbies was to "gently" get us on the interview line. To back up a bit, from my A-100 class, 10 of us came to various posts in Mexico. Not all of us went to Mexico City. I can't remember how many came to Mexico City; there were a handful of us, but it was a total of 10 who went to various consulates throughout the country. You could say that 10 percent of our class went to Mexico alone.

Once we'd in-processed and gotten settled and gotten to our desks, the NIV leadership had us observe veteran adjudicators on the NIV line. Although it was "gentle," we didn't waste time and certainly within 2-3 days after our arrival in the section, we began observing veteran adjudicators/officers interviewing applicants. There was one person right in the window, we sat next to them, and we were observing them, watching them. They would say, "These are the questions I typically ask." As they were going through an interview, they would actually stop the interview and say, "This is what we gathered. What do you think about this?"

You'd be like, "Well, I don't know, what do you think?" It was definitely a version of on-the-job learning. What we learned at ConGen was helpful, but really, at the end of the day, it's nothing like doing it for real. You're seeing that person on the other side of the window, and of course, half the time they're scared to death because it's a bit intimidating to go to the American embassy or consulate to get a visa, especially in Mexico City. It was remarkably busy, too. We were doing 1,500 to 2,000 interviews per day. There was a bank of 15 windows there at the time. I think it's more now. We did a lot.

That first week, I would say that in days one and two of training we kind of back seated a little bit and provided some input or tried to figure out how we would do it. Then, what happened is, for two or three days after that, we switched positions. I became the

interviewer, and then the veteran adjudicator would sit on our shoulder for part of the day. Maybe it wasn't all the time every day. They would start to see that we were getting a little bit comfortable with this. In addition, there are certain words in Spanish, in this case, which are consular or NIV words and that we didn't necessarily know from our language training, so we had to learn those words and put those in our vocabulary. It wasn't that difficult, of course, but you just had to learn them and get used to it.

The veteran adjudicators helped us out with that as well. They were also there to help us observe the applicants from the time we hit the next button to bring someone up. We would watch the person walk up. See if they're making eye contact with you. See if they have their head down and are shuffling like they're really nervous. It's not that that, in the beginning at least, is necessarily going to influence our decision, but you kind of get an overall picture of the kind of person that's coming up, and then you ask your set of questions.

I would say that after the first week, it was kind of like piloting. We went solo. I think our second week we started going solo if I recall correctly. There were a couple of different mentors that we had. I guess that's the right term, mentor. We'd have one person who adjudicated a certain way, and then we'd have another mentor who looked at it a different way. This was quite helpful to have a couple of different people's viewpoints. Some people tended to be very thorough in the questions. It would take them quite some time to get through an interview. That helped us understand the process in depth. Other people were very quick and fast. Thus, you were exposed to a couple of different ways of how to approach the adjudicating of the visas. That was immensely helpful.

The first week of going solo was a bit uncomfortable, to be honest. I found out – and this is coming back to your question about decision-making – that even though I was able to do it and I did it very well, I did not like saying "no" to people. I think it's human nature to want to help people out. What I figured out is that adjudicating a visa should not be thought of as "personal." It's just business, right? A yes for them doesn't always mean helping them out. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. You hate to say no to people, though. You want to say, "Yeah, I want you to go to the U.S., I want you to enjoy it."

But we had to learn, of course, the famous Immigration and Nationality Act of 1986 and apply Section 214B. That is, you are guilty until proven innocent, essentially. We consider you an intending immigrant until you overcome that assumption. That was a difficult concept to grasp onto initially as the adjudicator. This was, of course, post-9/11. They had upgraded the systems in terms of doing criminal background checks before we actually approved/issued the visa. I figured, "Well, as long as they don't have any known criminal history, I don't feel bad in positively adjudicating a visa." But of course, there are other issues to consider, like potential public charge issues in the U.S. and not being in a legal status in the U.S. I would say that after the first month, I started to feel more comfortable making those types of decisions.

Q: Okay. The one other piece in the adjudication is recognizing fraud. How did that go for you?

ANDREW: Yeah, thank you. I actually got rather good at it. We had a Fraud Prevention Unit, FPU. I think every consular section has that. Our local employees, our Mexican FSNs, Foreign Service Nationals, who were working at the Fraud Prevention Unit saw that I was good at it, actually. They trained me a little bit more. I didn't actually do that specific work for them as they kept me on the line because I became a high producer. I could do a lot of visas in one day. I got pretty fast compared to some of my peers. But they would bring certain fraud cases to me. The actual fraud prevention officer they had in a different part of the consulate, and they would have him/her dealing with really serious cases.

They would kind of give me the minor fraud cases. They would direct them to my window, and I would try to get the truth out of some of these people. Occasionally I ended up doing what we called a "hard hit." There was a certain part of the law where they were no longer eligible to apply for visas. It was when there was serious fraud. For example, let's say it was some elderly person who had bought some bank statements or something like that to try and improve her case. We're probably not going to hit her hard. We're just going to say, "Look, your money was taken from you, and it's very clear to us that you gave us fraudulent documents." That's usually what it was about, fraudulent documents.

I became quite good at spotting those, and I think I also learned the lesson early on that you should never trust documents, even good documents. In some interviews with some of the folks who were going to commit fraud with poor papers, the fraud prevention guys also asked me, "Would you have issued this person a visa if they had not shown you the documents?"

In some cases, I would say yes, and they would say, "Well, what you need to do then is maybe re-look and see if you can issue the visa. Push those documents away." Now, if it was egregious fraud, no, of course not, but I thought that was a good way to look at it. So many of our applicants thought that the answer was always going to be no, and that they had to have documents. They would always try to shove documents underneath the window. You probably remember that. What I would do is, I would try to not look at those documents and do the interview, and then if I had a doubt one way or the other, then I would look at the documents. I think that's where I generally went.

Q: Yeah. Eventually, asking people for more documents seldom helps you make the decision.

ANDREW: It really doesn't. I did ask for documents sometimes if it was relevant to something. "Oh, I'm a farmer." Then it'd be like, okay, prove you're a farmer. We knew the exact type of little paperwork that the Mexican government issues farmers. They would show it to us, and I'd be like, okay. There's no reason to actually make a fraudulent document like this because farmers were generally poor cases. To come to your point, we learned not to rely on documents.

Q: Okay. Did they move you from non-immigrant to other sections?

ANDREW: Yes, but there's a big twist here. Number one, of course, is that in Mexico City there's no IV (immigrant visas). All immigrant visas are done in Ciudad Juarez, up by the border near El Paso. Some of us did some short-term rotations up there to do IVs. I volunteered but they never chose me, and I was never able to do it. They'd go up there for a six-week TDY (temporary duty assignment) to do IVs in Juarez.

Let me back up. It's a two-year tour. The idea was eight months in NIV, eight months doing something else, and eight months back in NIV. That's kind of how they wanted the first tour officers to operate. I was going to be going to ACS, American Citizen Services, to do something there, but I interviewed to be the staff aide for the ambassador along with a few other select people. They kind of liked my military background and my leadership capabilities and my ability to organize things, and I actually ended up doing that for eight months, being staff aide to the ambassador. I'm sure you have a question on that, but that's what I did instead of ACS.

Q: Well, yeah. Mexico City's embassy is one of the biggest in the world. Were you the only staff aide to the ambassador?

ANDREW: Yes, I was the only professional staff aide. Our ambassador's name was Antonio O. Garza. He went by Tony to his friends. He was a political appointee from the George W. Bush administration. He and Carl Rove and George W. Bush were all friends back in Texas. They knew each other very well. Tony Garza had actually been the railroad commissioner down there in Texas. They knew each other very well.

The reason I mention that is that because he was a political appointee, he was entitled to a Schedule C employee, and he was able to have an assistant come with him as a political appointee. I remember her name. She wouldn't mind me mentioning it. Her name was Mary Fraser. She generally dealt with political issues for him, so I didn't deal with that. I was essentially the guy that made sure every section did their job to support the ambassador. They often needed to provide paper to the ambassador to prepare him for meetings. I was the guy knocking on their doors, standing on their desks, saying, "Hey, you need to get this in for the ambassador."

I generally didn't have a problem, but that part of it really opened my eyes up to the rest of the embassy and all of the sections that were involved, because as a staff aide, I dealt with every section – Political, Econ, obviously Consular, Management, and Public Diplomacy, as well as RSO (Regional Security Office) and FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) and DEA (United States Drug Enforcement Administration), etc. Mexico City had 30 or more federal agencies represented, including EPA (United States Environmental Protection Agency), and Social Security. I really got to know how an embassy worked.

I was also the guy that everyone wanted to see…sometimes! The ambassador sat me down early on and he said, "Rob, you're the bad guy."

I said, “What do you mean by that, Ambassador?”

He said, “People are going to come up to you…” He said, “People always come up to me looking for visas or appointments. Rich Mexicans usually want to flex their connections with the ambassador.” He said, “I’m always going to tell them yes, and I’m going to take their information, and I’m going to give it to you, and you’re going to have to call them up and say, ‘Make an appointment.’ So, that’s why you’re the bad guy, and I expect you to do that.”

I was like, “Eh, that’s no problem. We can take care of that. And if it’s truly a VIP (very important person) thing, we can make a VIP appointment. It’s not a problem.” I did that often.

Up in the front office, as you know, there was the ambassador, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), the Protocol lady, the OMS’s, the Office Management Specialists, and then I was the staff aide. I dealt primarily with consular issues that came to the attention of the ambassador. It was mainly visas, but I also dealt with some very high-profile American citizen deaths that got the attention of the ambassador. I’ll briefly mention one.

There was a terrible, tragic accident of a small child, eight years old or something like this. He was on vacation with his parents in Cancun and was swimming in a big pool. One of the drains was not covered properly, and he actually got sucked into it. It was just awful. Of course, he died. He drowned in there, in a very constrained space. I saw the pictures afterwards, when they got him out of there. It was awful, and it affected me quite a bit, just looking at that and talking to the parents.

Of course, the consul general and the minister counselor for consular affairs for all of Mexico were also deeply involved with that one, but I was as well as the everyday person to help this family. We wanted to say, “This is the ambassador’s staff aide, and that person is available to you 24/7.” That was the only high-profile death that I remember clearly. There were others. That was the part that I certainly did not enjoy, dealing with deaths, especially such a terrible and easily preventable death like that. It was so tragic for that child, for that family. It affected me for quite some time. It affected me as an observer from far away. I never had to see the body, just pictures. But it’s kind of one of those, “Hey, this is real life,” things, and you affect real people’s lives in this position.

Q: Yeah. As staff aide to the ambassador, was that helpful for you in planning your next assignment?

ANDREW: It was. As I said, I got to know the rest of the embassy. The consulate in Mexico City is still on the same compound as the chancery there, but it’s a separate building, and you can get very insular there. You go to the main embassy for lunch, but you never go and visit people. The staff aide position helped me figure out the rest of the embassy and how the whole thing operates. Even though I was doing consular work, I was a political officer for my career track, and I was going to do a political tour next.

This has nothing to do with being a staff aide, necessarily. But as a consular officer, I was able to go and spend a little bit of time with the political section, and I ended up writing my first cable for them. I went along as a notetaker to some meeting, and I drafted the cable, so that was good for them to do that for me.

I do want to mention that another opportunity that the staff aide job brought to me was travel. The ambassador, when I became staff aide, had not visited all of the U.S. consulates in Mexico. There are/were nine consulates, as I recall, in Mexico. He'd only been to four of them when I became his staff aide. He said, "Rob, you are to look at my schedule, work with my political secretary, and schedule me to visit the rest of the consulates in your time as staff aide." I was able to do that. We basically visited one consulate a month. The most interesting consulate visit was to Nogales. We actually did what we call a "migrant trace" tour where we flew up to a certain airport and then took a car up to where migrants approached the border and then crossed the border at night. We were able to get in a CPB (Customs and Border Patrol) helicopter and do what they call a border trace flight as well. You could see, when you were flying over the border, all the footpaths that looked like well-worn lines crossing the border in the middle of the desert.

We also went to Hermosillo, to Nuevo Laredo, to Merida, to Guadalajara. Visiting these consulates was one of the main missions that he wanted me to take care of while I was his staff aide. I enjoyed the traveling aspect as well and taking care of the ambassador's travel. I traveled with him nearly everywhere he went outside of Mexico City. When he traveled, I was his travel aide as well to make sure that if we had to do changes in schedule or we had to get back on an earlier flight, I was the guy taking care of that.

It was an eye-opening job and that also gave me that experience to be able to do control officer duties. When you're a staff aide, you're kind of like a control officer 24/7, to a degree, for the ambassador. Of course, it's a very friendly environment, and it's not stressful 100 percent of the time, but you learn to be on the ball. You have to be on the ball.

Q: After the staff aide period and the work you did as a political officer, you go back for some final months as an interviewer, as a non-immigrant visa interviewer. Were you able to take that knowledge and use it to see social trends or demographic trends of the people coming in for visas?

ANDREW: Yes. I would say that's a fair assessment and a fair question. The short answer is yes. I think that that tour as a staff aide not only opened my eyes up to how the embassy ran, but also how we dealt with the country as a whole. I got to meet senior government ministers and leadership. We got to meet the poorest of the poor. The ambassador was our ambassador to all of Mexico or all of whatever country we're in. It was amazing. I would go to see young children with Down syndrome, for instance, and they produced some of the most amazing art. Then Mexican President Vicente Fox's wife, Marta Sahagun, was a huge supporter of that program. I got the opportunity to meet her via that art program. It opened up my eyes that people's disabilities can be

abilities, sometimes, and to not view people who are a bit down on their luck as necessarily bad visa cases.

Coming back to the visa line, I would say that before the staff aide position, I probably viewed *campesinos* (farmers) in particular as terrible cases. Campesinos are peasants or peasant farmers. I thought they would just want to get a visa and go live in the U.S. What I figured out after my staff aide experience and dealing with people from all strata of society – and of course, there's a lot of abject poverty in Mexico – is that people aren't always just interested in immigrating to the U.S. They might be interested in seeing a relative that's up there. They have no intention of overstaying a visa.

I remember one of these poor campesinos that I positively adjudicated a visa for. We did a visa validation study on him, as well, and he did exactly what he said he was going to do. He had a couple of sons that were illegal aliens in the Los Angeles, California area. He told me that he wanted to go track them down and bring them back to Mexico to work on his small farm, and I believed him. I issued that visa, and he went and got them. It was eye-opening. I got to where I became a far more efficient adjudicator of visas. It sounds bad, but the very good cases and the very bad cases were 30 second interviews. At the end, I was able to figure them out very quickly. It was the in between cases that took a couple minutes, and I would be like, "I could go either way here." I usually voted on the side of issuing.

I'm sure you found this as well, and you've probably heard this story before, but I found that the more you come to the realization of the fact that you are going to have issued visas to people who overstayed their visas and did all the things that you did not expect them to do, and then, on the flip side, you accept the fact that you denied visas to people who had the only intention of doing exactly what they said, you actually become a better adjudicator. You worry about it less. I'm fairly sure I remember this. My overall refusal rate after 16 months of adjudicating – the first eight months and the last eight months – was probably about 25 percent. That's really not that bad. That does include renewals. Renewal visas are almost 100 percent approved. Most people are good cases for that. I felt rather good about my time there.

I noticed some of my colleagues, I would say, were jerks. There were a couple of us who would revisit cases. If an applicant was refused, I would later on come to them and re-look at the case, and then maybe I would uphold it, but about 50 percent of the time I probably overruled it and issued a visa. Then, there were some people who were far too generous. They would issue a visa almost to anyone, and I was like, "Man, you can't do that. That's not how this is supposed to be done. You have to look into it."

Q: I can't help but ask. Mexico's a huge country. It's got lots of different kinds of famous people. Were there any famous people or celebrity cases that you remember that were kind of fun?

ANDREW: I did not personally adjudicate any famous people there, but you could always tell when there was a famous person there. Our locals were just agog. They were

just so giddy, like teenagers. It'd be like Jon Bon Jovi or someone walking in. I'm dating myself, but it's like an absolute rock star is coming in, and I'd be like, "Man, I feel so stupid. I don't know who this person is." I never did, though.

I did end up adjudicating some very well-known people in, say, the business world. I was like, "Oh, I know who that person is." I think Carlos Slim is the richest guy in all of Latin America and a remarkably successful businessperson. I did not personally adjudicate his visa, but I helped arrange it because he had talked to the ambassador and all of that kind of stuff. Of course, they didn't want Junior Officer Rob to adjudicate the visa. It had to be the consul general to do it. I was like, "Okay, whatever. You're welcome."

Then, there were famous singers. I couldn't tell you their names. They would be like "American Idol" equivalents. But again, you could always tell. The FSNs would all of a sudden start getting giddy, their knees would shake, and they'd be like, "I can't believe who's here." That type of thing. That was very cool.

Q: Okay. Well, time marches on, and you begin to think about the next tour.

ANDREW: Yes. As I had said, I always thought about serving in Russia. Our tour in Mexico was going to end in early 2005, two years after we started. When we looked at the bid list for our second assignment when it came out, there was a position opening up in the late summer, like August or September, of 2005, and they were looking for a first or second tour officer to work in the Pol/Mil (Political/Military) section in Embassy Moscow. It only required a 2/2 in Russian. The timing worked where I could go to FSI and do a 23-week course of Russian, which is half of the normal, but you can get to a 2/2 at that time frame.

Moscow, by the way, was number one on my bid list. this was going to be my second tour, so I wasn't lobbying yet or anything. It was simply putting in the wish list, sending it to the CDO (Career Development Officer), and the CDO doing their magic. That's what we were thinking about. I guess I went a little bit past your question, but I was thinking about Moscow at that time. It showed up on the list doing exactly the kind of job that I wanted to do, so I really put a high preference on that in the bid list.

Q: Okay. Did you get it?

ANDREW: I did, yes! We did get it. I can't remember how exactly we found out. I guess we did the handshake type of thing back then on the emails, but yes, we got it. I would begin Russian language training in February 2005 to August 2005, so six months or approximately 23 weeks.

Q: And in this case, your wife was able to join the class?

ANDREW: Yes, that's correct. She wasn't in my particular section, though. They actually made a point to separate spouses, because they thought that they might feel a little intimidated. What they did is they would put them in other sections, and then do it by

ability. My wife Pam did the full course. That was absolutely critical. She could read Cyrillic. They didn't evaluate spouses, but she was, I would say, probably at a 1+ level, which is fairly good. That was before we got to Moscow. Then we also did the area studies for Russia as well, so that was helpful. Bottom line, she was able to do the language, which was great and absolutely critical.

I remember Pam talking about one of her instructors when we were in language training for Russian. There was one young Russian woman who taught reading, and she was very tough. She was young, but we all called her the Soviet teacher. She was very gruff and rough on us, but we ended up learning the most from her, and Pam really liked her. She had a bit of a hard personality to get along with, but whenever she'd crack a smile, we'd be like, "Ah, we got her! We made her smile."

Q: Was the training adequate for what you were going to do?

ANDREW: I think so. While I was there, I would've had to go through Pol/Econ (Political/Economic) training, as well, before going to my first political assignment. I don't remember where that came in at, to be honest, in this sequence of training, but I did Russian training and Pol/Econ training before I went to Moscow.

I felt adequately trained, certainly in the language. Because I got to the 2/2 level, I knew that it would be hard for me to conduct business right off the bat. They did have a post language program, like many embassies do, but I will tell you, when you get into a political section, it's really hard to break away for that language training. Pam did some of that, and I did it when I could, but I found that it was so difficult to get to that my language, at best, ended up being between a 2 and a 2+.

When I had to go into meetings with Russians who didn't speak English, I usually brought along one of my FSNs to make sure that I didn't mess it up. But I was able to survive and thrive otherwise with my language training. I could get on the Metro. We could go shopping. We could travel. There was no problem with that. I'm telegraphing on the tour a little bit, but it was just when we got into more serious meetings that I would want someone else there to assist.

Q: Just one very quick question before we go into the nitty gritty of Moscow. Throughout your experience in Mexico City and then coming into Moscow, was everything healthful? Did you guys have all the healthcare you needed?

ANDREW: Yes, it was no problem. Mexico City and Moscow are fairly large embassies. We had our own health clinic in each of them. There were some health concerns in Mexico, as you probably know. The air pollution is pretty bad there. I think it's much better than it used to be; they have cleaner burning cars, of course, and they have traffic restrictions on certain days of the week. If your license plate ends in a certain number, you're not supposed to drive. Of course, what people do is they just buy another car if they can and get another license plate. This is going to sound a little bit gross, but I think it's useful for people to understand. Every day, when I woke up in Mexico City, like most

people, you go to the bathroom. I usually would blow my nose. What came out was dark. It was unhealthy to live there. That was always a particular concern for people who were asthmatic or had any other COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)-type problems. My mother, who had COPD, had some difficulties breathing in Mexico City.

When we could, we would travel out of the city to get to fresher air. Very rarely did we actually stay in Mexico City on weekends. If we did, we were touring the city, doing tours or exploring. We explored a lot of the country. Very rarely would we stay in the city for more than two weeks without getting out. We made some nice friends who were, it's easy to say, rich Mexicans. They owned some nice *haciendas* (ranches) south of the city in a town called Cuernavaca. It's a popular place to get fresh air. We would try to do that to try and clear out our lungs for a few days.

I have to say, we drove out when we left Mexico City, and there are huge signs on the main highway that say, "*Bienvenido a la Ciudad de México*," (Welcome to Mexico City) and when you're leaving it says, "Good luck, you're now departing Mexico City," or something like that. I have to say that that day when we left Mexico City by car for good on our way back to the U.S. for training before going to Moscow, we started feeling better. We made it up to near Monterey, to Saltillo, where we stayed the night. That next day when we woke up to finish our trip leaving Mexico, we started feeling better. Pam had actually developed a cough in the last six months, and it was totally related to the pollution. We were quite happy to get out of there. To come back to your question, the embassy in Mexico City provided adequate healthcare. I know I went past your question on talking about the pollution, but all of our shots, anything my daughter needed, etc. No problems whatsoever, medically.

Q: Actually, at the back of my mind, I was thinking about the pollution and the overall health situation in Mexico City. It is famous for pollution, smog.

ANDREW: We used to say there were three really big problems with Mexico City: too many people, too much traffic, too much pollution. Then there's crime, too, but once you learned your way around, you learned where not to be and what to do to avoid crime. The famous or infamous thing that happened to some unfortunate Americans was what was called "express kidnapping." This generally occurred when one would get into an unauthorized taxi, those little green and white VW (Volkswagen) Beetles. Those were not authorized. Pam took a lot of taxis, but she always took what we called the "sitio" or taxis at a taxi stand. They're licensed, you call them by radio, and there's a paper trail of where someone's at. Pam took taxis all over the city to get around potentially harmful transportation issues.

We were not supposed to travel on the Metro, their subway, for instance. I did it a couple of times with some other folks, but we were not supposed to do it by ourselves. I can see why, especially if you're a single female officer. I hate to say it, but the culture is a little bit where if you're a blonde, blue-eyed, nice looking American girl, you are going to get hit on pretty roughly in some of these situations. It was like, just don't do it. That's too bad.

Q: I did not ask you about the drug cartels and all of that, mainly because I didn't think in your position you would end up having all that much to do with it. Was that an oversight?

ANDREW: Not entirely. The drug cartel war, which we're so used to hearing about, really only got substantially worse in 2006 (after I left Mexico) after Vicente Fox left the presidency. The drug war heated up during the Mexican presidency of Felipe Calderon. He campaigned on a war on drugs, and that is what it became. I'm not blaming him or anything, but that was where the war on drugs became a lot more real and you started having the murder rates go extremely high up, the drug violence, just terrible things. I heard about it later on in my Foreign Service career when I came back to Latin America. The tour after Moscow was in San Jose, Costa Rica. My DEA folks gave me a lot of intel when I was there on that because of my position at the time.

Was it happening during my time in Mexico? Of course, it was happening. We were very cognizant of it. Yes, drug violence was bad, but it was not like what it became. We were careful about our personal safety. We were careful about how we did things. We paid attention at the Security Overseas Seminar. There were problems while we were there, in our time frame, but not to the level that they were a few years later.

Q: Alright, so, Moscow. The same general question: As you arrive and get yourself settled, how are the health conditions there?

ANDREW: Not too bad. Moscow is a big city. Before I leave Mexico City completely, one of the problems with it is that it sits in a bit of a bowl. Mexico City is built on Lake Tenochtitlan, named for the old Aztec city. The Spaniards drained the lake. Earthquakes were a big problem in Mexico City, as you might know; we experienced plenty of them. The city, being a "bowl," is surrounded by a ring of mountains. Even at the lake floor where we were at, that was 7,000 feet. Being in a bowl combined with being at altitude made the pollution that much worse. I remember that the first few days after I arrived in Mexico City, I had a headache. They call it a high altitude/pollution headache. It went away after your body kind of adjusted to it.

In Moscow, you didn't really have that issue. It was a relatively flat plain area. There are some hills and mountains there, but you're not sequestered in a bowl. What that means is, the pollution of the city can be blown out. It doesn't sit there. However, there are other health concerns. Hepatitis and tuberculosis are big concerns throughout Russia and in Moscow itself. HIV/AIDS (Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), of course, was also a problem in Russia. However, it was not a problem for us, per se, unless you're engaging in potentially risky behavior.

I'll give you an example of how happy I was with our Embassy medical clinic there. My daughter Jessica went to the Anglo-American School of Moscow. In the first month or so of our tour, she fell down and hit the back of her head on a brick wall. It was a pretty good bump. Someone called me and said, "Hey, your daughter is in the medical clinic

here." I was like, uh oh. I went down there, and she was okay, but we had a doctor who took great care of her. The doctor's name was Dr. Mark Cohen. I don't know if you know that name, but he is one of the Foreign Service Specialists featured in the book put out by AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) called *Inside a U.S. Embassy*. You recognize this book? He's in the section called "Who works in an Embassy?" When I read this book and saw his name in there, I was like, oh wow. He was the regional medical officer/doctor in Moscow that stitched up my daughter's head and took care of her. The clinic at the Embassy in Moscow was strictly outpatient. It didn't involve anything too complicated, but could take care of minor surgeries like stitching up minor injuries. Dr. Cohen took great care of our daughter and our family. That was indicative of the quality of the health care provided by the embassy. The level of healthcare was great. The doctors were good.

I would say that the only bad thing was that we didn't have a good dentist, and I didn't really care for the Russian dentists there. There was an American practicing dentistry there, and we all went to this one guy, but I always worried about him. It was like, why are you practicing here and not in the U.S.? But it was okay. He and his staff did basic dental work, and if we needed anything major, we just waited or went to the U.S. to get it on leave or something, or while in between assignments. Medical care for us was generally good. No complaints.

Other health issues… I don't really recall there being other health issues than the ones I mentioned, and that affected mainly people in Moscow who either engaged in risky behavior or they weren't taking care of themselves. Alcoholism is a real problem there in Russia, as well as smoking. I remember not seeing a lot of older Russians who were smoking or drinking. They all killed themselves, essentially. The older Russian population that I saw were in good shape because they took care of themselves.

Q: Interesting. Alright. We're about to start your tour in Moscow. Would you like to continue, or would you like to break? I'm happy to do either. There's no time limit.

ANDREW: Well, maybe it is a logical time to break, Mark. I wanted to share two things from Mexico before we left Mexico, if I could, if that's alright.

Q: Yes, absolutely.

ANDREW: One of the things I wanted to mention – and I think it's important for both the oral history and my own memoirs here – is duty officer calls. I haven't talked about duty officer calls yet. I think this is going to be the only one I talk about. There was one in Mexico City that was actually humorous. It covers the topic of how not only to do your job whatever it is, but reminds the reader/listener that you are going to be called upon to be the duty officer for a week at a time. It's after regular work hours. You get the duty phone. The calls you get are mostly going to be dealing with issues like lost passports and other American Citizens Services such as deaths, or if Washington wants something in the middle of the night.

American citizens or their relatives are the ones that call the embassy when there is a problem. Generally, the first person that they talk to will be a Marine on duty at Post One. If that Marine can resolve it, they will. They can usually handle simple issues like telling folks when the visa section or ACS opens to take care of routine problems. They will say to the caller, for instance, "Yeah, the embassy's open tomorrow. We can't get you a passport in the middle of the night; you're going to have to come tomorrow." Then, of course, it's those issues that they can't deal with when that phone call gets forwarded to us as duty officers.

On this one phone call I got, the Marine on duty patched this lady through because he said, "This lady says her husband has been kidnapped."

Of course, that got my attention right off the bat. I said, "Immediately patch her through. I want to talk to her." I do all the things that a good duty officer should do: I get her name, the name of the husband, any identifying features, passport number, all of this kind of stuff, any kinds of details. This is when her story starts to unravel a bit. I said, "How long have you been married?" I felt something was off, so I wanted to dig a little bit deeper.

I also realized, after speaking with her for a few moments, and though I can't make an official diagnosis, that it was pretty clear to me that she had been drinking. It didn't bother me personally and I did not hold it against her. Folks might drink when they may be upset about something.

In response to my question on the longevity of her marriage, she said, "Well, we're not actually married. We're in a common law marriage." I was like, okay. That's fine.

I said, "Do you have a ransom note? Do you have any idea who kidnapped your husband?"

She said, "Well, yeah, it's his sister." That is when I started going hmm, okay, what's going on with this?

I said, "Why would his sister kidnap him from you? That starts to sound like it's not a kidnapping to me."

She said, "Well, they don't like me." I don't know if she admitted this, but I found out later on that sometimes she could be a bit confused.

So, I took down all the information after that and I said, "Do you think that he's in any physical danger?"

"No."

Let me back up. In an earlier part of the call, she had asked me to close the border. I almost felt like saying, "Hold on a minute. Let me clap some keys on my laptop. Okay,

the border's closed." So, that's when I started digging a little bit more, and I said, "Do you think he's in any danger?"

"No, no, he's with a family member. He's not in any danger."

I said, "Okay. Let me investigate this a little more and I'll get back to you."

I actually waited until the next morning because I figured that this was not an imminent threat to anybody. The next morning, I went and briefed the consul general, and she said, "Yeah, Rob, we know this lady. We'll take it from here." I turned all my notes, as you do, to the consular folks, along with my duty log. I didn't talk to her again on that duty week.

Here's where the "wow, small world" moment is about to come in. Several months later, Pam and I and a group of other embassy Americans were vacationing together in a town called San Miguel de Allende. It's an immensely popular place for Americans to go. A lot of expats live in this area. It's a beautiful area with lots of great shopping, especially for spouses, with things like black pottery and wood art. If you look at our house right now, you would see that it is full of it. Well, we're in this little restaurant by our hotel, and we're not exactly being bad, but we're being a little bit loud and we're talking. We're talking about embassy stuff. I'm starting to think, maybe we shouldn't talk quite so loudly.

There's this couple at a table next to us, and this lady comes up to me and says, "I can't help but hear that you guys work at the embassy."

I said, "Yes, that's right." There was no point denying it.

She said, "Did I hear one of them call you Rob?" I'm starting to get a little nervous here, like, uh oh, what's going to happen. She said, "Is your name Rob Andrew?"

I said, "Yeah."

She goes, "I want you to know that you are the least evil person I dealt with at the embassy."

I said, "What do you mean?"

"Oh, don't you remember? It was my husband who got kidnapped by his sister."

I said, "Oh, you're her!"

She said, "Yeah, it's me."

I noticed there was a gentleman at the table with her, so I said, "Is this him?"

She said, "No, no, this is a new guy." With that I internally rolled my eyes and then had a nice chat with her. (Her new guy looked like a beaten puppy---felt bad for him…a bit!)

I wanted to share that story number one, to remind people that we do duty calls. I had bad duty calls and I didn't want to talk about those, about the ones where someone dies. Some are not too surprising: There was an American who was climbing a steep mountain in his 70's who was in bad shape and he had a heart attack. While I don't like to focus on those kinds of calls, I should acknowledge that those things happened, too. But this one I like because of the humorous part of it, and what were the odds that I would actually meet the person I had a duty call with, right? What were the odds? So, I wanted to share that story. We'll finish on that. I think it's representative of duty calls.

I wanted to see if there's anything I wanted to preview in Moscow before we take a break if that's okay. I do want to say that for Moscow – and we'll get into it next time – my portfolio there in the Pol/Mil Office was arms control and non-proliferation issues. Those were the exact issues that I wanted to work on. I guess I'll leave today's session with the sense that we were quite enthused to be going to Moscow. I'd been thinking about Russia and the Soviet Union since the seventh grade when I wrote the consulate in San Francisco, and I was finally going to be able to get there and experience this dream tour in the Foreign Service. Thank you very much to Uncle Sam, Secretary Powell, President Bush, and the CDO who got me there. We were ready to go.

Q: Great! Alright. It's a good note to end this session. I'm going to pause the recording.

Alright. Today's May 25th, 2021. We're resuming our interview with Rob Andrew. Rob, you wanted to add a little bit to Mexico before we went on to Russia.

ANDREW: That's right, yeah. Good morning, Mark. Good to be back here with you again. Just two more brief points about Mexico: One is a visa line war story that I think is reflective and helps talk about some of those fraud issues that we were discussing. The other one I'll talk about first, actually, and that's just to mention that while I was there, Secretary of State Colin Powell made an official visit. I did not work the visit, unfortunately. I didn't get that experience, but I was able to be part of the meet and greet. At the embassy there in Mexico City, which is a cube-shaped building, not unlike the embassy that we have in Moscow, there is a large courtyard in the center. This is where we did the meet and greet.

We got pictures with Secretary Powell, which was nice and great, but I have to tell you, he was like a rock star to all of our Mexican Foreign Service nationals, our FSNs. He was patient about it, but he also didn't like being crowded by people. That's why I called him a rock star; it almost felt like you were at a concert, and people were pushing to get to him. He was firm with people in saying, "Listen, you wait for a picture." He would literally say, "You need to go wait. I'm going to take a picture with this person now, and then it'll be your turn."

It was kind of funny and unorganized. I was wondering where his handler was to help control that. I noticed that they didn't do a very good job of crowd control for him. Thankfully, it wasn't anywhere close to being a stampede, but he was definitely pushed a little bit. He didn't care for that, and frankly, I did not blame him at all. But he was very friendly when you spoke to him. I got to shake his hand. For me, being a first tour officer and seeing the Secretary of State and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff before that, I was in awe, and a bit of hero worship there, I have to admit. It was really cool to meet one of the people that I considered to be one of my role models.

I don't know if you've heard of it, but he used to have this thing called "Powell's 13 Rules." You can Google it. I always loved it. My favorite one was, "Get mad, then get over it." If something makes you upset, go ahead and get mad, but then get over it and move on, you know? It was really a privilege. That was the one and only time that I had the opportunity to meet him as Secretary of State. In the second term of George W. Bush, which I'll cover in the Moscow part, Condi Rice was Secretary of State by then. That was the first story.

Then, the second add-on story was from one of the visa interviews that I did. I think I did well over 30,000 visa interviews while I was there in Mexico. It's hard for any particular ones to stand out, but usually there are the awfully bad ones or a very good one or an interesting one that I remember. One of the ones I had was a young man, probably in his mid-20's. It was a first-time visa for him. As I was going through my interview with him – of course, it was in Spanish – some things just seemed off. I'd been there for a while. This wasn't my first few months of visa duty. This was either later on or after I did my staff aide position.

At any rate, I felt pretty experienced. I noticed that he was using words that most Mexicans living in Mexico did not use. To be honest, I can't remember exactly the words he was using, but it just seemed like this was how Mexicans in California speak. There is a difference in the dialect, a little bit. It's still Mexican Spanish, but there were certain words he was using where I was going, "Are you sure you've never lived in the U.S. or been to the U.S. before?" He insisted that he'd never been to the U.S. and did not speak English, but I just had too many doubts, so I said, "Look, I'm sorry, I'm not going to approve the visa. I don't really believe you."

Then, in absolutely perfect American English with no accent, like he'd grown up in the U.S. like you and I… I will use a minor explicative here. Not the F-word, the S-word. He said, "You know what you are? You're just a piece of shit."

I said, "Well, I guess I got it right. You are living in California, aren't you?" His accent was definitely a West Coast accent in English, kind of like my accent. In the United States, our accents are a little different, depending on the region, and California tends to have a very neutral accent. It was kind of funny. I thought, well, at least I made one correct decision on my visa line.

I thought I would share that with you because it really stood out to me. He got very visibly upset. It was clear that he was abusing his status, whatever it was. I don't think he'd had a visa before, so he was up there illegally and maybe he at one point would have been a DREAMer (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) or something like that, but it was before the DREAM stuff came in. He was trying to get back. But he was well-to-do, well-spoken, well-dressed, so I'm sure he's probably in the U.S. now, but he was very mad at me and called me a POS (piece of shit). That's all I had on Mexico. Just wanted to share that with you.

Q: Sure. I mean, these are the kinds of cases that you get everywhere, although because Mexico is right next to the U.S. and very highly populated, you probably get, on average, a few more than somebody in Europe or East Asia.

ANDREW: That's right. And look, I grew up in California. I think I put it in this interview; I grew up in an immigrant community. I started learning and listening to Spanish when I was a little boy. Thus, I used all of that knowledge while doing visa adjudications in Mexico. Unfortunately, some people look at Mexicans and sometimes… I don't know if it's racist, per se, but they look down a little bit on our Mexican neighbors. That's always bugged me a lot. I saw them as my people as much as anybody else. I grew up in America, but in an immigrant-dense society, so I always felt that I was a little part-Mexican myself. I think that helped me overall in my adjudications, but it also disadvantaged those who were trying to be fraudulent, and I could see through them, to a degree.

Q: Right. Okay. So, now we're going to transition to a completely different part of the world to have a different job.

ANDREW: That's right. I think we talked a little bit last time about my language training and area studies. My wife Pam was able to also take advantage of the language training. We arrived in Moscow in early September, perhaps late August of 2005, after the six-month language course that got us to a 2/2 in Russian. That's the goal for the 23-week course. You really need 44 weeks to get to a strong 3/3, and I wasn't able to do that.

We arrived there in early September. I was in the Pol/Mil section, as part of the larger Political Section there in Moscow. At that time, there were three subsections within Political. There was what they called Pol/External, Pol/Internal, and Pol/Mil. Since then, they've changed that. I think it's just Pol/Internal and Pol/External, and they brought the Pol/Mil part into the external reporting part. It was a large section. There were at least 20-some odd officers. There was a lot going on. Of course, this was a different time frame in Russia. I'm quite sure our Pol section is smaller now with all of the expulsions and tension that's going on in today's world.

Q: Just one quick remark I wanted to mention about that. Yes, of course, we are now, as of 2021… We have very few diplomats in Russia, given the mutual expulsions over these many years. As we speak, President Biden's getting ready for a summit in June. It may change. One of the things they may want to do as a small show of agreement is increase

the number of diplomats. Of course, the fewer you have, the less eyes on the ground you have.

ANDREW: That's right for both sides, for that matter. I just saw the newsbreak a few minutes ago, actually, that they've set a date. Apparently, it'll be June 16th in Geneva this year. I'll be keeping a close eye on that as well. I'm telegraphing what I do now as an adjunct instructor at OU, but I teach a course in U.S.-Russia relations now. It is fair to say that I still stay up on this topic and watch it very closely.

I think you're right, Mark. I think there will be attempts to, as we've been saying, bring stability to the relationship and continue to agree to disagree on certain issues and then work on other areas of cooperation where we can, like climate change and hopefully non-proliferation and arms control issues and a few other areas of the world where our interests coincide. But I think it's still going to be a tough relationship for a while. We hope to maybe calm the relationship down a little bit, though, and I'm really happy about this summit that's coming up. (This interview took place before the February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine by Russia.)

Then, comparing current events to the timeframe that I was there overall, from 2005 to 2007, the relationship is quite strained and different. When I was there, it was the time of George W. Bush's presidency. Colin Powell was the Secretary of State for the first part of it, then Condi Rice. The relationship was not perfect, but there was definitely more congeniality, a little bit more partnership, certainly in the immediate post-9/11 era where the Russians shared real intelligence with us on Afghanistan and a few other areas. I think that that deep cooperation probably lasted for about a year, and then it started to fall apart, as it inevitably does. I arrived after that initial honeymoon period after 9/11, so to speak – the honeymoon period being the improvement in relations and Putin's outreach to us to assist in the war on terrorism. It had cooled off, certainly, by the time I got there, but it had not been extinguished. That was certainly still the time of George and Vlad, so to speak.

I actually have a Putin story, which I'll save for just a little bit later, but I wanted to talk about some of the major issues that I worked on as a second tour officer in this case. One of the biggest non-proliferation issues that I worked on was called the MANPADS Arrangement. This stands for Man Portable Air Defense Systems. These are the weapons systems like in the U.S. where we have a Stinger missile; that's a shoulder-launched surface to air missile. For the Russian equivalents, their designations would be SA-7 and others.

What this arrangement was about was coming to an agreement between the U.S. and Russia, basically to help eliminate old stocks of Russian MANPADS and to help ensure that they did not fall into the wrong hands. We helped build facilities in Russia to dismantle and disarm some of these weapons systems under the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, DTRA. They did that. I worked on the policy side and in some of the negotiations a little bit, but that's what that was about. In my timeframe – and I can't remember exactly when it was, but I want to say it probably would have been the late

2006 timeframe – we came to a formal arrangement. There are all of these terms – an accord, an arrangement, a treaty. An arrangement had a certain legal definition to it. It was called the MANPADS Arrangement.

I was part of the negotiating team. I was definitely not the lead negotiator, but I was part of it. I also took notes on it and did the reporting on it for Washington. But I was a valued member of the team. The lead negotiator would ask me various questions throughout the negotiations. "What do you think about this? Are the Russians being honest with us?" I would try to give the U.S.-based team some on the ground truths during the negotiations. I truly felt that I was a part of the team and doing real diplomatic negotiations, it was great. I got to use some of those skills that I thought I did have in this particular arrangement.

Q: Just a very quick technical question. It's a weapon that is launched by military personnel, but does it take only one person, or is there a little team that helps provide targeting? How does it work to actually fire one?

ANDREW: Yes, it literally can be one person. For example, I know the American system a little bit better. There's the Stinger missile. It looks kind of like a grenade launcher, but it's got its own infrared seeking system. I don't know exactly what it is, but it tracks a target, the missile itself. When you shoot it, the missile goes and tracks the target (like a helicopter or a low-flying jet) and takes it down. This was used very effectively in Afghanistan when the CIA supplied weapons like these and other weapons. These were the weapons that helped bring down a lot of Russian helicopters in Afghanistan during their time there in the '80s. We saw how effective they were, and the Russians did as well. They certainly did not want any loose weapons around, including our own. We wanted to get rid of ours that might have fallen into enemy hands. But this was as much about being worried about the fall of the Soviet Union and not having full control over some of the arsenals that the Soviets had.

But yes, to come back to answering your question, definitely… Usually you had a team of people. One person might be helping spot an airplane, or a few people, but it could definitely be a one-person job.

Q: Okay. Did the arrangement ultimately… When you say some of the weapons were also American, did we have responsibility for eliminating any of our equipment?

ANDREW: That's a good question. I don't know. As I recall, it was totally focused on the former Soviet Union, but I'm sure there was a clause in there about destroying any weapon, not just Russian-made weapons that may be found. If you recall, there was an incident in Africa. I want to say Ethiopia? There was somewhere in Africa where an airliner was brought down by one of these weapons systems many years back. That's always the biggest fear for commercial air traffic, is that some group will have access to this type of weapon system and bring down a commercial airliner somewhere. That was really the motivation for this MANPADS Arrangement. It served Russian interests; it

served our interests. I'm sure they worried about Chechen terrorists having access to these weapons, as well as other groups. This was all about helping them eliminate it.

Now, we're in 2021. I have no idea what the status of the arrangement is. It may have expired. It may not have been renewed. Certainly, in the current state of the relationship, I wouldn't see that even this type of relationship would go forward. But we probably finished doing what we were doing with it in this particular case to support non-proliferation efforts within the former Soviet Union.

That was the main negotiating team that I worked on when I was there. Of course, there were other non-proliferation arrangements that I worked on and protocols that we worked on with the Russians. For instance, there was the Missile Technology Control Regime. You may have heard of this – MTCR. There was also something called the Wassenaar Arrangement. These weren't items that I worked on in terms of negotiating but rather in terms of enforcement, or we would share information with each other. In my case, we would share information with the Russians when we thought that they might have been in violation of one of these agreements. Say, for instance, when they would provide arms and weapons to Iran or Syria, we would call them out on it and say, "Look, we believe that you are violating a protocol, like the Wassenaar Arrangement or MTCR."

Now, for a lot of these, there aren't necessarily penalties that happen. It's not treaty-level status. It's just an understanding, an arrangement, that we have. But if we ever caught the Russians out on something real and we had proof, then they would take it seriously. If we just gave them a piece of paper and said, "We don't like you selling weapons systems, these S-400s, to Iran or to Syria. We think that they may be used in a manner that's against international law or even your own laws." They would always ask us to prove it. Of course, we had to be careful, because whenever we shared intelligence with them, it was a tricky thing with sourcing and all of that.

One time we had credible intelligence that we were willing to share with them, and we really caught them on their back feet. When we provided this evidence of illegal proliferation from Russia to Syria to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, their disarmament branch, I could see their eyes kind of go wide. It was clear that they were not aware that this was going on, that someone else was not telling their own Ministry of Foreign Affairs what they were doing. They said, "We will get back to you on this," and they did, and they stopped this transfer. It did work! The Russians didn't always listen, but occasionally, they did, specifically if we could show them that they were violating a legal concept. Even if it wasn't a treaty item, if we could show them that they were doing something wrong, then they would address it. That was a good thing in the relationship. That would be a great place to get to today in the relationship.

The other part of my portfolio was on arms control issues. Specifically, before it became New START (Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms), the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) Treaty. There were usually no big issues. It was more like the Russians would request information from us to share information, and we would do that. To some degree, I would become a little of a

mechanism of information delivery to them. It was very technical. They would ask about the O-ring on a rocket and some specific characteristics. Of course, I'm not a rocket expert, but I would take that information and we would go through our process and then I would go back and give it to them through the START Treaty process.

After the negotiations are ended for a big treaty like that, you have various groups that are responsible for this information. We would help those groups with the communication, essentially, with the Russians. I don't recall any major disagreements on the START Treaty implementation or verifications while I was there. I think it ran relatively smoothly. Today, it was only three or four months ago that we renewed New START, the last real remaining arms control agreement that we have with the Russians. I'm certainly familiar with the issues that they're talking about when they do this, about how many strategically deployed nuclear warheads you can have, how many launchers, how many missiles, bombers, things like this.

This is a good arrangement for the world, these arms control agreements dealing with strategic weapons. At the height of the Cold War, between the two of us, we had about 80,000 of these weapons deployed. Think about that. Now, on each side we have roughly 1,550. A lot of real work has been done. That includes work from my predecessors, work while I was there in Moscow, and of course work since I've left Moscow. There were all the teams, the Arms Control Bureau, the Arms Control Verification Office, all of that. They've done really good work. It's been beneficial for both sides. I am proud to have been a small link in the chain of continuing that process, even though I had no part in the negotiations for START. I certainly had a part in the implementation of it, which I'm proud to have been a part of.

Q: I just have one technical question. Maybe you know. Strategic arms reduction talks… We are reducing all the different kinds of nuclear weapons, as you mention, from launchers and so on. To what extent, though, was that something that we needed to do anyway because some of our weapons systems were aging out, and similarly, some of the Russian systems were aging out?

ANDREW: No doubt about it. We can work within these arms control arrangements to modernize weapons. I think that's going on now, as a matter of fact. Some of it was aging. Let me highlight an important point: On all of these strategic arms reduction treaties, we've never actually gotten rid of the nuclear warheads themselves. We've gotten rid of the delivery systems. They're in storage somewhere. Rose Gottemoeller, who's one of the premier American negotiators and diplomats on this issue would say that the holy grail of nuclear arms control would be actually getting rid of warheads. That's very tough, extremely sensitive. Neither Russia nor ourselves, at this point, have been willing to entertain that to much of a degree other than saying, "Yes, we want to talk about it someday."

To reiterate, part of it is modernization and getting rid of some of those legacy weapon systems, but both sides maintain a nuclear triad. That term was quite common during the Cold War, with triad meaning we have three primary ways of delivering nuclear weapons.

We could do it by bombers, like Air Force bombers; by ICBMs, intercontinental ballistic missiles; and by submarine-launched ballistic missiles, SLBMs. Both sides maintain arsenals to be able to maintain strategic stability. The concept of MAD, or Mutually Assured Destruction, comes into play here. One side would not be tempted to launch on the other one because the other side knows that they would get attacked too. These ideas of strategic stability are all part of this and being able to maintain it.

I think I can echo President Reagan, to a degree, because I think Reagan really had an epiphany at some point in his presidency where he said, "I'd like to get rid of all of these weapon systems." Of course, the issue is that both sides need to do it at the same time. If one side really decreases, then the other side has a strategic advantage, and there's an option, at that point, that they might actually be able to attack without any retaliation. In all of these arms control agreements it's important to maintain some sort of parity, as we go down, and we did that. I think that's going to be the next largest, hardest step for the U.S. and Russia, along with hopefully China, to further reduce strategic arms. With some of the new weapons that we now see today, like the low-yield tactical nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles, there is quite a bit of potential to see new arms races. There's been a lot of press coverage of those particular weapons systems.

Are these weapons systems addressed in these treaties? Not yet. There's a lot of work to be done. To come back to your question, Mark, yes, I think that part of it was that it was cost-efficient to get rid of these weapon systems, and it came at no cost to either country's strategic stability.

Q: That is exactly what I was wondering about. Okay. Go ahead.

ANDREW: Let's see. I also, in addition to working on non-proliferation and arms control issues, was naturally the officer who did a lot of Pol/Mil reporting. I wrote dozens if not hundreds of cable reports on the Russian defense industry and their defense or national security strategy. I worked closely with the Defense Attaché Office, in these matters. We were not attached hip to hip, but whenever I would write on these topics, I usually coordinated with them to make sure I could see what their thoughts were on it. I wrote on every aspect of Russian military issues, from their doctrine to deployments. There were not a lot of deployments while I was there.

I also wrote about arms sales, regarding Rosoboronexport, the Russian Arms Export Agency. They sell to a lot of customers around the world that we really don't want them to sell to, so I would keep close track of that. They would just sell four and a half billion dollars' worth of tanks to some countries, and it'd be like, why are you selling tanks to that country? That country doesn't really need them. But they were doing it for cash purposes, for money. They have a huge arms industry, and they like to sell their weapons to other countries to get the money. That's a good source of income for Russia.

One of the most touching cables I wrote was on a young Russian soldier, Andrey Sychyov, who had been a victim of a form of brutal hazing. The Russian term for it is called dedovshchina, which loosely translated means "rule of the grandfathers" or the

more senior conscripts in the Russian Army who beat on more junior conscripts. Young Russian soldiers that are coming through their version of basic training and then in their initial units, they are really subjected to this hazing. I would hate to be a young Russian soldier. They are abused in every way – physically, mentally, psychologically. I guess the idea is to prepare them for war, right? But it can also be sexual abuse. There were beatings, torture. The idea was to make them tough.

There was this one soldier, Andrey Sychyov, who got a lot of coverage in this 2005-2006 timeframe about being a victim of dedovshchina. The beating he received resulted in the amputation of his legs, his genitalia, and a finger. He may have died eventually from his injuries, but he did survive in the timeframe that I was there. It was really indicative of how they treat their own conscript soldiers. If we did that type of thing, there would be a minor revolution – not only in our armed forces, but in society. America's sons and daughters being treated like that? We expect them to get treatment to make them tough and to make them military, but not torture and not abuse. This is a problem that remains in the Russian army today.

It had its origins in pre-Soviet times, but really came to be routine in the late 1960s onward. This was one of the most touching reports that I did, to really try and understand what happens to Russian conscripts. I did a series of reports on this Russian soldier, his mother, and a movement started by mothers of conscripts. It was called "Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia. Basically, it was mothers against this type of hazing happening to their sons, that type of thing.

During the Soviet Afghanistan War, the Russians acknowledged about 10,000 deaths from their experience there. Unofficial figures put it at three or four times higher than that. The reason I mention that is that there were mothers' organizations that formed during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, similar to the one against hazing. The basic questions would be, "What happened to my son? I never got his body back. What happened?"

One wonders today how prevalent is hazing in the training of their army? That's something that we just don't always have good insight into. Being a former soldier myself, I never like to hear about any soldier being tortured, especially by their own people.

Q: Along the same lines, did you also report on readiness?

ANDREW: In terms of their armed forces?

Q: Yeah.

ANDREW: That was a little bit more on the defense attaché officer's side. I would be involved in that, but I focused more on policy issues. However, I did do some reporting on readiness. I do recall writing some cables on the fact that the Russian army, at this time – and again, this was the 2005 to 2007 timeframe – was not the Soviet army that we

all feared during the Cold War. It was rebuilding. In that aspect of readiness, we would make assessments that we weren't too worried about a resurgent threat, at that point, from the Russian military. Certainly not towards Western Europe or what we would then call Eastern Europe. Some of those countries were starting to join NATO, like the Baltics and Romania and Bulgaria.

At that time, we did not assess that they were much of a threat. Of course, it was in 2008, a year after I left, that the Russians invaded Georgia and it was an imperfect operation by the Russians, from a military point of view. Of course, it wasn't too difficult for them with their overwhelming firepower and manpower to overwhelm the Georgians, but the Russians had some problems that they fixed later on before the Ukraine conflict. That was, in some respects, their first instance of stretching their military muscle during their rebuild of the military. It showed that they were still lethargic from the Soviet era, and they learned those lessons that they applied to Ukraine later on.

There was one other topic. Terrorism in Russia was an issue. About a year before I got there, you might recall the attack on the school in Beslan by Chechen terrorists. Russian special forces went in, and, in the operation, a lot of children were killed, a couple hundred. It was terrible. Terrorism (whether committed by the Russian state itself or by "bonafide" terrorists) was a constant issue. I won't say it was a threat over me while we were there, but it was always an issue that you had to be aware of. The takeover of a theater in Moscow had occurred not long before Beslan as well. The Russians had gassed the theater to put people to sleep, but they used too much of it and there wasn't good enough ventilation, so they ended up killing a lot of people, including hostages, not just the bad guys.

There was definitely a fear of Chechen issues when I was there. When the Russians threw in their support to us after 9/11, they were really looking for us to support them in their internal war against the Chechens. We didn't really do that. We recognized that there were terrorists, and we would cooperate on that, but we did not consider all Chechens to be terrorists. We made a distinction between what we called Chechen separatists and Chechen terrorists. The Russians didn't. We disagreed on that.

Right. A couple of other issues, but did you have a question before I went on?

Q: No, that was it.

ANDREW: I will come to my Putin story, but I want to mention this first. Secretary Rice visited several times during my tour there. I wasn't able, unfortunately, to sit in on any meetings and do note-taking. That was done by the ambassador, at that point. But I was able to meet her, also, in a meet and greet situation a couple of times. This is a little story. One of the meets and greets occurred in the basement of the embassy there in Moscow, where there's a tennis court and a large area where you can gather people. My parents happened to be in Moscow at that time, and they were invited to be a part of this meet and greet. My mom got to shake Condi's hand. The secretary asked my mom, "Where are you from?"

My mom said, “Oh, I’m from Chico, California.”

Condi goes, “I know Chico.” They chatted for a moment. Of course, Dr. Rice is at Stanford. She came from there and she went back there. That’s northern California, so I’m sure she’s been everywhere in that part of the state. They had a nice little conversation. That’s a bit of an aside, but I thought that it was kind of neat that my mom and the secretary of State had a conversation about my hometown, and I wasn’t even involved! I was next to her, but I was like, oh, I’ll let them chat.

There were a couple of other things that I was able to do while I was in Russia, and because I came from a military background, they were even more interesting. This had to do with Russia’s military history. I became a little bit of a battlefield tourist. I went to the town of Borodino, which is about 80 miles west of Moscow. This was the site of a famous battlefield during the Napoleonic Wars. In September 1812, when Napoleon invaded Russia, there was a big battle between the French and the Russians. Kutuzov was the Russian general’s name.

Every year, they have a reenactment of this battle. It’s kind of like Gettysburg reenactments from our own civil war. It was really cool. I went to this reenactment, and there you had the French army. They were all Russians dressed up as French guys. Someone’s Napoleon. Then there’s the Russian army. They do this battlefield reenactment at Borodino. That was really cool for me to see.

For the story, the French won that battle and the Russians subsequently decided to withdraw. As a matter of fact, after that they withdrew from Moscow, even, because this battle, even though it was Borodino, was really the Battle of Moscow. The French, of course, famously occupied Moscow, but then the Russians burned it down around them and after 5 weeks, Napoleon was forced to retreat. It was a terrible retreat in the winter. He entered the country with about 600,000 soldiers and left with 30,000. It was a terrible loss. Of course, the Russians ended up occupying Paris in 1815 after Napoleon’s defeat and as a result of the Congress of Vienna. I felt very privileged to visit that battlefield and actually watch a reenactment. It was very well done.

The other battlefield that I got to tour – and I did this by myself, with the help of a local – was in Volgograd, which was known as Stalingrad during the war, of course. It sits along the Volga River. Volgograd or Stalingrad is a kind of cigar-shaped city, going north and south. It’s not very wide, but it is long, and it sits right next to the Volga River. The Volga River is a wide river. I was able to walk the battlefield there at Volgograd, the modern-day Volgograd where the Germans and the Soviets fought each other. I took a river cruise on the Volga River. I could see how wide it was. This was where the Russians were sending reinforcements across the river.

You might remember that movie called *Enemy at the Gates.* I don’t know if you ever saw it. Jude Law was in it, Rachel Weisz, and Joseph Fiennes. Anyway, that was a movie about the Battle of Stalingrad, and it’s kind of interesting because in the movie they

depict the Volga River as quite wide, and I can tell you it looked pretty much like that. The movie also talks about a famous Russian sniper named Vasily Zaitsev. In their beautiful museum that they have there in Volgograd, they have his actual rifle that he used during the war. He was a famous sniper. I was able to see that and go to their Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This Battle of Stalingrad was the turn of the tide for the Russians on the eastern front. This was the key battle of the war. Even though the Russians had turned away the Germans from Moscow the year before, it wasn't really until Stalingrad where the German offensive was effectively halted and, as a matter of fact, pushed back eventually all the way to Berlin. The Russians captured a huge army at Stalingrad.

It was really neat for me to walk some of those battlefields, see the tractor factory, which is famously part of this fight. Other than a few buildings, which they left as monuments, destroyed partially with lots of holes, you can't really tell that the war happened. Other than that, and some war memorials, it's quite a lovely city. I visited in the summer. It was beautiful, with wide avenues and filled with gardens and flowers and people out in the streets. If you didn't know otherwise, you could be in a suburb of Paris, sipping your latte outside somewhere. It was quite a lovely little city there. I enjoyed it quite a bit.

While in Russia I did some "non-military"-related tourism as well. I went to St. Petersburg and experienced the famous White Nights, where it's light almost all night long. The sun does go down, but the sky never gets dark. I visited some of the Golden Ring cities and ancient Russian capitals. There's a Russian city named Vladimir, which was one of their former capitals before Moscow. There was an old 12th Century church in Vladimir.

Of course, I did more than scratch the surface as a tourist in Moscow. I would say that of the two years that we were there, we probably only stayed in at our house on the weekend three or four times that entire time. We were out and about. We had the opportunity to see many sites that most of the public can't see. We went to Stalin's bunker to the north of Moscow. We went to the KGB museum. We were able to go inside that. We went to Boris Pasternak's house. Boris Pasternak, of course, was the author of *Dr. Zhivago,* the famous book (made into at least 2 movies, the most famous one being with Omar Sharif and Julie Christie that came out in 1965) that was not allowed to be read during Soviet times. At his funeral, when Boris Pasternak passed away, thousands of people came out to pay their respects to him.

There were numerous art museums. When we were in St. Petersburg, we went to the Hermitage. This was the former Tsar's palace there. Of course, St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia during tsarist times. It's a magnificent country. When I grew up, I remember my love affair with Russia started when I was in the seventh grade, writing the Soviet consulate. I'd always wondered, "Who the hell are these Russians and why do they think they can kill us?"

From that thought, it became this intellectual and lifelong study to find out more about these people and understand what a great civilization and culture it is. Some of the best

literature in the world has come from Russia, as has ballet and art. I really felt that I got an appreciation for that. I like to remain an optimist. Despite the Stalins and the Putins of the world, there are Gorbachevs, and, to a degree, even a Khrushchev. We viewed him as an enemy, but even he was to a degree, in our eyes, a liberal reformer. I would like to think that our two countries could, at some point, land on a much better relationship. I want to be an optimist in that, despite being, at the moment, a pessimist.

Q: Just out of curiosity, were Khrushchev's memoirs in bookstores while you were there?

ANDREW: I didn't read his memoirs, but I read his son's book on his father. Of course, there was Nikita Khrushchev, and his son Sergey wrote one on his father. That may be the one you're referring to, and yes, I did read that one. His son, of course, became an American citizen, as did Stalin's daughter. They became good Americans. His son, Sergey… I don't want to say he was an apologist for his father, but I think that what he tried to do in the book is, he tried to open up our minds to the idea that his father was just not a bloodthirsty killer. He is accused, I think, of being a little bit bloody, but he said, "Look, there was more to this guy" than that.

Events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis really affected Khrushchev and his thoughts on nuclear war and Armageddon. However, he was eventually ousted from power because of the Cuban Missile Crisis and thoughts that he had become weak because he did "blink" during it. As a result, Sergey, the son, believed that his father got a bad rap and that history should treat him better. That was an interesting biography on him.

I'll finish up the Russia talk with my Putin story, and then we can see if you have any other questions. This has to do with the presidential visit, the POTUS (President of the United States) visit. It was November of 2006. George W. Bush, of course, was president in his second term, and he was headed to Beijing to go to APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Conference).

He was going to Beijing, and normally, as I understand it, when the president travels to China, they normally fly west from Washington, refuel on the West Coast, and then fly over the Pacific. Well, he wanted to meet Putin in person about something, so he was going to travel east from the U.S., do a refuel and meet with Putin in Moscow on the way to Beijing.

Usually, in the best of times with a POTUS visit, you know that they're coming a long way out. Maybe six months, maybe even a year. People always have that in the back of their mind, and then as the last few months get closer together, you do a lot of work towards preparing it. You know this better than I do. I won't say this was a no-notice visit, but I think we had about six weeks' notice. We started scrambling. Even though an embassy like Moscow has its own travelers and visitors' unit that deals with the visits of senior government officials all the time, it's at a whole other level when it's a POTUS visit, especially to Russia. We really had four weeks to get this visit ready.

I became one of the assistant control officers. The president, during his visit, was never going to leave the airport. Airforce One was going to be on the ground for about two hours doing a refuel, a maintenance check, etc. During this timeframe, he wanted to meet with Putin. We set it up where they would have a meeting at the airport. There are three main airports in Moscow. There's Sheremetyevo, Vnukovo, and Domodedovo. Vnukovo, starting with a V, is kind of their domestic airport for Russia, but also, they have this nice VIP terminal where they bring in heads of state and heads of government to do VIP treatment and arrivals. They've got it all set up for that.

That's the background of this story. I get to the airport a couple of hours early, after all of the pre-coordination before game day. We're working with the White House Communications Agency. Boy, they're real pills to work with, by the way, but they have a hard job to do to make sure the president's always in communication with national security authorities. It's Russians and Americans working together in this terminal to make sure the visit goes off without a hitch. There's going to be a room where the presidents meet and where they come in, etc. We've rehearsed all of this stuff.

About 30 minutes before Air Force One lands, Putin comes in. He arrives. I can remember this clear as day. He was wearing this orange parka. It was November, so it was chilly in Moscow by then. He takes it off and hands it to one of his aides, kind of dropping it off/releasing it. He's not a tall person. He's about five foot six. He walks in, and there are roughly 20 to 30 of us there. We're not really milling about, but we know he's coming in, so we kind of stop what we're doing.

When he comes in there… It's hard to replicate over Zoom or over a recording, but he briefly looks everybody in the eye. He kind of sizes everybody up, left and right. I made eye contact with him, and I felt this icy cold glare. I was really taken aback. I was like, holy smokes. This is like the Godfathers just walked in, or a KGB intel agent or something that felt incredibly criminal. He's sizing me up, along with everyone else in the room. I even checked my wallet to make sure it was still in my pocket after that glare. He does this. He surveys the entire room in a matter of a few seconds, looking around. After this intense and icy stare around the spacious VIP terminal, his aides scurry him off to this room.

The next part is about 10 minutes before Air Force One lands, Putin and his then-wife Ludmilla walk out of this room. Now, if Ludmilla's there, that, of course, tells you that Laura Bush is coming with George. For protocol purposes, if one spouse is coming and the other guy or gal's married, then the spouse or partner or significant other should be there. They come out. It's like a cocoon has turned into a butterfly. The president of Russia emerges from this room. He's smiling, his eyes are sparkling, he's shaking hands. If there had been a baby in there, I'm sure he would have gone and kissed it like a great American politician.

What he's done is, in my mind, he's transformed himself, and he's now the president of a great country. He even looks taller. Maybe he put on elevator shoes; I don't know. But he looks bigger. He's a great politician, a great leader of a great country.

A small tangent from this story. This is about when Air Force One landed. We'll leave Putin for a second. I see the big plane land, and I see it taxi up, and I have to tell you, I am a patriot. I love the flag, but I don't know if I've ever felt so proud as to see that big 747. On the fuselage, it says, "United States of America," and on the tail there's the American flag, and I know that this plane represents America. No matter who the president is… I have to say, I had a little bit of patriotic heart-pounding going on, and I was like, man, that's a great moment to see. I know you've worked POTUS visits. It's quite a thing it got to me.

Back to Putin. They have the red carpet out there. George W. Bush and his wife Laura come down from the aircraft and Vladimir and Ludmilla meet them at the bottom of the steps. They jointly come into the terminal, and they go to this room. They walk by and make a little small talk and joke. William Burns was the ambassador at that time. Of course, he's now the CIA director. Putin had been taking some English lessons back then and I think that now he speaks a lot more English, but back then, he had just a few English phrases. He said something to Bush. I could hear him say, "Well, that's a good ambassador you have here."

Bush said, "Yeah, I agree, I think he's a good guy." Then they walked into this room. That's really the end of my story, but the punchline is this: Right then, at that moment at that airport, I remembered what George W. Bush had said about his first meeting with Putin back in 2001 when he said, and I'm paraphrasing, "I looked into his eyes and I saw his soul, and it was good."

(The actual quote is: "I looked the man in the eye, I found him to be very straightforward…and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul.")

At that moment, I thought to myself, after seeing Putin come in before he thought there was anyone really watching him, when he was sizing people up… I said to myself, my God, Mr. President, you've been fooled. It was years later that Bush actually admitted, "He bamboozled me. He fooled me." He publicly stated that. I was glad to hear that he did. I was wondering, how much did Putin fool Bush when he was the president because he was a different person when he was with Bush than when he was with other people? I guess that's natural to a degree, but he really turned on the charm to him, whereas I think, at the end of a day, he's nothing more than a Russian criminal figure and probably with blood on his own hands.

I don't have any proof of that, but that's my Putin story. It really opened up my eyes to him as a leader and how he leads the country versus how he fools other leaders. Nowadays, I don't think he's fooling anybody. President Biden has called him a killer or said other things in the past, and Putin has basically said, "Yeah, well, we understand each other." I don't think Putin's trying to fool anybody anymore, but I think that in his first few years, he was trying to, to a degree.

By the way, in December 2006, we did an R&R, and we went to Hawaii – about as far away from Moscow as we could get. This next piece of information is not particularly germane to Russia, but in the airport in our travels I was watching the news, and it was December 2006 when Saddam Hussein was hanged. That was his execution. I remember that. That was during my time in Moscow. Of course, Russia was not a big fan of our invasion of Iraq. I wanted to mention that.

We lived in an area called Pokrovsky Hills. It was a gated community. It was about eight miles from the embassy. We had a lot of American diplomats living there, as well as rich Russians and Americans who worked in the oil business and other country's diplomats. We had quite a big social community out there. Jessica, my daughter, went to the Anglo-American School of Moscow, located right next door. She learned Russian to a degree, and to this day she can still remember some of the Russian children's songs and can sing them. I think those are the main highlights of Moscow, subject to your questions, Mark.

Q: I think you've covered it. It was a two-year tour?

ANDREW: It was a two-year tour. It was my second tour. I would have extended for a year if they would've let me, but still being a junior or entry-level officer, they wanted to limit it to two years.

Q: Well, I think you've covered everything really well. As it's only a two-year tour, the only question with regard to where you're going to go next is, did you begin talking to people? Was there mentoring available? Did it have an effect on what you thought you needed to do next?

ANDREW: Yes, I'm really glad you mentioned the word "mentor," because there was a formal mentoring service that I started while I was in Moscow. I assume there still is. When I was at Embassy Moscow, the management counselor was Jim (James) Melville. He's a management type, but I think he was our ambassador to the Hague, in the Netherlands. He was quite critical of President Trump, and I think he got fired or resigned over it.

Jim was my mentor in Moscow. I'm still in occasional contact with him, but it was probably for about five years after that point that I stayed in close contact with him. I would talk to him about, "Hey, what should I be doing in my career? What do you think about this EER (Employee Evaluation Report)? What do you think about some of these comments my rater and reviewer has made?" He was quite happy to sit down and talk with me, and later communicate over long distance. But he became a good friend and mentor. Of course, he was a senior Foreign Service officer at that time, as the management counselor at Embassy Moscow.

When I was there, we had the American Embassy Community Association (AECA) that was in charge of many aspects of the embassy. We had our own commissary store. We had our own barbershop. We had our own pool, our own gym, our own tennis courts. I

actually became a member of the AECA committee there, kind of like the governing board of it. I helped to raise money for the gym. I expanded FSN hours. A lot of people did not want to let FSNs use it more because they were worried about intel threats. I said, "Well, it's in a non-controlled access area anyways. If anyone's talking classified stuff while they're working out, they're stupid." I got a lot of pushback from the Agency on that, but I won after talking with Jim Melville. The ambassador and the DCM supported me on that, too. That was Ambassador Bill Burns.

The ambassador was very generous with his time. Now, I got a little bit more facetime with him because I worked in the political section, on the same floor, essentially, as the ambassador.

Q: That reminds me that real estate in an embassy and real estate in the main building of the State Department is very meaningful.

ANDREW: It is meaningful.

Q: The floor you work on and your proximity to the power floor or, in the case of the embassy, the power office can have extra benefits. It can have some extra responsibilities, as well, because there are line of sight managers. I'm sure you knew a few in the military; there are certainly some in the State Department. An ambassador will walk out, and the first person the ambassador sees is going to get some kind of assignment, whether it belongs to them or not. That's how it works.

ANDREW: Yes, that's the double-edged sword, isn't it? It was great to have access to the ambassador. I would go into the front office often. Because I became a subject matter expert on certain issues, the Political counselor would say, "Look, when the ambassador calls for you, you just go in there. Let us know. If it's time-sensitive, just go in there and then tell us." Coming from a military background, I was sensitive to the chain of command. But it would come to the point where they'd say, "Can you go brief the ambassador on X issue?"

"Yes, I can do that." Of course, the ambassador knew it already and probably knew it better than I did. But he would want to throw a couple of ideas against me.

I went with him to go and lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin, one time. He called me in there and said, "I need you to go do this, this, and this."

I was like, I don't know how to do any of that. I said, "Sir…"

He said, "Rob, just talk to Boris." He was one of our local employees. "Boris will take care of it, okay? Just go talk to him."

"Okay. Yes sir, Mr. Ambassador." He, William J. Burns, was a good guy, a friendly and amenable person. Very smart. Deadly smart, you know? I would get career advice from

him, as well as from the DCM at the time. His name was Dan Russell. There were actually a few "Dan Russells" with the exact spellings in the Department, but this was the EUR (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs) Dan Russell. I think there was a WHA (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs) one as well and another one. I knew the EUR one.

I would talk to the ambassador and get some career advice, but it was mainly from the DCM and my official mentor, Jim Melville from management. The DCM was really the person who was supposed to mentor all of the JOs, the junior officers. Occasionally, the DCM would meet with us, and I would meet with my mentor. Of course, I would talk to my boss as well on career advice. My next assignment ended up being Costa Rica, so that was back to WHA. My leadership said, "Oh, yeah, that would be a good assignment for you." It was off to Costa Rica and a counter-narcotics assignment there. My mentors said, "Yes, that would be a good assignment." It would help me diversify my political portfolio, a little bit, with the counternarcotics part.

Q: Alright. So, you had had Spanish before, but along with the assignment to Costa Rica, did they plan for any additional training?

ANDREW: Yes, I had Spanish. I didn't even have to take the language proficiency test again because I was still within the five-year proficiency timeframe. That was nice. But, of course, I hadn't spoken Spanish on a daily basis in Moscow. But, funnily enough, because I was a Spanish speaker, I often got invited to parties in Moscow where Spanish linguists were needed. For example, the defense attaché in Moscow would invite his counterparts from Latin American countries to diplomatic gatherings, and he'd ask me to come translate. I would call that one of those additional duties that I was happy to do. I got invited to a party and got to work it. In this case, I would translate Spanish into English, back and forth.

In terms of other training, no. It was direct. I went straight from Moscow to Costa Rica after home leave. I don't recall doing any training in Washington, D.C. at all. I'd already had Pol/Econ, of course.

Q: The only reason I ask is because sometimes, when you're working as an anti-narcotics officer, DEA or others will want you to spend a little bit of time with them.

ANDREW: Well, let me back up. I say I didn't do any training, but I did do consults. You're right. Sorry, Mark. I did do probably a week's worth of consults. I went on home leave, but then I did also factor in roughly a week to do consults with INL, the International Narcotics Law Enforcement Bureau, and with WHA, as well. That's the office that covered Central America and Costa Rica, in this case.

I don't think I met any leadership, but sometimes, there might be someone transferring down at the same time, like an ambassador or someone in your particular food chain, but in this case, the ambassador was already down there. The ambassador in Costa Rica, when I arrived, was a political appointee from Bush named Mark Langdale. He was a

Texas financier. He was his ambassador in Costa Rica. He was a very smart fellow. I enjoyed working with him. He was there for about a year after I arrived. Is that right? I got there in 2007. He was there roughly six months to a year before he departed, and then we got another ambassador.

I'm sorry, Mark. Yes, I did do consults before I went to post. Absolutely right. But no formal training.

Q: Alright. Now, what year do you arrive in Costa Rica?

ANDREW: I departed Russia in July, and I would have arrived, I think, in late August to Costa Rica. It's in their rainy season, by the way, when I arrive. I arrived in a good storm. Yes, I arrived in late August. My new supervisor was David Henifin. I don't know if you know that name. He was the Political counselor. He ended up becoming, after they combined the Pol and Econ sections, the Pol/Econ counselor. But I ended up working for him there.

Q: Okay. Sorry, the year's 2007 now?

ANDREW: Yes, 2007. I was in Costa Rica from 2007 to 2010. Three years there.

Q: Okay. When you arrive, I imagine that settling in is relatively easy. Costa Rica is not a hardship post.

ANDREW: It is not a hardship post. There are some misnomers about Costa Rica. People think that when you do a tour there, you're sipping pina coladas every day on the beach. It's not like that. San Jose, of course, is in the central highlands of the country, but almost in the center, so it's a temperate climate. Down at the coast down there, every day is 100 degrees F and humid and hot and awful, that type of thing. It's jungle or rainforest temperature. Listen, what we used to like to say when I was there is, "Costa Rica is not dangerous compared to the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and, to a lesser degree, Nicaragua." We would say, "While Costa Rica is not dangerous, it's no longer safe."

I hate to say this, but while I was there, in my time, we had the dubious distinction of having our first beheading by a Mexican cartel in Costa Rica. Of course, Costa Rica sits on this drug transportation superhighway between South America and the number one market for mainly cocaine but really all drugs: North America. We estimated that two-thirds of the cocaine that is produced in the world is shipped through what we call the Central American Corridor to get to the U.S. and Canada. A lot of it, obviously, goes right there through Costa Rica.

You'd get a lot of these go-fast boats or semi-submersible submarines that got filled with dope from Colombia. They can only go so far because they need refueling. What they end up doing is landing somewhere in Costa Rica; their logical endpoints are somewhere in Costa Rica on both coasts – the Caribbean side and the Pacific side. Then, they would

start their land transportation from there. We had a lot of illicit drugs, primarily cocaine, going through the country.

Q: Right. That was my first question: What was the status of arms transfers, and, to the extent that you followed it, money laundering in Costa Rica?

ANDREW: Quite a bit. There were lots of drugs going north and a lot of money and weapons going south. That's kind of the trend in the drug trade. In terms of money laundering, that definitely occurred in Costa Rica, but Costa Rica was primarily a transshipment point for drugs. By the way, we would estimate – and again, these are 2007 to 2010 stats, so they're out of date – roughly 1,000 metric tons of cocaine were produced every year by cocaine manufacturers in Colombia, let's say. On a good year, the entire interdiction by the U.S. government would be 20, 30, maybe 40 percent. So, what that means is that obviously, the majority is getting through.

The hardest border in Central America before the U.S.-Mexico border is the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Now, despite our political differences with Nicaragua – and of course, Ortega's been back in power there for quite some time now; he was in power when I was there – one issue that generally has always been good is police cooperation and counter-drug cooperation. Somehow, we seem to leave our politics aside for that particular issue on both sides of that border. It was still a porous border, but it was the best chance we normally had of interdicting both money and arms going south as well as cocaine and other drugs going north.

That was at this border crossing area called *Peñas Blancas,* which means White Rocks or Crags. We had INL facilities on either side of the border; the inspection facilities that I supported were on the Costa Rican side. My counterpart in Embassy Managua supported the one on the Nicaraguan side. We built an inspection facility for the Costa Ricans, along with an office fully outfitted with computers and equipment. It was quite a good facility. Of course, I would do something that was called "end use monitoring." We would go out and make sure that the Costa Ricans were using the equipment properly, the way they're supposed to be using it. Then, we also provided or arranged some maintenance for them as well.

Essentially, my job as a Narcotics Affairs officer was not to kick down doors and bust bad guys…as much as I wanted to do that! I left that to others. It was all about buying training and equipment and donating it to the various Costa Rican law enforcement authorities. I could have been anything from radios to parts to anything and everything. I think the best thing that we could ever do was training. We did arrange police professionalization training for the Costa Rican cops, the *Fuerza Publica,* or Public Force. Costa Rica has no military. They got rid of their military after the civil war in 1948-49. About 1,200 people were killed, so it wasn't bloodless, but it was relatively not that devastating. But still, they decided they weren't doing that anymore. What a concept! They just got rid of their military.

Costa Rica, by the way, is a fairly well-functioning democracy. I think we in the U.S. government like to say that it was the least corrupt country in Central America. In addition to doing the INL work, I worked with your office to promote our mission to the public. Melissa Martinez and Evelyn Ardón were some of the locals there that assisted me in that mission. There were also some other folks I worked with to do radio interviews. I don't think I ever did TV, but I did radio and I did print interviews while I was there, talking about cooperation with Costa Rica's coast guard, drug control police, their FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)-equivalent organization, called OIJ (*Organismo de Investigaciones Judiciales*) and others.

I really felt that I built great relationships with those organizations. They trusted me, and I trusted them. I flew in their airplanes from their air surveillance service. We partnered with them to do maritime patrols and maritime interdictions. Sometimes they flew me over to Limón, the Costa Rican state on the Caribbean side, to work with some of their guys over there to assess their needs for INL equipment.

You might remember the Merida Initiative that was started in 2007 in Mexico between Presidents Bush and Calderón, who was then president of Mexico. Before it became CARSI, which is the Central American Regional Security Initiative, we got funds from that Merida Initiative to help out Central America. I was able to get about 10 million dollars and start programming it for Costa Rica. I like to feel that I laid the seeds for the INL section that is there now. There are more than 10 people, and I was the only one back then, along with two of my FSN workers. One of them is still at the embassy, Iliana Castro. She was one of my great FSNs there. It's a big operation there now, and I like to feel that I laid the seeds for that in the years that came after I left in 2010.

Q: Okay. Good. I have a couple of questions. As the first INL program manager down there, we, the U.S., have ambitions for increasing Costa Rica's ability to interdict, and Costa Rica has its own ambitions as well. There are three ways – Coast Guard, land police, and border. How did you work or… What were the goals and the successes you had in those three areas?

ANDREW: Well, certainly the easiest one, I suppose, is measuring the amount of drugs that have been interdicted. It can give one a false sense of accomplishment as we know that we are interdicting only a relatively small fraction of the total amount shipped, but it is still important. You'll remember the term return on investment, or ROI. That's always a favorite term that we had at the State Department whenever we did some project with tax-payer money overseas. If we didn't have good ROI, then why are we doing it? We, the counter-narcotics team, actually intercepted and interdicted quite a bit of drugs. Rather, I should say that the Costa Ricans did that with our assistance. They would, on a lot of their operations, act on U.S. intelligence, provided either by DEA or some other source. I think that we did pretty well as a team overall.

While we may not have been able to discourage drug runners from transiting through Costa Rica, our efforts caused them to be really clever. I think that the training of their DEA-equivalent, the Drug Control Police (P*olicia Control de Drogas*) and the training

and equipping of the Coast Guard made it a real factor for them. We effectively got into the decision-making cycle of the bad guys, the drug cartels. I think that that made a big difference. In terms of numbers beyond that, I don't really recall. I know that one year we intercepted 30 or 40 tons of cocaine, which is fairly good, but when you consider 1,000 tons are made every year, that's not very much. But then you combine it with what we're doing in Panama and the rest of Central America and Mexico, it was respectable.

I think another successful aspect of our assistance there was the police professionalization training. It helped reduce corruption, particularly in the land police and the coast guard. There had been some corruption and infiltration, I would say, by drug cartels. I think that we did a good job of trying to root them out, or at least getting them fired. I wouldn't have any numbers now, but I think that those were some of the goals. We were getting away from just doing counter-narcotics work to helping professionalize the police, having them do com-stat analysis, which means analyzing crime trends in areas. We helped them out with that a lot. I think they were better able to understand how to deal with crime and how to be preventative and not just reactive.

When I arrived in Costa Rica, we did have an INL program, but I was expected to close the door on it and shut it down within a year. It was thanks to the Merida Initiative that we were able to open it back up. From the previous program, my first six months there were relatively slow as we only had a couple 100,000 dollars to spend the program down. We were spending it here and there. It looked like, "Rob, you're shutting the program down," and then we had this opportunity come up. I did all this work. I worked with the F Bureau back at the State Department. I collaborated with other experts in helping redesign that program. I think that was the key.

I wanted to add that we also did work with the border folks. That assistance was to provide them training so that they would know to ask the questions of, say, potential drug runners and be able to understand when they were getting answers that didn't make sense. We also trained them in how to read paperwork that was not accurate. That was so they would really be suspicious of paperwork that wasn't correct. At the ports, I worked with the CBP, Customs and Border Patrol, to help train Costa Rica's CBP equivalent agencies. CBP would travel down and provide training on container inspections. Of course, I didn't train them in that, but I helped arrange training in that for Costa Rican ports.

Also, I think that we were getting them cargo scanners to be able to examine containers, so that they could scan for drugs but also WMDs, weapons of mass destruction, and other paraphernalia.

In addition to my counternarcotics work, I did some political work! As I said, David Henifin, who was the Pol/Econ counselor, did a majority of that, but I did do a little bit. I did some minor political reporting. But it was mainly counternarcotics work with INL. I also became one of the go-to people for the ambassador, whether it was Ambassador Langdale or, later on, Ambassador Cianchette. When we would do the MEDRETEs (Medical Readiness Training Exercises) - these were these military set-ups of hospitals and dental clinics out in the jungle and remote locations for the indigenous peoples – I

would help prep the ambassador for those and fly with him on the helicopters up there. We went to indigenous tribes in the central highlands, as well as down on the border with Panama.

I remember down on the border with Panama, I was trying to connect with some of the locals there. Even the Costa Ricans didn't always connect with them very well because they were indigenous folks. Not all of them spoke Spanish. Only some of the tribal elders would speak Spanish. I really tried to cross some of those cultural and language barriers between us. For instance, they had wild grapefruit, and I said, "Hey, can I try some of that?"

They were like, "Yeah, knock yourself out." It was a bit bitter, but I tried it. Then they said, "Hey, do you want to ride a horse?" I'm sure they thought, oh, this gringo is going to fall on his butt. Unbeknownst to them, I was a horse rider if you recall. So, I rode on their horse all over this one little farm area. Their eyes got wide, and they were like, boy, this guy knows what he's doing.

There was a young man that I met that I'll never forget. He was sick, and he was paraplegic. We provided him with some aid, and I helped carry him to go somewhere and get some treatment. He was a friendly young man. I think he probably had a little bit of some mental slowness. I don't know what the right word is for that. But he was incredibly happy to get assistance. The elders there, of course, were also happy to see us help their vulnerable population.

When we would do those particular operations, we showed the local tribes that it wasn't just drug control issues that we worked on. We knew that there were people who worked in those tribes, for instance, who would work for drug cartels. We would go in there and say, "Look, this has got nothing to do with that. We would not be open if we were doing that. We're here to assist you. We don't care who we assist. This is about medical assistance, dental assistance." I think it was effective because I never felt threatened there. But I knew there were probably people there who were a little less than savory characters. But they never did anything. I think the tribal folks were like, "No, the Americans are here to help us. We're all just trying to get shots, vaccinations, dental work, whatever it is." It worked out quite well.

I have a little bit of a war story on this one time when we were in the middle of the jungle there in Costa Rica. I was with the coast guard. There are a lot of internal waterways where we think drugs are run as part of the transshipment. As a result, the Costa Rican Coast Guard does river and sometimes stream patrols. I remember going on a ride in one of their boats to kind of a remote Costa Rican coast guard small base. I was actually doing end-use monitoring. We had donated equipment to them and it was out there in the middle of the jungle. The Office of Defense Representation (ODR) defense attaché, usually a U.S. Coast Guard Commander, knew I was going out there, and he said, "You know, Rob, we donated a bunch of weapons to their coast guard years ago. Can you go check on it for us?"

I said, “Sure.” So, when I was there, I said, “Hey, my colleagues at the embassy said you have an arms room. Can I take a look at your weapons and just visually look at them?” That was all I really needed to do: make sure they were there. It was fine, they were all there. But then they wanted to test me a little bit. I think the local Costa Rican coast guard folks thought that I did not know my way around weapons.

They said, “Hey, do you know anything about these weapons?”

I said, “Sure, I do.”

“Oh, would you like to handle one?”

I said, “Sure.” So, they gave me a weapon, a M-16 type of rifle, and in front of their eyes, I field-stripped it down, took it apart, and I inspected it. Of course, I’m watching their jaws kind of hit the ground as I’m doing this, and they’re going, oh, crap, this gringo knows what he’s doing. I gave it back to them, and there’s a little test you can do with your pinky in this one particular part of the weapon where it’s famously dirty if you don’t know where to clean it after it’s been used. My finger came out black. I said, “You know, your weapons are a little bit dirty.”

They said, “Yes, sir, we’ll do a better job before you come next time.” I used my military background to do this. Of course, I was never invited back after that. They were very friendly to me. But again, I think I surprised them. Here I was, this big gringo coming into town with the money, right? He doesn’t know anything about anything. Then it’s like, “What is he doing with our weapons?”

“Well, you gave it to him.”

“He’s showing us how stupid we are!”

“It’s your fault for showing him.”

I thought I would share that story with you. I will say, also, that in the political part of my portfolio, I supported Vice President Biden’s visit back in 2009. As a matter of fact, I have his “thank you” letter on my wall here in my home office. That’s what I’m looking at, at the moment. He visited in May 2009. I was a control officer or a site officer for part of the visit. That was great. I missed the meet and greet at the embassy, unfortunately, but my wife and daughter were there. I’ve got a great picture of my daughter with Jill Biden, Dr. Biden.

Then, also, I was a notetaker when Secretary of State Clinton came. She met with the then-vice president of Costa Rica, a lady named Laura Chinchilla. She was double hatted as the vice president of Costa Rica and the minister of justice. Of course, the president then was Oscar Arias. He had also been president in the ‘80s and he was a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Very famous fellow. He helped negotiate an end to the Central American wars in the ‘80s. But I was a notetaker for Secretary of State Clinton and Laura

Chinchilla, the vice president. It was kind of neat to sit in on that and take notes and write it up within three hours to get to the secretary's staff and all of that. This shows that I did do a little bit of traditional political work now and again. I supported many VIP visits, of course. But I was primarily focused on a counter-narcotics portfolio for my time there.

I should mention one other event that shook all of us. In early 2009, there was a big, 6.2 magnitude earthquake in Costa Rica. I think about 30 or 40 people were killed. I know about 30 kilometers of an important highway was destroyed. There were famous waterfalls that were wrecked. I remember helping to work with some of the Costa Rican authorities to see if we could get some of our helicopters down from JTF (Joint Task Force) Bravo, the ones that are stationed up in Honduras, to help out. We did. They eventually came down and helped do some rescuing or transporting of people and equipment. The Colombian army, I remember, came as well, with our donated equipment to the Colombians as part of Plan Colombia. Costa Rica kind of looks up at Colombia as their big brother, strategically, in addition to us. Their regional big brother is Colombia, so they look to them for assistance.

That was difficult, going to some of these areas and talking to people who were devastated by this earthquake. It had occurred right at the end of the wet season. Because it was in January, we were really at the end of the rainy season, and all of the ground was saturated. With a substantial earthquake, the ground turns into a river of mud and just wipes out anything in its path. I recall some terrible landslides totally collapsing on and burying a village where I think about 30 people were killed. That was terrible. I remember that very well.

Q: The last question that I have is, you're down there as the State Department rep for counter-narcotics. Did you have a relationship with DEA? How did that work?

ANDREW: Oh, yes. I worked closely with the DEA in my role as the narcotics affairs officer. I actually organized the law enforcement working group, which met on a weekly basis and was kind of like a mini country team. In attendance at these meetings were the DEA, INL, the RSO. If an FBI guy was there, he would be a part of it. The DCM chaired these meetings, and I would run them. I would set the agenda, and then turn it over to the various section heads to brief the DCM.

In terms of a day-to-day frequent basis, I worked very closely with the DEA there. The main guy, when I was there, was a guy by the name of Paul Knierim. After Paul PCS'd back to the U.S., there was another fellow by the name of Phil Springer who took over the DEA section. I worked closely with them and their agents. I don't remember how many people they had. I think that with FSNs, it was probably 10 or 15 people.

I would work with them to help assess certain Costa Rican law enforcement units and kind of do the truth-telling on what their needs were in terms of INL-purchased equipment and training. The Costa Ricans would want everything. They would want heaven and earth that we could give them, and they thought that U.S. government resources were infinite. Of course, they're not. We would evaluate their needs and what

our ability to support would look like. When a certain agency, like the Drug Control Police, who were the DEA's direct equivalent, would come to me, I would be sure to say, "Hey, they came to me." I would tell the DEA guy. "This is what they're looking for. What do you think?"

Nine times out of 10, he was like, "Absolutely. They talked to me about it, and I told them to talk to you." Great.

It could also be the coast guard or the air section, and I would double check with them too and say, "Hey, what do you think? Does this support our U.S. mission here?" I wanted to make sure that we were all on the same sheet of music, that we were supporting our mission goals…those country-specific goals to support the bureau plan or strategy. The DEA guys would help keep me honest on that. I felt like we were attached, again, at the hip. In a traditional political position, I worked closely with the defense attaché section. In Costa Rica, I was like that with the DEA and the Office of Defense Representation, our Coast Guard guys there.

Q: It is interesting that our Office of Defense Representation is always a Coast Guard rep. It's one of the few countries where that's true.

ANDREW: That's right. The position, I believe, is pegged at an 05 level. That would be a commander in the U.S. Coast Guard, like a commander in the U.S. Navy. That's equivalent of a lieutenant colonel in the Army or Air Force. Occasionally, we put a military guy down there as a temporary assist, but the position was for a Coast Guard officer because we wanted to acknowledge and honor the fact that Costa Rica did not have a military. We wanted our liaison with their government to be associated with law enforcement rather than the military, as the Costa Ricans were sometimes a bit leery about working with the military. Our main liaison with them, then, was our Coast Guard. It's quasi-military, but it's law enforcement, and it has that law enforcement authority. The Costa Ricans respected that. I think that was really important. You're right; I believe that if it's not the only one, it's one of only a few where the top person in the defense section is a Coast Guard person. I worked very closely with them, too, just like I did with DEA. I was just as close with them on policy issues and also the INL portfolio.

As I said, just to underline, I was not going out and busting bad guys. Costa Ricans did that. I would support them with equipment if they thought they needed something. I'll tell some of my friends in the outside world, and they'll say, "Rob, you were busting down and taking out Pablo Escobar!"

I said, "No, I wasn't doing that, but thank you." Maybe I should let that myth go a little bit further so people will keep going, "Ooh, Rob." But this was about training and equipment and working within the embassy with those folks. Again, this was a position where I was a mid-level officer. I'd been promoted. I had rather good access.

Again, I was on the floor with the front office. That's a double-edged sword, once again. But this was one of those things where the DCM would call me in a lot. My boss said,

"Yeah, when the DCM calls, just go and tell me afterwards." The DCM and I had a great working relationship. I actually traveled with him to a lot of meetings because we knew the counter-narcotics portfolio would come up, as I did with the ambassador. So, I was extremely privileged in both my Moscow assignment and my San Jose assignment to have such good real estate and face time with the front office. Like I said, I was incredibly privileged and honored to do that for them. I felt that I got an exceptionally good, firm grasp on how we run embassies once again, and how I knew every section very well. That included Public Affairs, of course. I made a lot of good friends there.

Eladio Ramirez was the photographer with PAO there. I maintained contact with him. He was such a good friend. Occasionally, I'll say, "Hey, did you have a picture of me doing something?" I'll email him, and he'll send it back to me. A great working relationship with every section there. I was very privileged and lucky.

Q: So, in terms of your family, obviously your daughter was going to school. Did your wife want to work? Did she work?

ANDREW: You must know me better than I know myself. I should've mentioned this. In both Mexico and Moscow, my wife didn't really work at either one. She did some volunteering. But it was in Costa Rica, indeed, where she did work. Actually, my wife Pam had a background in clerking, particularly in medical records offices. She's particularly good at paperwork, being a receptionist, being a secretary. At Embassy San Jose, she was a "roving secretary." That term may be a little archaic now. She was a roving secretary, though. She could be a secretary for any office in the building.

She did quite a bit of time right there in my own Pol/Econ section, as well as the front office occasionally. She never worked for me, because we never wanted to have that nepotism type of relationship, but she worked for my boss David Henifin and the econ guy. Mark Kissel was his name. She did a lot of work there, because we had a shortage of office management specialists. There would be a gap, often, of months between one coming in and one leaving in that three-year timeframe. I would say that of the three years that we were there, Pam did secretarial work for a year and a half at least, maybe two years.

Our daughter Jessica was getting a little older, so she didn't need constant supervision all the time. She was going to Country Day School there. She was of middle school age at that point, sixth to eighth grade. She got involved in some sports and all the activities that they do there, and Pam would spend time there as well. Going back to Pam's work, she actually made good money there. I think embassies try to employ spouses if they can. For spouses who want to work, they try to help them find work. It was good. She enjoyed it. Some extra income is always nice.

Q: Yeah. She got to know the embassy, probably, pretty well. That's always a help for anyone in the family.

ANDREW: In many respects, she knew it better than I did, because I traveled quite a bit in this job. She got to know the internal dynamics as well as I did or better, in many respects. She did work for a few different offices. She would cover the front office sometimes for one of the ladies up there, now and again. It was challenging. She said it was a bit of a steep uphill curve. When the DCM or ambassador needed something, you'd have to be like, "Oh my gosh, what do I do?" So, she figured it out. I was enormously proud of her. She did a good job.

Q: Absolutely. Those are high-stress, goldfish bowl jobs. If you can survive and you get a good relationship, that stuff is great. It's transferable skills to other locations, as well.

ANDREW: That's right. For our next assignment, she did work, as well, but she did something different. I think she might have done some secretarial jobs, but she also did something else. We'll get to that then. They liked her, too. She got some good evaluations out of her employment with our embassies. We still have them in her portfolio. She exhibited great people skills. What's funny is I call my wife an introvert-extrovert. She can be quiet, but once you get her talking, she keeps going. I don't mean that in a negative way. She'll interact with people and then try to get to know people as well as she can and provide that secretarial service to a better degree.

Q: That's great. Well, alright…

ANDREW: We were talking about Costa Rica. Pam stuck her head in. She heard us speaking about her. In Sweden, later on, she wanted to remind me that her title was security escort. She did something a little bit different in Sweden, the next assignment.

Q: Very good. Well, in that case, unless you have other parts to the Costa Rica story, it sounds like we're approaching the end of the tour and thinking about and preparing for the next assignment.

ANDREW: That's right. Let me just take a quick look here. I mentioned the earthquake. Oops, that's forwards. Let me go backwards here. I do want to put a shout out to my parents. My parents visited every overseas location where I was at. They were alive for all of it. They've both since passed, but they came down and visited us in Costa Rica a couple of times, as they did in Mexico and Russia and Sweden. They loved it down there in Costa Rica. Those were some good times with Mom and Dad, being able to do that. I took them to a well-known area, Manuel Antonio National Park. Good surfing, good beach area there, nice restaurants. They enjoyed that quite a bit.

I should also mention that I worked quite closely with the RSO at that time, Wade Dewitt. He became a good friend. He was also my next-door neighbor. I worked closely with him on many different issues. This is something that happened in my complex. I lived in a housing complex there called *Condominios Calahondas*, so Calahonda Condominiums. It was a gated community. It wasn't too large, but we had our own pool and activity area. I think there were roughly 10 to 15 U.S. diplomats and families in there, something like that.

While I was there, a triple murder occurred in our complex. This is a quick story, and this is not a good one. When we were there, I remember that this was on a weekend, a Sunday. I was backed up with work. I had gone into the embassy. I really tried to protect weekends, but occasionally you just had to go in. You remember? I remember I was going into work on a Sunday afternoon. It was later in the afternoon, maybe three o'clock, three thirty. I was about to come home anyways, and I get a call from my daughter, Jessica. She says, "Dad, there's someone running around the complex with a knife."

Of course, that got my attention very quickly. I said, "Okay, where are you?"

"I'm in the house."

"Have you locked the doors?"

"Yes."

"Where's your mother?"

"She's not here."

I'm like, "Okay. Do you know where she is?" She might've; I don't remember exactly, but she did say that she wasn't in the house. I said, "Okay, lock the doors. If your mom comes to the door, let her in, of course, but otherwise lock the door and don't let anyone else in that you don't know. If you know somebody, let them in, but if you don't know them, don't let them in. If it's someone you know with a knife, don't let them in. Check."

Of course, I immediately lock up the office. I'm the only one there, so I lock it up quickly and I drive home as fast as I can. There are lots of police there and there's an ambulance by the time I get there. I'm able to get into the complex. I park. I've made contact with Pam; she was fine. She was with someone else at someone else's house, visiting with friends or whatever.

What had happened is there was a triple homicide in that gated community that day. To make a long story short, there was this Chinese American guy who was not a diplomat who was living in the complex. He was a bit of a gambler. He was like a professional gambler, and he had been at a casino or somewhere there in Costa Rica, and he had been gambling a lot of money. This one waitress noticed it and became friendly to him. She wanted to go out with him, that type of thing. They developed a relationship over a week or so. What happened is, she came over to his house and spent the night or something, or stayed with him during the day. They had relations. He was asleep and disrobed and everything, and she had set him up. She had an ex-boyfriend that she was a partner in crime with, and they wanted to get that money. He had won a lot of money and shown it off. It was about 10,000 dollars in cash.

To get into this complex, you have to go by guards. If you're not known and don't have the card key to open the gates, they call up the house. Of course, they called up the Chinese American's house and she answered and said, "Oh, yes, have this person come in." They didn't know who lived in the house. It was her boyfriend coming in. What they were going to do was kill him and rob him, basically. The boyfriend stabbed him in bed, while he was naked and under the covers. The Chinese American was strong enough, though, that even though they gave him mortal blows, before he died, he killed both of them. They tried to get away from him, and he stabbed them both to death with the same weapon that they used on him. The house looked like an abattoir. There was blood everywhere in the house and in the carport area.

I remember coming home and seeing her body. Then, Wade Dewitt, our RSO, was the one who got the story because it was our contacts at the Costa Rican Judicial Investigative Division who worked the case. They eventually told us what happened. One of our guys, our GSO, a guy by the name of Ramon Best, this event happened right next to his house. He lived there. He actually tried to perform CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) on the girl before she died. Actually, the Chinese American guy lived for a little while. They had him in the ambulance, but he passed away in the hospital. I think the other two died on the spot.

That was a very odd thing to happen. It came to be known a little bit as the murder complex. That house where it occurred, we certainly didn't put any Americans in there. It just has a bad feeling, right? I don't really believe in spirits or ghosts, but a place like that, you're just like, you feel like it should be bulldozed or something. But they eventually cleaned it up and sold it to someone else. It was all fine, I guess. But that was a bit scary. To get a phone call from your daughter that there's someone running around the complex with a knife. She didn't actually see that, but word had spread. A quick rumor had spread because someone had screamed. Ramon described it sounding like an animal barking or roaring, or an animal fight. It was this guy who was going after these two who had tried to kill him and succeeded.

That's not the phone call you want to get. Thank goodness, no embassy Americans were hurt, but it was a tragedy for everybody involved. The Chinese American who was killed there, we of course took care of him as an ACS case, American Citizen Services. They got his family in there and assisted them. As for the two Costa Ricans, we don't know why they did that. They hadn't been known as being particularly violent before then. Maybe they just saw a chance and thought they'd get rich quick and have to kill the guy. Very tragic.

Q: Yeah. Oh, my goodness. Would you like to close this chapter…?

ANDREW: Yeah, let's close with the triple murder for today.

Q: Alright. Well, that does leave me with the question, would you like to close now and go to your next tour at our next meeting, or would you like to continue?

ANDREW: I need to close. It's not as bad as you, but I had my hot water heater go out yesterday, and the repair guys are coming anytime. It's probably a good time if we could schedule our next one. Actually, I have just one more overseas assignment and my Foreign Policy Advisor (POLAD) time. We'll probably be able to finish that. We might even be able to finish next time. But let's reschedule.

Q: I'm sorry. Okay. Today is June 1st, 2021, and we're resuming our interview with Robert Andrew. Robert, what year are we in now?

ANDREW: We are in 2010, just leaving Costa Rica in the summer. I guess what was kind of interesting, in terms of my overall Foreign Service career, is that this is one of those times where we spend some significant amount of time back in the U.S. After three tours overseas, we're going to spend a year in the United States before we go on to our next assignment, which is in Sweden. We moved back to the U.S., my daughter Jessica started high school, ninth grade, in this year, and we live in Fairfax, Virginia.

The first six months after moving back that year I was in the Office of EUR/NB – European Affairs, Nordic and Baltic Office. They cover the eight Nordic and Baltic countries. The person I worked with most in this office was Tom Selinger. Tom was the desk officer for both Sweden and Norway. Upon my arrival for this "bridge" assignment before taking Swedish language training and then heading off in the summer of 2011 to Sweden, I took over the desk officer duties for Sweden from Tom for about six months.

Before leaving Costa Rica, I had asked the EUR/NB Office if I could do a bridge assignment there and maybe learn a little bit more about Sweden before I went. It turned out to be one of the best things I did because Tom, the desk officer for those two countries, said, "Look, why don't you take care of Sweden for the next six months, and I'll just focus on Norway. If there's issues with Sweden, obviously, come to me." That's essentially what I did, and that was a fantastic experience, because I got to escort some Swedish VIPs that came to the State Department, and they ended up being some of my contacts later on. It was really helpful to my understanding of all things Swedish to have this experience. That was the first time my eyes were opened to the fact that assignments back at the State Department could be helpful in preparing you for your next overseas assignment. That was quite good.

For instance, I first met the foreign minister of Sweden while in Washington, who I would work with later on during my assignment in Sweden. We didn't work directly one-on-one, of course, because he was much higher-ranking, but it was the first time I got to meet him and that was pretty cool. His name was Carl Bildt. There were other foreign ministry workers and parliamentarians that I met in my desk officer position, kind of the usual suspects that visit the State Department from various countries.

I do want to mention one major issue that came up in my time there, and that was WikiLeaks. The WikiLeaks revelations, thanks to Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning, and then to Julian Assange and his organization, hit shortly after I came in as the Swedish desk officer in that office. As a result, there was a whole lot of damage control to be done

with the eight EUR/NB countries (which were: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). For Sweden, the damage wasn't too bad. We weren't too worried about burning people or having people's lives in danger, of course. It's Sweden. We have quite a positive relationship with them, and it's never been a cantankerous relationship, or certainly not a stressful one like with countries like Russia or China.

But as you know, in cable writing, you often list people that you speak to. Even if you classify it or say, "Source protect," sometimes there's still information in there that, if it gets released, can cause a little bit of a black eye. The worst case that I dealt with was the chief of protocol for Sweden, at their Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had quoted him in a cable. It was nothing particularly bad, but we were in the middle of negotiations for HSPD6 (Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6), and his name came up in one of the cables from Embassy Stockholm. This HSPD6 had to do with passenger listings on air travel between the two countries and visa waiver programs. By the way, Sweden is on the visa waiver program.

Since this was a post-9/11 world, we were still working on some security agreements with the Swedish government. In this cable, this particular guy mentioned that we may not need to go through the Swedish parliament for HSPD6, based on the way that he looked at the law, and the way his folks have advised him. However, when that particular cable was released, Swedish parliamentarians saw it and said, "What do you mean, you don't need to go through the Swedish parliament?"!

He got in trouble a bit. He didn't lose his job or anything, but he wouldn't talk to us for a little while. This kind of got resolved after I got to post later on. Our DCM at the time, a gentleman by the name of Bill Stewart, worked it out with this chief of protocol. Of course, we were very apologetic that we put him in a bad position, and he eventually came around and said, "Look, I understand how people do these things."

From my perspective, as far as Sweden was concerned, this was the worst "black eye." While it was not good, our relationship survived it quite easily. The Swedes were a little… I won't even say annoyed. They were just a little like, "Eh, that didn't make us happy." That type of thing.

However, the EUR/NB Office Director tasked me with reviewing all of the cables that our office covered, not just Sweden. As a result, I reviewed thousands of cables to see if there might be more embarrassments like that. It took a bit of work and time to go through. I had a couple of people that assisted me, some interns that were in the office. Sometimes the hardest part during the cable review was predicting whether or not a seemingly non-controversial issue might become one. Is that going to be an issue for whichever one of these countries?

Most people now have forgotten about the worst part of the whole Wikileaks affair. I mean, shoot, that was 11 years ago now. They come up now and again. But I do recall, and I'm trying to remember who it was at that time… I don't want to quote someone as

senior as the Secretary of State, John Kerry, but it was a senior figure in the State Department who said that the silver lining to the black cloud of the WikiLeaks releases is that a lot of people saw how well Foreign Service officers wrote. It became a minor recruiting tool for us as well. They were like, "Oh, wow, these FSOs really seem to be in touch with what's going on in the country," based on some of the reporting cables that came out. Again, I don't remember who said that, and it's not really that important, but it was a senior person. I thought that was kind of neat. Later on, when I became a diplomat in residence and a recruiter, if I were to get a bit more of a one-on-one setting or a group setting, I'd talk about things like that.

The fellow who I mentioned earlier, Tom Selinger, who was the desk officer for Sweden and Norway when I got there, and let me take over the Sweden portfolio… He reached out to me a week or so ago and asked me, since I did sign up, when I retired, for the reemployed annuitants list, if I was interested in doing something later this year. I said, "Well, if I wasn't busy teaching at the University of Oklahoma," and I have a pretty busy fall schedule, "I would help you out, but I can't. My schedule's pretty full."

But it was great to hear from him. He said, "Is this the Rob Andrew that worked on the Swedish desk 10 years ago?"

I said, "Yes, this is he." Tom's still in the Service, of course. It's interesting how people you meet in the Foreign Service tend to come back onto your radar, occasionally, just like you, Mark, and others. I remember saying that the Army was a small world, even though it has a lot of people. That is 100 times truer for the Foreign Service and meeting people throughout your career. I don't know if you had any questions or if I missed something from the desk officer time, but that's really kind of the highlight of it.

Q: That sounds right.

ANDREW: There were other issues, of course, as always. There were briefing checklists, bureau checklists, getting senior officials ready for meetings and briefings, lots of paper movement. The work definitely helped me in understanding how the State Department itself worked. I enjoyed that part of it, although I also realized that I didn't necessarily want to do a lot of assignments at main State. I felt that six months as a desk officer was time well-spent. I enjoyed the foreign part of being a Foreign Service officer even more.

Q: Right.

ANDREW: Now we get to language training, Swedish of course. There's not too much to report there. It was a fairly standard language training course, but there are a couple of items I'll highlight. One, there weren't that many students. There were only three of us in this class. The three were my future boss, who was there with me – Angie Bryan was her name – and my wife because there was space available. The three of us were there together for a while. Because Angie and I were moving at a quicker speed, Pam got some individualized training here and there. It was good. I developed a good relationship with my future boss, and as a matter of fact, I had a good relationship with her in Sweden and

I'm still in contact with her now. I visited her right before the pandemic hit in late 2019. She lives in Portland, Maine now. So, I had a good relationship.

Still, it's kind of a little weird doing a language training course with your future boss. Even with the best person and best boss, it was just a little weird. I don't know how to better describe that. I guess you felt like you were kind of under a magnifying glass already before you started your job. It was that type of thing.

Q: I did that, as well, with another small language – Armenian – where everyone in the class would either be working with me or for me. It was… We worked everything out, and it was quite pleasant, but yeah, there's a little bit of an edge to it.

ANDREW: Yeah. It's unavoidable. You make the best that you can of it, especially with those languages where we don't send a lot of people. Swedish is a very niche language, in this particular case, as I assume Armenian is, to a degree. Frankly speaking, I got a 3/3 in language training before I left, which is what the position required, but I spoke better Swedish at the beginning of my assignment than at the end. The Swedes spoke English very well and, in many instances, better than we do. When I would speak Swedish to them, they'd be like, "Rob, let's just go to English. We've been speaking English all our lives. Don't worry about it."

I'd be like, "Please, let me try."

"No." They weren't mean about it, but they were like, "We can exchange pleasantries, but when we get to business, let's just stick to English. It's easier for us, to be honest." I really found that… I won't say I found that intimidating, but once again, I felt like I was outclassed as a diplomat, sometimes, by our very well-educated Scandinavian brothers and sisters up there. They were professionals. At any rate, language training… I think that was the main highlight. I'm trying to think of any other big events that occurred during language training. That would've been early 2011. I suppose the Bin Laden raid took place while I was in language training. I remember that. That was in, I think, May of 2011. That would've been the last half of our course before we went out to post.

Right. We arrived in Sweden in August of 2011 for a three-year tour. A couple of things before I get to work issues. One of the most interesting parts of our life there is that we lived in a house that used to be owned by a lady named Agnetha Fältskog. I might be messing up her last name. But Agnetha is one of the "A's" in the ABBA musical group. We got to say that we lived in ABBA's house. She was the blonde if you remember the group. There was Bjorn (whom Agnetha was married to for some time and had a child with), Benny, Anni-Frid, and Agnetha. It was really something.

People wouldn't believe it, but I had proof. Proof came in a few ways. One is, when my mom visited – this was before she passed away – she was in downtown Stockholm looking at tourist books of Stockholm and Sweden. One of them was *ABBA's Guide to Stockholm*. She was flipping through it, and sure enough, on whatever page, there was a picture of my house. It was saying that this was where Agnetha lived at a certain point.

Then, another proof is that we got fan mail for her at the house. It was primarily Germans. I would say that about every three to four months or so, we would get fan mail addressed to her. Sometimes, we'd even get a picture of her. It was clear that what they wanted her to do was sign the picture and mail it back. We didn't know what to do with the mail. We went to the embassy, and they were like, "Yeah, we don't know. Just toss it or whatever."

Then, one other one was shortly before we left in 2014. About 6 months before we left, I got a cold call at our house, and it was this lady. I was a little bit suspicious, but she said, "We understand that you live where Agnetha used to live. We work for the ABBA museum, which is going to open in May or June of 2014. We would like to come and take photographs at your house."

I said, "Hmm, okay. Can I get your name and phone number?" Being a diplomat, you never know if this is a setup or something nefarious. I informed security and the RSO's office at the embassy, and they checked it out and said they were legit and to let them come. So, they came out and took photographs. They had a child model who pretended to be Agnetha and Bjorn's daughter. What they wanted to get is, from the kitchen, they wanted to take a picture from the kitchen to the front yard. There were these steps outside that led from the house to the street that were "key" to the photo shoot. Agnetha and Bjorn had a daughter together, and she would go off to school as a youngster. The museum photographers took pictures, and their model pretending to be the daughter, running down the steps, and they took pictures of her from the kitchen. That was really neat!

While that story is a little aside from the normal work there, I thought that it was an interesting story of where we lived. We were quite lucky and fortunate to live where we were at. Stockholm is a city of 14 islands – an archipelago, essentially, and part of the Baltic Sea. Obviously, the Swedes are a seafaring people and have been for a long time. Where our house was, we could actually see the main channel for ships coming in and out of the Stockholm port. Primarily, these lanes weren't for freight shipping, but more like ferries and cruise ships. We would see cruise ships going by every day. What a thing to do. You'd look out your window, and there was a cruise ship going by. It's a very pretty country there. We were fortunate. I cannot overemphasize that we were fortunate to have done an assignment in Sweden and to have lived that life there.

The particular island that we lived on is called Lidingö. The reason I mention that is that one of its sons from that island is a rather famous fellow by the name of Raul Wallenberg. He was, if you know that name, famous because of what he did in World War II, helping rescue Jews and giving them false papers, essentially. He gave them Swedish travel documents to get them out of Hungary and other places. I think he worked a lot in Budapest if I recall correctly. But he was captured by the Soviets late in the war and never heard from again. It was really unfortunate. The U.S. gave him honorary American citizenship way back when, as a matter of fact. He's well-revered, and he was from the same island that we lived on. That was also pretty neat, to be a part of that.

A couple of other life things… We traveled all over the country from Stockholm to the major cities like Uppsala, Gothenburg, Kiruna, which is north in the Arctic Circle. They have a huge iron ore mine up there. It's one of their industries that they have. My parents visited us in Sweden several times while we were there. I'm going to come back to some life things, but I'll get to a little bit of business. I did a fair amount of traveling in my position. By the way, I should mention my position. When I first got there, I was the deputy… What was it? I was Deputy Political counselor, but then our Political and Economic sections combined, so my boss, Angie Bryan, became the Pol/Econ counselor, and I became the Political Section Chief, and then they had an Economic section chief. Political Section Chief became my title about six months after my arrival.

In my portfolio, which was more of a traditional political job, doing political reporting, I did tend to focus on security issues, such as Pol/Mil. There was the NATO portfolio that I covered as well. Sweden was and is not a member of NATO (update, Sweden looks like they will join NATO as a result of the renewed invasion of Ukraine by Russia that began in February of 2022), but they are what we call an enhanced partner of NATO. For instance, when I got there, they were participating in Operation Unified Protector. These were the operations over Libya in 2011. They didn't drop bombs, but they participated by taking a lot of photographs and battlefield intelligence. They also had deployed 500 troops to Afghanistan. They were still there during our assignment, before they pulled out at the end of our assignment, and they had losses. We were working with them a lot on Afghanistan issues.

Q: Just out of curiosity, do you know what the mission of the 500 Swedes was, like where they were or what they were doing?

ANDREW: They were in the northern part of Afghanistan. It was either the Mazar-e-Sharif area or Herat. They worked with some other Nordic/Baltic countries. I know they worked with the Germans. They worked with the Latvians, too, and the Finns. They were in an area that was… I don't want to say peaceful, but it was relatively more peaceful than other parts of the country. I don't think they went down to Kandahar, for instance, where our Marines and the Brits and a few others were.

But the Swedes took casualties. They lost… It doesn't seem like a lot, but I want to say they lost around five to 10 soldiers to combat while they were there. For the size of their contingent, per capita, that was noticeable. We were very thankful that they participated with NATO for that Afghanistan mission to help respond to the attacks on the United States. That meant a lot to us. Being a so-called neutral country, they were definitely in with us on that. Neutral is also a very loose term these days. I would say they're very Western-oriented, the Swedes, in most cases. But yes, they were in the north somewhere, and as I said, I believe it was Herat or Mazar-e-Sharif.

Right. Well, the position required travel, so I did some regional travel as well. I went to Helsinki, Finland to coordinate with our embassy there and attend some conferences, as well. I went to Tallinn, Estonia and Riga, Latvia, not necessarily for work but for some

tourism. There were overnight ferries from Stockholm to those places. One of the great things I did in my time there was attend Almedalen. It is located on the island of Gotland, which sits in the open Baltic Sea there, and it belongs to Sweden. The capital city of that island is called Visby. Every year, they have a huge political conference there and it is called Almedalen.

This conference is kind of like a Republican or Democratic National Convention. It's an intellectual and think tank convention, all rolled into one and takes place over a week or so. Almedalsveckan (which stands for Almedalen Week) is what it's called. It takes place over a week to 10 days in the summer. It's *the* political event to go to during the year. All of the big politicians from each of the parties go there. They'll have seminars, conferences, mingles, parties, a lot of public affairs events. It generally occurs during the Fourth of July weekend or near that, so sometimes we would do our U.S. Embassy Fourth of July party out there. But we would be careful so that it didn't detract from their event. We coordinated closely with them.

Almedalsveckan was really neat. It was also a party, in many cases. This is where a lot of political networking would occur. As I said, it happens on an annual basis, so that doesn't necessarily mean that there's an election going on, but during an election year, it's even more important. You will see major political figures from the Swedish political parties make speeches. That's why I mention that in some ways, it's a bit like a Democratic or Republican National Convention during an election year. All of the heavy hitters and the doers of Swedish politics and other forms of industry – business and economics – are involved. It's primarily politics and government, though. That was a fantastic experience there.

I should mention that my ambassador at the time was a fellow by the name of Mark Brzezinski. If you recognize that last name, he is one of the sons of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was the national security advisor for Jimmy Carter in the mid-late '70s. So, Mark comes from a famous family. His sister, Mika, is on MSNBC (Microsoft-National Broadcasting Company). She's on Morning Joe, or she used to be. Then, he has a brother Ian. Ian's the only Republican in the family, which is kind of funny. They're a family divided, to a bit of a degree. I mention that because, obviously, we worked with him as ambassador there. Go ahead. You have a question.

Q: Well, in general, I was curious what your portfolios were, including whether you were involved in military sales or that aspect of political work?

ANDREW: Yes, all of it. Like some of my other assignments, I was attached at the hip with the defense attaché in this assignment to Sweden. I worked closely with him on both policy reporting as well as some weapons sales. The big one I remember is a large sales package of helicopters. I was part of a large weapons sale. In this case, it was Blackhawk helicopters. The Swedes bought quite a number of them, and we were involved, as the United States and the U.S. Army, in training them to fly and maintain these helicopters. They deployed some to Afghanistan as well while we were there. That was a big deal. I also had an opportunity to ride in one of them. That was pretty neat, too.

I'm trying to think if there were other major weapons transfers. The interesting thing is that they would often come the other way. Sweden actually has a sizable arms and defense industry, and the United States buys weapons from them, actually. I think we bought anti-tank missiles from them before, as well as some other weapons systems. The interesting thing is that their air force is quite well-known as being quite capable, very professional, with first-rate equipment.

The United States' main air force fighter today is the F-35 or the F-22 or something like that. They have the Gripen fighter made by Saab Aerospace. It's related to Saab, the company that makes cars, but the car company's gone out of business. Now it is just Saab Aerospace. The interesting thing about that airplane, the Gripen, is that about half of the parts and avionics are American. When a country buys Swedish products, like the Gripen fighter, it's actually good for us. Let's say for instance that we're competing with the Swedes and others to sell a fighter jet to some country. If they don't choose, say, our F-16 export model, and they choose instead the Swedish Gripen, we still win at least partially. I was part of that on some of the policy issues.

It was also eye-opening how closely we collaborated with the Swedes on everything. I guess I can't use the word "ally," as in NATO ally, but they were a little-a ally in almost every issue like that.

My portfolio included the security/military part. As I said, even though Sweden is not a member of NATO, they were close. As a matter of fact, they were probably more interoperable with NATO than some of our allies, in terms of communications equipment, and joint military planning. There was quite a bit of that, obviously because of Afghanistan. There's probably less so now. But they continued to be a very well-integrated with NATO type of country. As a matter of fact, there's a movement. It's not strong enough for it to happen (at least until 2022), but there is a sizable portion of the population and political parties that advocate NATO membership for Sweden. It's probably not realistic, but things could change if the political situation were to get really terrible with, say, Russia, or the security situation. You could see movement very quickly. But that was a big part of my portfolio, Sweden's relationship with NATO.

This goes into my next part. In my time there, the first year after I arrived, there was the NATO Summit in 2012 that took place in Chicago. That was then-President Obama's hometown, so it figured they would choose Chicago for it. I did a couple of trips there. I did a recon trip there in March of 2012 from Sweden because I knew that they were going to have me be the U.S. liaison to the Swedish delegation that was sent and headed by the prime minister. I went in March as part of an official recon, to see where the event would take place and all of this.

Then, when the summit took place, which was in May of 2012, it was really, again, a lot of work, but it was a privilege to be able to escort the Swedish prime minister around. The prime minister at that time was a fellow by the name of Fredrik Reinfeldt. His foreign minister, Carl Bildt, was there, as well as the defense minister, Karin Enstrom. I

led a support team there as well. The defense attaché from Sweden, who I was attached to at the hip with many times, Jon Klaus, took care of the Swedish defense minister. Another FSO, Brianna Olsen (who had occupied my position in Sweden before me and with whom I had served together in Mexico City) assisted me in escorting the foreign minister. We had a great team, and the visit of the high-level Swedish delegation to NATO went fairly smoothly. I made sure that the prime minister got everywhere he needed to get to, working with his control officer, so to speak, as well as the foreign minister and the others.

It was at this summit that Sweden became an "enhanced partner" of NATO. They had been a partner of NATO, part of the PFP, Partnership for Peace, process, but then they became an enhanced partner. I think Finland did as well. This was a pretty big deal for them. Of course, for Sweden, it's a mixed bag for their domestic politics, how involved they want to be with Western security institutions like NATO. It can be negative in their political discussions at home. They like to consider themselves neutral or non-aligned.

Interestingly enough, they are a member of the EU and have been since 1995. When you're a member of the EU, it's hard to be neutral, in many cases, because of how your economy and other aspects of your policy are integrated with the EU. There's actually an Article 5 type of clause in the EU constitution, whatever they call it. While it is not the Article 5 that we have in NATO, which says that you respond to an against one as an attack against all, it could be considered an "Article 5 light" type of commitment. In the EU articles from the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, this article that says that you will respond to other countries' emergencies, whether they be by attack or natural disaster. Sweden is a part of that.

There's one more thing that occurred post-Chicago summit, which is a bit of a little war story. It's one of my proudest moments of being in the Foreign Service. I'll explain it to you here. The NATO summit was in May of 2012, and Secretary Hillary Clinton, at that time our Secretary of State – was coming to visit the next month, in June. The Embassy leadership really wanted me to be a control officer for her, but I couldn't, just because I was working on NATO. Someone else had to do it, but I was assigned to be a notetaker for her bilateral meeting with the Swedish foreign minister, whom I knew well.

Just a couple of weeks after the big NATO summit, Secretary Clinton came, and we had this bilateral that was going to take place on a boat. They were going to take her for a little boat ride in the Baltic right there, in the Stockholm area. I was going to be the notetaker, and I was there. There were two things that stood out to me from this experience. One, it was a Swedish boat, and we were all pre-positioned. We were all on board before the secretary of State came. There were all of the things that the control officers had done, and I helped out the site officer a little bit. When Secretary Clinton came on board, the foreign minister, Carl Bildt, was with her. He was introducing her to her staff.

Then, there were a few of us Americans lined up also, almost like in a receiving line. He was introducing us to her as well, because he knew all of us. Of course, our ambassador

was there in case the foreign minister didn't know us, but the foreign minister knew every one of us. He came to me, and he goes, "Oh, this is Rob." He's talking to Secretary Clinton. He puts his hand on my back and goes, "He did a great job in Chicago at the NATO summit."

For me, that was one of those moments I'll never forget, when another country's foreign minister recognized me and thought that I did a good job working a particular meeting or summit. I didn't know what to say. All I could say was, "Thank you." But for me, that was probably one of the high points of my career in the Foreign Service, being complimented by another country's foreign minister in front of my own secretary of State. I was not a senior Foreign Service officer. I was just a mid-grade, mid-level officer doing my job, but this fellow was so smart. He knew my name. He knew who I was. Of course, I'd met him and done notetaking in a lot of meetings with him. I'd even called him with permission if the DCM or ambassador were out or whatever. It was such an honor to be recognized like that. Just a simple word, saying that I did a great job at NATO.

The second part of that bilat, as I was a notetaker, was dealing with the noise on this boat, and of course, they're serving them some sort of lunch. The dishes are rattling along with the noise of the engine. It was kind of hard to hear what they're saying. I'm sitting behind Secretary Clinton, not too close but a little bit to her right and behind. They didn't want me that close to her, right, but I was there, and I was trying to listen as well as I could. I really appreciated Secretary Clinton at that moment, and I'll tell you why.

She was using 5x8" cards that we'd prepped for her and very professionally put together. After a while, I started not to worry about what she was saying, and I focused, of course, on what the foreign minister was saying. She actually bothered to read our background notes and our talking points. When she was talking about certain issues, I recognized what she was saying because, guess what? I wrote them. That was another compliment. I'd been so frustrated in various parts of my career when I did all these hours of work on talking points, bureau checklists, and prepping your principal officers, and then they didn't use them! You're like, oh my gosh. I can't believe how much time I spent on that, and you didn't even bother using it! But Secretary Clinton did. She bothered to read the background notes and the talking points. She may not have used every one of them, but it was clear that she was read-up on the topics. That's a shout out to her for doing her job, and, at least in that particular case, doing a very professional job. I was quite proud of that.

I think those are the main parts of the work that I did there. You may have some questions. Obviously, there were other things that were going on, and there are a couple of personal stories that I want to share before we leave Sweden but let me go to your questions. I know you have some.

Q: At this point, the former United States Information Agency had been integrated into the State Department. The old expression was, "Oh, now everyone is a Public Diplomacy officer." I'm curious if your job came with other aspects of public diplomacy.

ANDREW: Less so in this particular instance. If you recall, in Costa Rica, I did quite a bit of public outreach. I worked very closely with the Public Affairs Office there. I did work with the PAO (Public Affairs officer) and the Public Affairs Office in Sweden. In Costa Rica, I was doing the counter-narcotics job, which we wanted to do some more publicity on, particularly for drug rehabilitation and educational issues. In Sweden, I don't recall ever being interviewed, but I do recall doing outreach activities. For instance, I went to local high schools, talking about Americans and the American experience.

I felt like I probably didn't do enough, but I did do some outreach on behalf of the Public Affairs Office. I was also involved peripherally in some interviews with the ambassador while he was there. Of course, we would have a Public Affairs officer there, or maybe it was one of the locals. Our Public Affairs officer at the time was a guy by the name of Jeff Anderson. I don't know if you know him or not, but he was a particularly good fellow and up on all the issues. One of his local Swedes, a very senior lady, and I would often confer, because I traveled sometimes with the ambassador.

I should mention that, actually, that was another one of my portfolios. When the ambassador traveled, I usually traveled with him for note-taking purposes. It wasn't really as a control officer, but more if I needed to arrange something on the spot. This duty was primarily to record things and to prep him for meetings and whatnot.

There were so many issues going on. There was controversy between some members of the Jewish population and the Muslim population in the southern part of the country, in the town of Malmo. The mayor of Malmo at that time was Ilmar Reepalu. On some occasions while in office as mayor, he had made remarks that were considered antisemitic on sensitive issues. We actually had the special envoy that combats antisemitism come do a visit. I went along on this visit with the ambassador. We met with this fellow and we were deciding whether we were going to do a press interview or not. We ultimately ended up not doing one. But that was after some close consultation between me as the Political person and the Public Affairs folks. We could see that it could be a little bit of a disaster in this particular case.

That was one of the main things I remember, other than doing outreach. That just came to me, this incident with the Swedish Malmo mayor. We were going to do a joint press conference, but we thought it might go south. We normally don't interact with other countries' cities' mayors. Usually we interact with their foreign ministry, their president, their prime minister, etc. The Swedes might have viewed it as trampling on their sovereignty a little bit. But we had support from the Swedish government in general to go ahead and talk to them, because they were concerned about his comments, as well. We thought that maybe at the press conference, he might say, "The Americans tried to come and tell me what to do, and I'm not going to do it." So, we didn't do that type of thing.

Q: Okay. The other question I have is kind of wonky. Sweden is home to the IISS, the International Institute for Security Studies. It's relatively well-respected about defense issues. Did you end up doing work with them?

ANDREW: Yes. I worked with several think tanks, in fact, that being one of them, and a very prestigious one. As a matter of fact, the Public Affairs officer, the first one I served with there – Jeff Anderson was the second one – he and I did an event for them. We kind of called it, "History of the World, Part One." We did a tag-team type of thing. To be honest, I can't even remember the topic or what it was, but we did work with them. We worked with several think tanks. Usually, it was in terms of going to some of their fantastic conferences or speaker series and taking some notes from them. They had very well-informed research products that we used, as a matter of fact, in some of our reporting. The bottom-line answer is yes, we did.

Q: Then, the other question was, did you have to deal with, other than WikiLeaks, irritants in the relationship?

ANDREW: There were some irritants now and again. It's not too sensitive, but it had to do with the Surveillance Detection Unit. I don't know if I should go into that too much on this or not?

Q: We never look for confidential information, so…

ANDREW: I don't think it's confidential to mention it. I think that what I'll say is that there were some irritants on our Surveillance Detection Unit with every country in the world, for that matter, but we resolved it. The Swedes, again, are very grown up about things. We worked very closely with their security folks who protected our embassy or who would protect us if we needed it. Our RSO was a professional. But I should mention that. What I really wanted to get to though is that during my time there… Gosh, I forgot about that. I guess I should mention that. That's a big deal.

There were two senior visits in my time there, and one where I was a control officer for Secretary of State John Kerry. I want to say that that occurred in the early summer. It was May or June of 2013. He visited, and I was his control officer. That was kind of neat to be the control officer for him. It was a multi-city visit to Sweden. He visited Stockholm, and then he went up further north and I had a separate control officer for him there. That was an Arctic Council meeting up in northern Sweden, so it was a multi-city visit. It went very well, this particular visit, and I got my complimentary picture with him in front of his plane, the State aircraft. It was a good memory and a good visit by Secretary Kerry.

By the way, to make a couple of comments, I found him to be a likable person. While I don't remember everything from that visit, what I do remember is the meet and greet that he did with the embassy. I found him to be very genuine and warm. He was a tall fellow, by the way. Obviously, he was very well-educated and a well-spoken person. I felt comfortable around him, and I really enjoyed his meet and greet. He didn't feel like a normal politician to me. It felt like someone who either fooled us completely or really did care about us. I really think it was the latter. I think he did care.

This has nothing to do with Sweden, per se, but when he came on board as the secretary of State, it was shortly after that when Anne Smedinghoff was killed in an IED (improvised explosive device) explosion in Afghanistan. That, I really think, affected him, even though he was a Vietnam veteran himself. When he just comes on board with this job and has this young Foreign Service officer killed by an IED explosion in Afghanistan… She was delivering textbooks somewhere. It was something education related. He talked about her, and it was clear that it affected him, how important our job was as diplomats to maintain, sustain, and make good relations with other countries. That's the basics of diplomacy, right? Avoiding conflict, deepening relationships. So, it affected him, and I felt that from him, being around him, when he spoke about it. I wanted to mention that.

I'm coming back, in a very circular way, to the irritants in the relationship. I didn't really feel that there were too many, and I'll tell you why. President Obama also made a POTUS visit. I want to say that that was in September of 2013. It was almost a no-notice visit. We only had a few weeks' notice. He was supposed to visit with Putin in St. Petersburg for a G20. There was some sort of meeting, but he flubbed Putin and said, "No, I'm not going to go meet with him. We're upset with Putin right now." So, instead, he came to Sweden, and we put that visit together.

He was like a rock star in Sweden. No one's supposed to know the motorcade route from the airport to wherever he's going, but it didn't matter. Swedes were lined up on every street just in case. There were so many Swedes. They treated him like the conquering hero. They actually did polling in Sweden, and he polled higher than the sitting prime minister, and, obviously, he polled higher than he did in the U.S. in terms of popularity and approval ratings. I think his approval rating in Sweden was approaching 80 percent. That was indicative, I think, of the relationship.

Were there irritants? Yes, but they were very minor and mostly kept behind closed doors. In general, it was a positive bilateral relationship. From my time there, from 2011 to 2014, nothing really sticks out as being a major irritant, other than the WikiLeaks thing, which was when I was on the desk in Washington and a little bit at the beginning of my tour. But again, that was a little bit of a matter of time and letting some tempers cool down, and then it was all fine.

Q: Okay. Now, the other thing is, now that you were the head of a section, were there management issues that you had to deal with where now you could perhaps call on your military background in managing people?

ANDREW: Yes. Now, I only managed a couple of folks, but I did. They were locals, in this particular case. I never managed Americans, unfortunately. But I managed several different FSNs. I had two or three at particular points. I definitely enjoyed it. Even with the least problematic person, there's always going to be issues to manage around. Again, I was truly fortunate that I did not have any major issues.

One of my employees had been out on maternity leave. They have a very liberal, I guess you could say… I hate to use the word in a negative sense, but it's a very socialistic system there, with cradle to grave benefits. That's incredibly positive for maternity and paternity leave. One of my FSNs was on leave when I first got there, and we had a temp, so to speak, that was in there. She did a great job. We had to manage time a little bit, and portfolios. When the one who had been on maternity leave came back, I was a bit sad to see the temp worker leave as she was just fantastic. However, the permanent employee was absolutely superb.

On another aspect in this case, you have to understand that labor laws are different in other countries. We actually had one of those famous government shutdowns occur during my time in Stockholm, and it was so funny. American employees would be furloughed first, and locals could not be. As a matter of fact, by their local labor laws, we could not furlough them. I would sit at home, and they would work. It didn't last long; it was like a day or two. It was only during Trump's presidency in '17 or '18 that we were out for 30-plus days. Actually, it was the end of '18. I was already back in the U.S. on my next assignment by then.

My FSNs, my Foreign Service nationals, could come up to my office, because it was not a controlled access area to the point where they could not come up there. At some embassies, if you're not a cleared American, you can't come up there. That wasn't the case, in this particular embassy. But I hated calling them up to my office, so 95 percent of the time, I would go down to them. I would actually say that on any given timeframe, without wanting to irritate them, I would actually spend some time in their office.

We might do joint drafting of cables together, for instance. They were much smarter on internal Swedish politics than I was, for instance. They would be, right? They're the continuity of the embassy. I relied a lot on their advice. I felt that I learned a lot from them. They were very professional, skilled at putting together all of the required annual reports – Human Rights Report, International Religious Freedom Report, the Trafficking of Persons Report, etcetera. Again, I will say that I was lucky. I had no major problems with any of my staff, and the other Americans in the section, too.

I also managed some interns. I should mention that. I'm still in contact with them today, as a matter of fact. Some have gotten into the Foreign Service, so that's always nice. I don't want to make this sound like I'm great, but it didn't tax my management ability, because I had relatively few numbers, as compared to my army time.

Q: Okay. While you were there, did Pam want to work? Did she work?

ANDREW: Yes and yes. Pam definitely wanted to work. Our daughter Jessica was in high school by then. She had done a year of ninth grade back in Fairfax when I was on the Sweden desk and doing language training. She was going to be in 10th, 11th, and 12th grade there in Sweden. Pam did want to work, but this time she did not become a roving secretary. She might've done it here and there, but actually, her primary job was, she

became a security escort. She got her high-level clearance, and escorted contractors and other folks around the embassy. She worked for facilities, I guess, in this particular case.

It wasn't necessarily a taxing job in terms of lots of knowledge for it. You're essentially just watching people. But she enjoyed it. As a matter of fact, she was a team player working for facilities. Several times, we had people who did janitorial services there, and we would have shortages, sometimes. Her American supervisor would not want to ask her to do that, but Pam said, "Look, I'm not above cleaning toilets. If you need help, I will help you out." They didn't want to ask her to do that, but she said, "Don't worry about it. I want to do whatever I can do to help contribute to the mission." She did facilities cleanup work, too, while she was there. She didn't mind. She said, "Look, if you need me, I will be there and I will help out." For me, I was proud of Pam for that. She was a team player. She would do her regular job, but if the embassy needed help, she would do that.

She also did volunteer work. She helped decorate for Halloween for the kids and Christmas and all of that. She was involved. She did work, and she made some good money again for that. That was fantastic. She stayed busy and stayed involved. I want to say she worked for most of our tour there.

Q: Okay. Now, you are mid-grade. At this point, in Sweden… You've had a couple of good jobs. What are you thinking about in terms of the rest of your career?

ANDREW: That's really interesting. At this point, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I thought about going back to D.C. This was probably the time to go. I'd really been overseas for four tours, with the exception of that one-year tour of the bridge assignment and language training before getting to Sweden. But I found out about an opportunity. This wasn't really career-enhancing, but it was helpful to us personally. I found out about HR, Human Resources back at main State, and their recruiting and Diplomat in Residence program. It used to be a program where you kind of… I hate to put it this way, but it was where you put retiring ambassadors out to pasture. They would go to a university for a year, maybe teach and pass along some knowledge to folks and fade from glory. However, HR was now looking for younger FSOs to do the jobs, including FS-1's and FS-2's. They wanted younger people to be a little bit more aggressive in recruiting.

This is what we wanted to do. We found out that there was going to be an opening in Norman, Oklahoma, at the University of Oklahoma. I thought to myself, "I don't think we could ever get this assignment." In terms of career, to get to your question, I wanted to head towards the Pol/Mil track, the Foreign Policy Advisor track a little bit. I was interested in that, and I had essentially worked on those portfolios in almost every one of my assignments – security issues, counter-narcotics, Pol/Mil. I thought the Pol/Ad thing would go nicely.

I actually got three handshake offers. One was to be one of the Pol/Ads at NORTHCOM (United States Northern Command) in Colorado Springs. I also got a handshake to be the Diplomat in Residence at the University of Oklahoma. It was a bit of a decision for us.

The better career choice would have been to be one of the Pol/Ads at NORTHCOM. However, Pam is from Oklahoma. I said, you know, I've been dragging her around for so many years between the Army and the Foreign Service that it might be nice if I could do this for a couple of years and get her home. Her parents were aging. As it turned out, my mom passed away near the end of my Sweden tour. We were starting to be concerned about our parents' ages and how long they were going to last. I said that this might be a fantastic opportunity to do a Foreign Service assignment at home. It will kind of plateau us in terms of career-enhancing moves, but we can recover from this in the long term.

So, I accepted the handshake offer for the Diplomat in Residence assignment.

I was inspired by this. I didn't even know about this program, to be honest, except for my boss from Stockholm, Angie Bryan, because she was looking into it. What she ended up doing is, when I took this Diplomat in Residence assignment, she ended up becoming an examiner for the Board of Examiners, BEX. It worked out quite well, in that sense, for us leaving Sweden at that point.

Before I leave Sweden, I do want to mention a couple of personal things there. One is, in July of 2013, my parents came over, and we did a fantastic driving tour of Europe. It was insane. We visited 11 countries in 13 days. It was that type of thing. It was almost one of those "if it's Tuesday, you must be in Belgium," things. We traveled to a lot of countries. Sweden, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark. We put 6,000 or 7,000 kilometers on the van we rented. That was quite a blast.

That was actually the last family trip I did with my parents. My mom, in March 2014 – this was just a few months before we were going to finish up our assignment, and we knew we were going to Oklahoma at this point – got a diagnosis of stage four terminal cancer with six to 12 months to live. I do the family medical leave thing, and I leave Sweden for about six weeks. I want to say it was the month of May and the first week or two of June. Then, I would go back and finish up my assignment for a month or whatever and then finish up.

I spent six weeks with my mom. She had a tumor in her brain and her liver was 50 percent metastasized, which is bad. That's actually the thing that got her. You can't even do a transplant, at that point. It's over. You've kind of got to manage care until the person dies. The tumor in her brain she got radiation treatment for, and it actually worked. It was shrinking by the time she ended up passing. I spent six weeks with her in northern California, where I'm from, in Chico. These were difficult, but good times to spend with her.

She was actually improving, to a degree, before we left. I say she was improving because this cancer had affected her speech. She could speak, but she had a hard time forming her words and getting them out. She could write them out, but she had a speech problem, and she would mispronounce things. We were going through items in the house. She was very practical until the end. As a matter of fact, she was teaching until a month or so before

she died. She was a highly active lady. She turned 78 just before she died. She would say things like, "That can live." What she meant was… We were going through some of her items, and "That can live" meant "That can't leave, I don't want it."

It was near the end of my six-week visit when her speech started coming back and we understood her better. It's not like she ever lost her mental faculties. She just had a problem getting it out of her mouth. At any rate, we left back to Sweden, and we were going to do a little bit more reporting. I had one more Almedalen visit, that big political event on Visby, the island of Gotland, in late June or early July. That's when I got a phone call from my wife saying, "Things are not looking good for your mom. You probably need to come back again." They were now talking about end of life stuff. She was going to go into hospice.

Before I could get back home to California, she passed away. Essentially, I departed post about three weeks early, so I didn't have any problems with curtailing or anything like that. That was to be able to see her.

Gosh. I thought of one other thing for the business part of this. But anyway, with Mom… As I said, I departed post a few weeks early to essentially take care of her funeral arrangements, memorial service, and all that.

One thing came back to me that I want to mention about the island of Gotland and the capital city of Visby, and this great political event called Almedalen. I actually made several trips to Visby during my time in Sweden. I had continued a professional relationship with a contact of mine that I'd first made in Russia. You're going to recognize his name. His name was Boris Nemtsov. I knew him in my time in Moscow, and then I met him at conferences and interacted with him a little bit during my time in Sweden. He had been a former deputy prime minister of Russia back during the Yeltsin days. He was an elected politician. Of course, he was most infamously murdered in 2015 just across from the Red Square and the Kremlin, on a bridge. Of course, that saddened me. But I wanted to mention here for the record that it was a privilege to meet him there and in Sweden a few times, particularly at conferences, talking about Sweden's role in the Baltic and the security up there and Russia. He was a remarkably interesting fellow, what I'd call a true Russian patriot in wanting to work with the West. What ultimately got him killed was being an opposition guy to Putin. They can never prove it definitively, of course. But I met him several times in Sweden, so I wanted to make sure I mentioned that.

Q: Alright. Is this a good moment to talk about the departure and arrival in Oklahoma?

ANDREW: It is. One last thing about Stockholm. The year before I left, I joined the Stockholm International Rotary Club, and I became a Rotarian. I've been a Rotarian ever since, but I want to give a shoutout to that particular organization in Stockholm. Again, my boss had gotten involved in Rotary. That was one of the things she'd wanted to do. I guess I copied her a little bit. I was a copycat. She joined another club, and I joined this

one. I was inspired by my mom to do this, and with my mom's passing, that was something we had in common, so that's why I continued with it.

Yes, I left in early July, a day or two after my mom died to go and take care of that. I never went back. Pam and Jessica had to finish up. They had to turn over our quarters, our ABBA house. I was there for the move. We did the move out before we left, the pack out and stuff, but Pam and Jessica ended up closing that particular post, turning the house over and all of that. I arrived in the U.S. in early July, and then I went to Washington for DIR training. After I dealt with my mom's stuff, Pam and Jessica got back and I'm out in California dealing with Mom. Pam and Jessica find us a house here in the Norman, Oklahoma area. We're on our own. We decide we're going to buy a home. It's the home that I'm in right now, in fact. Then, I go to Washington for the Diplomat in Residence orientation. Every six months, they gather all the Diplomats in Residence to do a training conference or whatever. That was my first time doing that.

I kind of hit the road running here, but before I get started on DIR stuff, I wanted to make sure I answered any questions that you had on that.

Q: On Sweden? No. Any other questions on Sweden I had were more along the lines of economics, so I don't think it would have fallen under your area of expertise.

ANDREW: Not really. I did some work on that topic, but the Econ officers had the lead on that. I know I supported them a few times on big visits from econ-level folks, but that definitely was not portfolio.

Q: Okay. Now, as you start in Norman, it would be helpful to explain how the program works and what a Diplomat in Residence is supposed to do.

ANDREW: Right. We ended up doing a three-year tour, by the way. It was a two-year tour, and then we extended a year. What is a Diplomat in Residence supposed to do? If we kind of back up to the 30,000-foot view, at main State Department, I think they call it something else now. I think they call it Talent Management or Global Talent Management, but it was HR recruiting that we were a part of. There are only 15 or 16 Diplomats in Residence around the country, so there aren't that many of us. Many of them are senior ambassadors, and then there are folks like me at the FS-1, FS-2 levels. Then, there are the Washington D.C.-based recruiters, as well, that would go out and travel sometimes.

The reason I like to mention is that, again, this is a divide between the Department of Defense and the State Department in terms of numbers, budget, and resources. If you think about Armed Forces recruiters, they're in almost every little town in the United States. Well, not every little town, but every major town is going to have an Armed Forces recruiter. That means that they have thousands of them. For us, there were 16 of us that covered the country. I covered seven states in my first two years being here in Oklahoma. I covered Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota,

and South Dakota. I saw my job as being very much a road warrior, so to speak, and being on the road quite a bit, as well as here at my main campus.

The primary job of a Diplomat in Residence now, or at least when I started that job in 2014, was to recruit. We were still allowed to teach, and I actually did end up teaching at OU in the spring semesters. I developed a course called "The Practice of Diplomacy." Go figure, it was on what I'd been doing in the State Department. It's a course I still teach now as a retired person here at OU. But they were really moving away from having DIRs teach at universities as the main emphasis was on recruiting. Main State Department and HR Recruiting were not too thrilled about teaching. They thought that it took away from more hardcore recruiting that they wanted to turn to.

Diplomats in Residence usually were very senior persons, basically on a retirement tour and then getting out. As they like to say, this was not your father's or grandfather's DIR program. They were wanting to be more aggressive in their recruiting. You would go to career fairs at universities in your region. You would go to job hiring fairs. You would do any and every type of outreach. It could be high schools. There was a lot of emphasis on going to high schools. I even went to a middle school.

I would do sessions on preparing for the FSOT, the Foreign Service Officer Test. I would do information sessions on that. As a matter of fact, when I developed my course, the Practice of Diplomacy course here at OU, I modeled the course on preparing people to take the test, actually. It had a heavy dose of American diplomatic history put in there. If you were to attend my course, Mark, you'd be like, "It's pretty clear you're prepping me for the selection process to become an FSO."

HR Recruiting would tell me about people in my area, in my states, who were going to be taking the orals anytime soon. Maybe I might be able to travel to an area and provide an information session on the oral assessment, the Foreign Service Oral Assessment. I did that fairly frequently. I would do a "Coffee with a Diplomat." I always tried to make my recruiting trips, especially if I was driving by car for a long trip, almost like a military operation. That's where my military background came in handy. I would hit certain institutions, whether they were academic or maybe business, even, or tech types of universities. We're not just looking for potential FSOs, we are also looking for people who want to be specialists – engineers, IT folks.

I was on the road, I would say, a couple of weeks every month. I actually found the DIR job to be one of the hardest jobs. They say recruiting is hard, and it is. I was away from home a lot. Pam would come on some of these trips with me, which was great, and my dad would, as well, because by then he was a widower. We had a lot of great father-son time in the car. But these were the types of things we'd do, like recruiting events. It was primarily information sessions about the State Department. Various careers, internships, the Pickering and the Rangel Fellowships. I actually recruited a couple of people that got into those programs and are FSOs today. I'm immensely proud of that.

Of course, the name of the game was also recruiting for diversity. As an older White guy, I'm not necessarily a diverse person myself, but it was diversity in all of its facets. We tend to think of most FSOs as coming from the East Coast, the capital region, or the West Coast, like San Francisco, Stanford, LA, UCLA, things like that, and not so much from the middle part of the country. My diversity recruiting was as much about geography as it was about recruiting minorities like African Americans and Asian Americans.

The really tough crowd for me was Native Americans/American Indians. They have a healthy distrust of the federal government, as they should. But I was successful in getting some into the Foreign Service – or at least one – and then getting several internships. They were great partners to work with, some of the tribal nations here in Oklahoma. One of the reasons they put the DIR here is that Oklahoma, before it became a state, was known as Indian Territory. The U.S. government had forced a lot of tribes to relocate here in our country's westward expansion. Here in the state of Oklahoma today – I think this is accurate, but I could be slightly off – I want to say that there are 38 federally recognized tribes here. When you drive on a highway through Oklahoma like Interstate 40, which is a major east-west interstate, you'll constantly see signs. "Entering the Citizen Potawatomi Nation." "Exiting it." "Entering the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma." "Exiting it." "Entering the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma." It was similar in a couple of other states, as well, but I really wanted to make an effort to reach out to Native American communities here to at least inform them of possible career opportunities.

The interesting thing about a lot of our tribal nations in the country is that they really don't want to leave home. If they do, they want to leave for four years, which means a military enlistment. They like doing that. A lot of tribes in Oklahoma, like the Comanche and the Apache, have a warrior background. They like sending their young men in particular to the Army to toughen them up, remind them of their warrior past, and prepare them for leadership in the tribe. That's how they like to do a lot of that. For the Foreign Service, we're looking for people who are going to join for 20 years and maybe never come home for work, at least. That was a challenge with the tribal members here.

I also made a lot of visits to Historically Black Colleges and Universities. There weren't a ton in my area, but there's one right here in Oklahoma, just to the north of Oklahoma City. There are a couple in Missouri and a few other places. I would visit them, as well as the big draws. In Missouri, for instance, the university that produced the largest number of interns for the State Department was Washington University in St. Louis. It's a very well-known university. The majority of the internships for the State Department from this region came from Washington University and OU.

Q: Fascinating. When you made contact with these universities, who were you working with? Who was the point of contact, basically?

ANDREW: Right. The default point of contact would be career services at these universities. However, the diplomats in residence who came before me, as well as I, developed contacts well beyond the career services. Individual professors, often, who taught international relations or political science would send me requests to visit their

class. If I was at a university for their career fair, I wouldn't just do the career fair. I would visit classrooms. I would do other events while I was there, or even other universities in the same town. I would use a career fair as an anchor to get to other places for my trip.

Here in Oklahoma, I also would do a little bit of networking on the economics side of the house. It's all about jobs, right? I became, in my position as the diplomat in residence here, an honorary member of the Oklahoma governor's international team. I was invited to join it, and I went to their meeting often. I have a short, interesting story about that.

One of these meetings I went to, there was a presentation by the manager of a barbeque sauce called Head Country, and it's made in Ponca City, Oklahoma. Unbeknownst to me, there's a connection between Head Country barbeque sauce in Ponca City and Sweden. How do you put those two together? In Sweden, there is a hamburger joint. They had McDonald's there, but they had their own version of McDonald's called Max. One of their menu items was called the Spicy Max burger. It was just a normal burger with a dollop of Head Country sauce on it. This was so interesting to find out that Ponca City, Oklahoma, Middle of Nowhere, USA has this trade relationship with Sweden.

That was really interesting. That's actually how I did a lot of my networking with the tribes. They were members of this international governor's team, as well. There were a lot of sovereign nations. Tribes are what we call sovereign nations – they are subject to federal law, but not to state or local law. They answer to the federal government by treaty, but they can also do exports and economics with other countries, which is interesting. Even though it's with the state government, they work closely with them to get rail lines into their manufacturing areas. The largest manufacturer of oil and gas parts in the state of Oklahoma is run by a tribal nation. They're a factory-producing tribe. A lot of the tribes here in Oklahoma have done very well and have taken a bad sandwich handed to them by the federal government and made it golden. Proud of them for that. But I wouldn't have found out any of this without my networking. It got me inroads into several tribes.

To come back to your question, if I was going to a university or an area the first time, I would look at career services, maybe Chamber of Commerce type of things, and then move from there. When I left my job, I left my successor a 40-page contact list with people who I had dealt with.

Q: Yeah. For a job like that, the Rolodex is a gold brick.

ANDREW: It really is. There are feelings of satisfaction. Even now, I get contacted by HR Recruiting as a retiree. They'll email and say, "Hey, by the way, someone that you spoke to five years ago is now in A-100, and they mentioned you in their survey." There's an immense amount of satisfaction there that will actually last for years. I visited a high school in Tulsa in this assignment, and one of the students from that assignment ended up becoming a student of mine a year ago as a professor. She took my class specifically because she remembered that I recruited at her school. She's still on track, maybe, to

want to become an FSO. The DIR job is a job that doesn't necessarily have an impact today, but it has an impact in the future.

Q: Fascinating. I am curious about one thing. As you were talking to all of these students and trying to interest them in the Foreign Service, did you find them to be significantly different in any way than the Foreign Service officers who were in the Foreign Service at the time you were serving? Were they more interested in particular kinds of things, or did they have particular skills or talents that, perhaps, we didn't have when we were entering?

ANDREW: I think that on the whole, I was impressed with the talent of the recruits, of the people that would come to me. When I would do a large net spread and talk to a lot of people, you'd have a mixed bag of people, of course, who were maybe not really interested in what we were doing and maybe not the best candidates. But people came out of the woodworks, and it'd be amazing, the experiences many of them had already had, their education levels. Of course, they all looked incredibly young to me, and I don't remember being that young. Even the youngest person in my A-100 class was 23 or 24 and he still looked older than these folks do now. That was an interesting part of it.

They were very well-informed about the world and wanted to know more. Frankly, I look at the selection process today, and it's pretty tough to get in. I think that in some respects, it's tougher than when I came in. There are three main stages to testing. There's the FSOT, then they go through this Qualification Evaluation Panel, which you and I didn't have to go through, and then, of course, the Oral Assessment. The QEP process eliminates a lot of people, and I wonder if I would've been able to get through that back then. I think maybe so, but I think that some of the requirements are maybe a little bit tougher. But yeah, I was pretty impressed with the quality of the people who were really interested in coming in.

It was unfortunate, because you'd also meet students who were interested but you kind of knew that without a lot of other life and work experiences, it'd be tougher for them to get through the selection process. They maybe needed a little more education. I hate to put it that way, but there were some who were in that particular box. For most of them, they were motivated, smart, up on issues – even more so than I think I was, at that time, and that was my job. I'm fairly impressed. I was fairly impressed with them. They were ambitious, in the positive sense of that word, and smart.

Q: That's fine. I was looking more for what your impression was. Of course, I retired in 2013, so there was already much more that people in college were going to learn about social media and how to use social media and all of that. They were coming in with a far greater facility of being able to use those tools in Public Diplomacy but also in all the kinds of analysis that you do with Excel spreadsheets and so on.

ANDREW: Yeah. I'm glad you mentioned that. It reminds me of a couple of things to mention. One, I became a social media warrior as well as a road warrior. Of course, I am not a Public Affairs officer, and the DIR job is all about public affairs. I did lots of

interviews. I don't think I ever did any TV interviews, but I did radio interviews on the local NPR (National Public Radio) station and print interviews with local newspapers and a tribal one. That was pretty interesting.

I found myself doing a lot more work on Facebook and Twitter than I'd ever done. I'd do Facebook Live events. It was things from Facebook Live to posting my schedule on my official Facebook page, saying, "Hey, I'm coming to your area. I'm going to be at this coffeehouse from this time to this time in the morning. Come join me for a coffee with a diplomat." I would Tweet on things. I won't say I was uncomfortable with it, but it definitely got me out of my comfort zone of the political mindset, the political career track. I became a little bit of a Public Affairs officer and became far more appreciative of what Public Affairs folks do. That's what that entire job was about.

As a matter of fact, the two diplomats in residence that have succeeded me in this position at OU were both Public Affairs officer career tracks. Of the DIRs, you tend to find that probably 60 to 70 percent of them have Public Affairs backgrounds, and then the rest are a mixed bag of the other cones. We also had specialists now and again as DIRs. That's kind of new. We've had IT specialists for certain recruiting opportunities. There's been a large emphasis, the last couple of years, on consular fellows and IT specialist engineers, and a few other non-FSO types or non-traditional FSO recruiting areas.

Q: Interesting. That pretty much sums up the questions on the general level. You really very well described what the responsibilities are and so on. But you liked it enough to extend one more year?

ANDREW: I did. I actually really liked it. I liked it for a number of reasons. One, I did it as a potential career change. I had never taught before, and I had been told throughout my Foreign Service and Army careers, "Rob, you're a pretty good presenter. You could be teaching a class." I thought about that, and that was in the back of my head, to make good networks and contact here while I was in this position. I don't think I was asked to extend, but when I put in my extension request, it was like, yeah, you've got it, no problem. Again, you may think about wanting to do something for your career or something else when you come back from recruiting land.

But we wanted to do that, and we stayed an extra year, and as it turned out, it was incredibly good personally for Pam. Her dad had been in ill health for 10 years, and at the end of 2016, about six or seven months before we finished our tour, he passed away. It was really good for our personal life, for my wife to have spent the majority of her dad's last couple of years on earth with him or close by with lots of visits. They were about an hour and a half from us. That was good. It ended up being a good personal decision to extend a year, and I think that partially went into it. We knew when we made that request that he was starting to go downhill quicker, and we wanted to see if we could stay a little bit longer, and we were able to do it.

But I also did it for the job. The job, in my last year, changed a little bit in terms of emphasis. First of all, my area shrank from seven states to only five. So, North Dakota

went to a different region and Arkansas went to a different region. I only had five states to cover, so it was a little less taxing to do that. I mean, gosh, Mark, I think that in the first two years, between my own car and rental cars, I probably put 60,000 miles on vehicles. It was crazy how much I was on the road. Also, that third year gave me a little bit of longevity to have worked with people, and I've seen the same students over a number of years.

In the DIR position, you're a recruiter, but I also became a little bit of a career counselor. I was able to counsel people over a number of years in this position – the same people. There were 50 to 100 students who were really interested across my region. They would stay in contact with me, and we'd do phone calls and emails and whatnot to help them along. Maybe they took the FSOT, and they didn't pass and so they wanted advice on this. Maybe they went to the orals, and they did exactly what I told them not to do and they failed. They would report it back to me and say, "You know, I did what you said I should not do, and I failed."

I'd say, "Well, I tried to tell you." But I was happy to work with that person, and then maybe the second or third time, they got in. The satisfaction and the energy I drew from young people really attracted me. They're so excited. They're at the beginning of their careers. You mention things to them, and you can almost literally see, like the lightbulb above my head, see lightbulbs go off above their head. They'll be like, "Oh, I can do this. I can do that. Maybe I should pursue a master's degree and do something like Peace Corps beforehand." That would be great. All of my Foreign Service jobs, I loved, but in terms of satisfaction and seeing some tangible results, this Diplomat in Residence program was one of them.

I had good bosses. As I said, the last year changed a little bit. There was a little bit less emphasis on recruiting FSOs and more on the specialist careers. The last year was from 2016 to 2017. My boss changed, and he wanted a much bigger emphasis, because he was getting instructions from the director general and others, on the consular fellows program. This is one of these non-career limited appointment jobs. It's two to five years. You already have a language, and we train you to be a consular officer, so you go and do adjudicating, American Citizen Services, whatever. Particularly, I think Portuguese was a big one for Brazil, as well as Russian, Arabic, Mandarin. French was in there for a while. We turned a little bit of emphasis into outreach to find people who already spoke languages. Even though I'd already worked with language departments in universities, I emphasized that more in that last year.

I'm making it sound very wonderful, and of course, that's how you want to remember things, but there are always challenges working with the Washington office, as well. There were some unrealistic expectations now and again. Really, you are the one person on the ground, and you have to be able to tell Washington what the ground truth is. As a trained Foreign Service officer, in many respects, even though we didn't write cables, I would draft monthly reports. In many of them, you're using that reporting mentality in your reports for Washington as a recruiter. I think that that helped out quite a bit.

Q: What was the expectation from Washington in terms of what you needed to do to be a successful Diplomat in Residence?

ANDREW: Yeah, so the one thing they could not measure you on was how many people became FSOs, because it's not up to us. It's not like an Army recruiter, where you sign people up and they're pretty much in the Army. They didn't measure us on that. Some of it was output, how many events you do. What effect are you having on internships? Those were one of the measures, a return-on-investment type of thing, getting students. There's a very niche internship, a paid one – one of the few paid ones we have – called the United States Foreign Service Internship Program, or USFSIP. I had some influence on that program, so I was measured on that, as well as Pickering and Rangel, though to a lesser degree. I certainly used the classroom as a recruiting platform. In fact, I was encouraged by the university to do that. That's where I ended up getting one of my Rangel Fellows from, from my classroom.

What else? Media interviews. I guess that's about it.

Q: I'm smiling, because the naughty boy inside of me wonders if you took advantage of military recruiters when they were there to be there as well for a little competition.

ANDREW: Absolutely. You actually bring up a really good point. In particular, at career fairs, you would have other government agencies, the military. As a matter of fact, you might have another State Department recruiter there from Diplomatic Security, because they have their own recruiting program. We would try, despite the fact that they had their own recruiting program, to sit together at the same table or side by side. That made it convenient for a number of reasons. One, I could leave my table to go to the bathroom or wander around and look for people, and he or she could cover me and then I would do the same for them.

But, yes, I purposely loved visiting people who were interested in becoming police officers. I would check them out and say, "Hey, come check out our table, too." Same for the military, as well. By the way, I also would go to the military recruiters and ask them if they were interested in Foreign Service careers themselves. I also visited military posts in my region. I did not mention that. Fort Sill, Oklahoma was down the road. Fort Leonard-Wood in Missouri. Tinker Air Force Base right here in Oklahoma City, not far away. There may have been a couple of others, but the big draws were Fort Sill, Fort Leonard-Wood, and Tinker in my area. But yes, at big career fairs, I would gravitate towards the military folks there and see what kind of people they were interested in.

Because I came from a military background, I didn't really want to poach, but what I would do is, I would get folks who were interested in military careers, and I'd say, "Go do the military thing, and then think about us afterwards." Or, "If you're only going to do it for a few years, you're going to have the skills that we're looking for. The military is a great way to develop some of those skills, and you're going to be a far better candidate for us." That's also a track that I took with them.

Q: Interesting. I imagine, of course, that you used Rotary and the other social organizations that you had access to, as well.

ANDREW: You pulled it out of my mouth very well there, Mark. Yes. In addition to being a Rotarian myself, I spoke to my own Rotary club as a recruiter, and I visited probably half a dozen Rotary clubs in my region to do outreach. I was not necessarily recruiting them, but rather trying to help spread the word and to educate. One of the toughest jobs about being a recruiter is talking to people who have absolutely no idea what the State Department is. None. I was floored. When I would talk about the State Department, they would think about the State Department in that particular state. There's often a secretary of state in a particular state. I'd be like, "Oh, the secretary of state."

They'd be like, "Oh, yeah, I had lunch with him last week."

I'm like, "Really? You had lunch with John Kerry?"

They're like, "Who's John Kerry?"

That became a challenge, and some of my sessions were simply information sessions to tell people what the Department of State was about – how big we are, what our role is in government, where we're at in the world, and what we do. Everybody knows what soldiers do. No one knows what diplomats do. That was always a challenge.

Q: You run into that everywhere. Sure. The other interesting thing is, of course, that as you extend, you're also thinking about your career. It sounds like you're thinking about completing a Foreign Service career but not looking to go into the Senior Foreign Service.

ANDREW: Yeah. At that point, it was question marks, you know? I've kind of gone off on a branch, doing this DIR thing. Am I going to make it to the Senior Foreign Service? At that point, I was saying maybe not, but I would like to try to get to FS-1 if I can and continue on. We actually considered retirement at the end of my DIR tour, because I was eligible for retirement in 2017 when I would've left here. I turned 50 that year, and I had plenty of years from my Army time, combined with State, to be able to retire. But I said, "You know, I'm not quite ready. I can see things going forward here."

Pam was like, "I'm good. I'm ready for this." I wanted to do one more domestic tour. You can stay domestic for quite some time. I went to what had interested me. I gravitated towards the foreign policy advisor, the Pol/Ad position. Pol/Mil stuff. I actively sought and lobbied to get a job like that. By the way, I also lobbied to be a Board of Examiners person as a safe bet. They knew me from my DIR time. As a matter of fact, when it came to handshake time, when we were bidding, I got three handshake offers. I got one from the Board of Examiners, one to be a desk officer on the Canada desk for WHA/Canada, and then also for Pol/Ad to be the Pol/Ad for U.S. Marine Corps Forces South in Miami. That was part of U.S. Southern Command. It's the Marine Corps component of Southern

Command, and they actually happen to be physically co-located with that command as well.

I said, "Well, of those, I think the one that really interests me the most is the Pol/Ad position." It was domestic, it wasn't at main State, which I viewed as a good thing. That's the handshake that we accepted.

Q: Okay. Meanwhile, Jessica is going to school here in the U.S.?

ANDREW: Yes. Actually, let me back up to Sweden for a second. She wanted a little bit of the experience of an American high school, so in the middle of our tour, her eleventh-grade year, she actually moved back to the U.S. with my parents out in California, and she finished the last year and a half here in the U.S. I'm incredibly grateful my parents were willing to do that with a teenage girl. It was good for her, too. She was there for the last year of my mom's life. The last few months of my mom's life were right near the end of my daughter's high school career. She graduated a month before my mom died. But it was good for her to spend that time with her grandparents.

Then, when we came to Oklahoma, she started school here. She's actually not quite finished now. She took a year or two off, but she's about to finish her degree this year. She went to community college for a year or a year and a half, and then she transferred into the OU system. In the DIR timeframe, it's actually kind of funny. We would commute together to the university because she would go to class, and I would go to my office. That was kind of cool. It was a good father-daughter time here. Yes, she's in university in DIR time and when we leave.

Q: Okay. So, it's a relatively easy move this time.

ANDREW: Yeah, relatively easy. We moved from Norman, Oklahoma to the Miami, Florida area. We moved into one of the suburb cities of Miami. It's called Doral, Florida. This is actually a large Venezuelan immigrant community that incorporated its own city. You have lots of Cubans, Brazilians, people from the Caribbean, all over Latin America, but the majority minority, if you can put it that way, are Venezuelans. They've been leaving Venezuelans for 30 years. These are generally well-to-do Venezuelans who are in the leadership of the city, as well. They're Venezuelan Americans, of course. They're all Americans. But it's kind of interesting.

My Spanish speaking skills came back into action here in Miami because Spanish is the first language spoken in the Miami area. As a matter of fact, we got lucky with our housing. It's funny you mention that Mark because we found a Venezuelan real estate lady. One of the interesting things I found out is, we were able to get a TDY trip officially paid for to do house hunting here in Miami. We went house hunting for about a week. It included airfare, lodging, and a rental car. We found a house that was literally a 15-minute walk from SOUTHCOM headquarters. You could drive it in two minutes, and actually, about half the time, I walked, unless it was too hot, which is often the case. But it was a fantastic location where we lived in Doral. It was a relatively easy move in the

sense that it was not overseas. I will say that domestic moving companies, I think, do a terrible job of packing compared to international movers. We had a lot of stuff broken.

Q: That was my experience, as well.

ANDREW: But the biggest challenge we had when we moved is, 10 days after we arrived, Hurricane Irma hit, and we evacuated. Three days before, we had just had all of our stuff delivered at our house, and I was thinking maybe we would never see it. We evacuated up to Orlando and stayed in a hotel up there. Funnily enough, the hurricane followed us up there and didn't hit Miami as hard, but there was a lot of wind damage from Hurricane Irma, especially in the Keys. The Keys got hit, as they always do, the Florida Keys. But I felt that that was our welcome to Miami. We got there, and there was a hurricane, a big one. It was a Category 5 storm, too. But it hit the west coast of Florida more than us.

That move wasn't too bad. I remember the day that we drove into our place when we were going to move in, when we actually came to move. That was the day of an eclipse, because everybody was out with their special sunglasses on looking up at the sun. I said, "Hey, what are you guys doing?"

They said, "Here, check it out." I remember looking at the sun during an eclipse. A quarter of it was blocked out during the day. You couldn't tell without the sunglasses, but I remember that day well.

Q: Here, since we're just about to begin the Pol/Ad job, I'm happy to continue, but I also want to be respectful of your time. Should we break here and resume with the Pol/Ad at the next session?

ANDREW: Probably so. That's probably a good thing. Yeah.

Q: Alright. I'll go ahead and pause the recording.

Q: I'm sorry. Today is Tuesday, June 8th, and we're continuing our interview with Rob Andrew. Go ahead, Rob.

ANDREW: Yeah. Last time, we finished up with the Diplomat in Residence time from 2014 to 2017. Today I'm primarily going to be focusing on the period of 2017 to 2019. 2019, of course, is when I did retire from the Foreign Service. This is the timeframe that we start in.

Q: Great.

ANDREW: As I indicated last time, the Diplomat in Residence job, I think unfairly, is not viewed as importantly as some of the other assignments in the State Department. I know that the Baghdads and the Kabuls and all of the challenging posts certainly do deserve special recognition, no doubt in my mind about it, but I also find recruiting to be

a particularly tough job. As I wanted to emphasize last time, the Diplomat in Residence program is not your grandfather's program or even your father's program, so to speak. They are far more aggressive.

But I recognized that I needed to do something else if I wanted to continue my career in the State Department and be competitive for promotion in other spots. When I had decided to go to the DIR program, one of the jobs that I looked at that I did not choose was to become a Pol/Ad, a foreign policy advisor for a major military command. I turned that one down, but I'd always kept it in the back of my mind, thinking that this might be something that is of interest to me with my military background. In almost every one of my assignments that we've talked about in the Foreign service, I've had a slice of that security portfolio, Pol/Mil or counter-narcotics or something like that. That always interested me.

We discussed bidding last time, and I got a handshake offer to be the foreign policy advisor, the Pol/Ad, for U.S. Marine Corps Forces South. It's a headquarters element, like these military commands are. They don't have real troops, so to speak. They can be assigned troops in wartime situations, but they're a headquarters element. This would be the Marine Corps component of U.S. Southern Command, which is located in Doral, which is kind of a suburb of Miami, just to the west of main Miami by about 15 minutes by car.

As it just so happens, Marine Corps Forces South is co-located with U.S. Southern Command in the same building. The other components are not. For instance, Army South is located in Texas, in Fort Sam, Houston. Air Force South is located way out in Tucson, Arizona. I don't understand how that's Air Force South, but it is. Navy South is located near Jacksonville, Florida, so just up the peninsula, so to speak. Special Operations South is located at Homestead Air Force base, which is not far from Miami. It's less than an hours' drive. Also falling under U.S. Southern Command's jurisdiction is Joint Interagency Task Force South, located in Key West and often called JIATF South. They're responsible for counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean. Then, you have Joint Task Force Bravo, which is a base that we have in Honduras, a joint base with the Honduran air force. Then, probably the one that gets the most coverage on TV is JTFGB, or JTF Guantanamo Bay, for various reasons.

Now, I wasn't necessarily involved with all of those others, but just to kind of paint the scene of where Marine Corps Forces South sat in this organization as a headquarters element. It is usually headed by a two-star Marine Corps general. From time to time, that will change – it could be a one star, could be a three star. It kind of depends. It's generally headed by a reservist who's on active duty. A Marine Corps reserve officer who is called up for active duty to lead this command.

SOUTHCOM, as the higher headquarters in that military element, is headed by a four-star officer. The last couple of officers, including the one that's currently there and was in command when I left, were Navy Admirals. I won't say it's always rotated between the services, but it's been Army generals, Marine generals, Navy admirals. I

don't know if it's ever been an Air Force general; I don't think so. It's generally been the Army, Marine Corps, or Navy that have headed it. It kind of makes sense that it has a Navy/sea-faring taste to it, because much of the land is countries with lots of coastline and controlling exclusive economic zones, things like this.

That was just to kind of highlight that particular aspect of where Marine Corps Forces South stands. We drove from our assignment in Oklahoma down to Miami. We arrived in late August of 2017.

A natural disaster needs to be mentioned at this point. It was 10 days later or so, in the first week of September, when Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 hurricane, hit the Caribbean and hit south Florida and all of Florida, including Miami. As soon as we arrived and got our shipment in, we evacuated out. The funny thing was that when the hurricane was coming, it hit Cuba and we expected it to make a bullseye right for Miami. As it turned out, it did what they called a "wobble," and it stayed on Cuba's coast a little bit longer and ended up coming to the west side of Florida through the Keys and Naples area. Miami did not get directly hit, but they did take a lot of damage, a lot of wind damage. I would say conservatively that every other tree was down. It was quite a bit of damage. We had some minor damage to our house. Actually, it wasn't even to our house, but to our fence. That was repaired. This is because homes in the Miami area, ever since Hurricane Andrew in 1992, have been built to a higher code. They have concrete fronts often, and the roofs are not just your normal shingle. They're heavy tiles so they can really take a pounding. We had shutters on our windows, the heavy steel metal shutters.

One of their primary missions of MARFORSOUTH, along with SOUTHCOM, is to conduct humanitarian operations and disaster relief, but known as HADR. In this particular instance, we would end up sending Marines into one of the Caribbean islands to assist them, but it was delayed because we had to evacuate ourselves and deal with that. By the way, that hurricane, Hurricane Irma, came up to Orlando, and Orlando is where we had ended up evacuating to a hotel, so it still found us there. Now, by the time it hit us, it was no longer a Category 4; it was about a Category 2 hurricane, but there was plenty of damage. That's what my wife liked to say was Florida's way to say, "Welcome to Miami and Florida! Here's a hurricane for you."

Q: Just a quick question. Since you were on State orders, did the State Department assist in your evacuation?

ANDREW: Not one bit, unfortunately. I was assigned to Marine Corps Forces South, at this point, but it depended on what the disaster declaration was by the governor or state officials. My particular area was not considered to have been dangerous, so they did not make mandatory evacuations. It has to do with flood zones. Part of the big problem with hurricanes is not just the wind but also the surge of water from the ocean. It's not a tsunami; it's just a surge of water. Downtown Miami got hit a little bit, but we did not. We were not affected by any surges of water, so there was no mandatory evacuation for us. As a result, there was no assistance, financial or otherwise, or tax break. For me, it

ended up being 1,000 dollars of hotel bills. That's fine. It was a bit disappointing, though, that we were not authorized to do that. That was a good question.

Right. Marine Corps Forces South, as I said, did send a part of their forces that they have in region to the disaster areas in the Caribbean. As I said, Marine Corps Forces South usually does not have organic, regular troops assigned to it, except in the hurricane season. Hurricane season is roughly from June 1st to November 30th. I think that's officially when it's considered hurricane season, although you can have a hurricane outside of those time frames. But that's the high point, right?

What the Marine Corps has been doing for several years – and I don't know if they're still doing it now – was deploying to Central America, to JTF Bravo area and throughout Central America, with what they called an SP MAGTF. I'll tell you what that stands for: Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force. It's a tailored unit. As it says, it's literally a Marine Air Ground Task Force. There are air elements, meaning helicopters, and ground elements and command and control. It's a military task force package that's kind of modular. You can put certain capabilities in these modules and then into this organization. It's a very flexible organization. For those who understand military organizations, it's a task force. It's put together from different elements, but they work very well together.

They had already had this detachment, this deployment of marines, in the region and it's usually several hundred that we're talking about. We're usually not talking about thousands of Marines. We're talking about several hundred that are pre-positioned in the theater to respond and provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief. What can they do? They can do evacuations with their helicopters, primarily of American citizens that are caught in some of these storms or isolated in the after-effects of the storm.

Then, they can also do some other relief. They can deliver meals and stuff, working with USAID, who actually has the lead in these disasters with their Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. OFDA and the Marine Corps will collaborate with each other, as well as the rest of the military. They have to have agreements and all of this stuff to be able to do that. That's what we as Pol/Ads help do the paperwork for, so to speak. But this particular unit specialized in water desalination. If an area doesn't have water, they have these desalination units where they can pull water from the ocean, desalinate it, and make it into potable water for drinking, cooking, whatever it is that you need.

I'm just looking up, very quickly, the particular path of Hurricane Irma. There was a particular island that we went to. It's well worth noting. I'm just going to have to look up the Caribbean. Anyways, I was possibly going to deploy with the SP MAGTF as part of this Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force that was already in the region. But because I was evacuated myself, what ended up happening is the Army South Pol/Ad, who had just come from an assignment in that area, they decided to deploy him. It was actually the right idea because he was familiar with that particular region.

Oh goodness. It's part of the Dutch and French Caribbean. It was St. Martin where the Special Purpose MAGTF deployed to. I was supposed to go to it, but because I had just arrived, I didn't have anything… I didn't have a phone; I didn't even have an email account. Heck, I could barely even get onto the base there because I didn't have an ID (identification) card yet. They decided not to deploy me to it. It just wouldn't have been the right thing.

They deployed another fellow who, as I said, just came from an assignment in Barbados or somewhere. He knew the region very well and was able to be an effective Pol/Ad for them. He helped get clearance for troops to get into this country, St. Martin. It's divided between the French and the Dutch, and you had to work with governments back in Europe as well as local governments. They were coming with weapons, and that was a pain. I helped from Miami in this particular instance, and then he helped downrange. I was a part of it. But that can be one of the jobs of a Pol/Ad, to help get diplomatic clearances in for troops to go into disaster zones. We try to pre-cook a lot of this stuff, but it doesn't always work, of course. Best laid plans of mice and men. We always have to be flexible and try to figure things out. That was kind of my welcome to that particular assignment.

After that, when things calmed down and we re-deployed and USAID took over… I should mention that in these disaster relief operations, the military's only called in, usually, when USAID can't do it, or they can't do something in a timely manner. I should say that's the OFDA branch. OFDA is like FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). It's the FEMA of USAID, to be able to go in there. If you recall, in Costa Rica we had an OFDA rep that was stationed there as a regional hub, and he traveled quite a bit. I think his first name was Tim if I recall off the top of my head. At any rate, the idea is to not use the military for long term in these humanitarian operations. It's because they have the equipment to be able to go in first and then follow up with people who really know what they're doing.

Throughout my assignment there, every year, the SP MAGTF would rotate, so they'd only be there for six months. Then, another reserve unit would come on board and do the missions, so it's not like the same Marines are there every year. There may happen to be, but it's different units, so they get this training. If there's a disaster or not, they do ongoing projects like building schools and various other humanitarian projects.

I'll fast-forward a little bit. The next year, in 2018, there was an eruption of a Guatemalan volcano that destroyed an inhabited area. There was a relatively low loss of life, but a lot of destruction of villages and abodes and homes and stuff. In this particular case, the Marines were not all that far away, and they started building, constructing temporary housing for these internally displaced persons. That would be the correct term, not refugees. Honestly, I don't remember how many they made, but they made like 500 homes, essentially. These were temporary structures. They were the bare basics – shelter, electricity, water, bathroom facilities, no air conditioning, which you would really want down there because it's hot. But the locals were used to it, so it was housing for them and that was one of the great things that they did.

I really saw my job – coming back to some generalities – as working to better integrate State Department and DOD operations, policies, efficiencies in this job. At SOUTHCOM, for the four-star admiral, he – in this case – had his own Pol/Ad as well. That was a higher-level State Department official. As a matter of fact, it was an ambassador, and I know she won't mind me mentioning her name. It was Ambassador Liliana Ayalde. You might know her. She'd previously been an ambassador to Brazil and to Paraguay. She actually came from USAID, interestingly enough.

Q: In fact, I interviewed her. Now that you mention it, I should go back and take a look. I want to be sure we completed her interview. Anyway, proceed.

ANDREW: I worked closely with her. She was in my rating chain. She was my reviewer. This is one of those assignments where the evaluation's a little bit different than your standard State Department officer. My rater was my Marine Corps general, in this case. He was my rater. Then, Liliana Ayalde, Ambassador Ayalde, was my reviewer. I still had to have a State Department person in my chain of command, but my immediate rater was military. Of course, that made the writings of the EER a little bit challenging. The military folks really don't know what we're looking for. It's similar to what they do, but it's a little bit different. They would work very closely with me to craft my EERs.

What I wanted to do is, I'm not going to read from the EERs, but there are a couple of things that I wanted to highlight from them. I did pull from this a little bit on what my job was a Pol/Ad, because it's a little bit different from most State Department positions. Basically, my job was to advise that commander on strategic policy that we have at the State Department, national security strategic policy, and provide my own insight on political, diplomatic, interagency issues based on my own experiences from the region – primarily Costa Rica and Mexico, in this case, to a degree. I was part of the Pol/Mil Bureau at State Department, so I was kind of a direct link between the two organizations.

I traveled with my commander quite extensively in the region, but the first trip I made with my commander was to get him to learn a little bit more about the State Department. The first thing I did after that hurricane mess was over – I think it was in early or late October of 2017 – was take him to Washington, to the State Department. I got him appointments with the assistant secretary for the Western Hemisphere, the acting assistant secretary for INL, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. Even at the Pentagon, believe it or not, I had better contacts than he did. That was in OSD/Policy, the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Policy. In my position, I had contacts with them because we do similar things. I set up appointments for him at the Pentagon. He had his own appointments set up there, as well, with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the big four-star and others. It was kind of interesting that I was setting up appointments in the Pentagon for my military officer. That didn't make sense, but I was like, okay, I can do that.

That was really good. The commander I had, my first commander, was a major general by the name of David Bellon. Funnily enough – this is just a slight tangent – he left

command a year into my job there to work as the J-5 at SOUTHCOM, and then later on he became the commander of Marine Corps Forces Reserve, or MARFORRES, which is in New Orleans. But now he's double-hatted. He just took command again of MARFORSOUTH, and so he's commander of both MARFORSOUTH and MARFORRES. What they're going to be doing with MARFORSOUTH is moving them out of Miami and putting them in New Orleans. That'll be an interesting dynamic. That's a couple of years after me of course, but I think that's an interesting little side note to what's happening to that organization now.

Q: Very interesting.

ANDREW: I should mention that I was only the second Pol/Ad ever assigned to MARFORSOUTH. The person who immediately preceded me was the first. They had not had a Pol/Ad, up to that point. They had decided that it needed it between the Marine Corps, SOUTHCOM, and the State Department, and that's why we started staffing that position. It'll be curious to see if that continues with this move and if they're changing the mission, a little bit, of it.

Let's see. One of the other main duties that I had there actually had to do with the SP MAGTF, the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force. I should put SC on the end of it for SOUTHCOM, because they have SP MAGTFs around the world, a few of them, at least. One of the duties was just getting diplomatic clearances to operate in Honduras every year. We had to renew that diplomatic clearance, the exchange of dip notes, and all of that. I participated in all of that, working with some lawyers and whatnot.

There was actually a delay the first year I was there because of presidential elections in Honduras. The Hondurans got a little catty about it for some reason. They wanted us there, no doubt. The government loves having us there despite some problems now and again, because of what do we do. We bring money, we bring jobs to the local economy. It's just like a little American base there in the middle of Honduras. There's a little post exchange and all that stuff. People can come and shop there. We offer jobs to locals. That's a good thing. But my first year there, it was a little bit on pins and needles to make sure that we got clearance, not for the force that was already there when I got there but for the next year's force. We always work a year ahead, right? I did end up doing that.

Let me transition next to talking a little bit about all of the travel that I did into the region. I did not travel with the MARFORSOUTH commander on every trip, but on most of them, I did. Certainly, I did when he would interact with the country team downrange. If you think of a map of Latin America, we went to most of it. Now, we don't go to Mexico. Mexico's actually covered under Northern Command, NORTHCOM, by area of responsibility for DOD. That's interesting, because for State Department it falls under the Western Hemisphere Bureau, right? All of it does. The Western Hemisphere Bureau at State Department deals with both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM. That's kind of interesting.

At any rate, where did we travel to and quite often? We went quite a bit to Central America. This is where the Special Purpose MAGTF was usually forward deployed in Honduras and then in other locations like Guatemala and El Salvador. Believe it or not, when I first got there, we had a small training detachment in Nicaragua in 2017. Now, there were some issues that occurred later on in early 2018 and we pulled our guys out of there, but despite the fact of Daniel Ortega being in charge again there – and he has been for a while, like he was in the '80s – we were still able to get some military assistance into there for professionalization training. It's usually some sort of training, but not necessarily lethal training all the time.

They had teams in El Salvador, the Marines did, as well as Honduras and Guatemala on a rotating basis. As I said, they might be doing security cooperation training with local Marine Corps equivalents from those countries. They might be doing humanitarian projects like building classrooms for schools. Maybe not building whole schools, but helping repair schools, building kitchens for schools, etc.. I saw one of those down in Guatemala. There was a lot of travel to the Northern Triangle countries, which are getting a lot of press because of all the immigrants on our border. It's always been that way.

Then, I did get to Belize, as well, which was kind of unusual, but we did have a training team there, too. There was a little bit less emphasis on that. The British are still heavily involved. Of course, Belize used to be known as British Honduras. They got their independence in the early '80s or late '70s or something. It was a peaceful independence. I think the Brits were happy to do that. But the British maintained some military training areas. As a matter of fact, the British have a jungle training base in Belize that they use. That's where they go for that.

Where else did we go? It all depended on our relationship with certain countries and their Marine Corps equivalents. I should mention that 'Marine Corps" doesn't really translate very well into Spanish, so in Spanish it's usually called *la infanteria de la marina,* which literally means naval infantry or infantry of the navy. They might have the term *el cuerpo de infanteria de la marina,* so the corps of the infantry in the navy.

Other countries in South America that we often traveled to and had these same interactions with their Marine Corps leadership… Oh, yeah, go ahead.

Q: Just a very quick question. So, they've never adopted marineros *(sailors) or something like that?*

ANDREW: No. *Marinero,* of course, just means sailor in Spanish. What they do is, they will just use the American term. They'll just say, "*Los marines.*" (The Marines). Everybody knows what *los marines* are.

Q: The reason I mention that is only because often, in Spanish, they don't want to take long names. They don't want to have to invent long names. So, they figure out ways of taking something shorter from another language in that makes it easier for them to say it.

ANDREW: That's right. That's what they would informally say. What's interesting is that in every one of these countries where we would work with our Marine Corps counterparts, they would kind of feel a little bit like our Marines, in one way or another. Some of their uniforms were similar. It depended on the country. In Central America, some of their Marine Corps' equivalents, their combat uniforms or camouflage uniforms looked like our Marines. That was kind of interesting to see. They weren't always the same, but it was the same flavor, same ballpark, like, wow, I can see the difference between their Marine and their Army person. There was a definite difference. Of course, in most of these countries, the army is the big military force. Marines are specialized. It's the same here in the U.S. Our Marine Corps is supposed to be specialized for amphibious warfare. In the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they've essentially functioned as a second land army. They're enormously proud of their difference and being part of the Naval services and being an amphibious-oriented force.

I'll mention some specific activities that we did in these countries, but another country that we went to fairly often was Colombia, quite a bit. We went to Bogota, of course, to the embassy. On one of our trips down there, we went to a city called Tumaco. Tumaco is down in the southern part of Colombia, not far from its border with Ecuador. This is where approximately, we figure, about 85 percent of the cocaine that is produced in Colombia crosses the beaches in that area to go into the Pacific and start their drug transit north. Being in Tumaco was actually kind of… It was a risk. I won't say it was risky, but it was a little bit of a risk. We had armored vehicles. When we traveled in these vehicles through this town, there were Colombian marines stationed at every corner in case something happened. There's definitely a big Colombian cartel presence and drug folks there.

We flew into this Colombian military base there. We flew in on a little airplane and landed. It was a little harrowing, this landing into this jungle airstrip type of area. But as we're landing, there are helicopters going out with armed Colombian troops to do counter-drug operations. They're taking casualties. It really made it real. I was not involved in that, but we were down there and helping train marines for various missions, including counter-drug. It was quite an eye-opener.

Of course, it's ridiculously hot down there as well when you're near the equator and it's sea level. It's almost unbearably hot, this particular area. But it was really good, educationally, for us to understand the conditions that their marines were in. We had people down there advising them, as well. This just doesn't make the headlines all the time. You wonder what's going on.

Q: I am curious about one thing. You mentioned that yeah, they do take casualties. What kind of military equipment do the drug traffickers have? How much of a true military threat are they?

ANDREW: Well, they're not going to have heavy equipment like tanks and airplanes and stuff like that, so what we're talking about are primarily small arms weapons, machine guns, mines, or IED types of weapons to use. What they're really doing down there is, the

Colombians aren't necessarily going down there to mix it up in a war with, say, the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas,* Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), who they have a peace agreement with. It's primarily about drug eradication. Either aerial eradication, like spraying crops – that was suspended for a few years; I don't know its current status – or manual eradication, going out into the jungle and finding these hectares and pulling out the plants. There are tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of hectares of cultivated coca leaves.

They try to eradicate them, convince farmers to grow other crops, all of this. Of course, the farmers don't make a lot of money off of cocaine. They make extraordinarily little, like a miniscule amount. It's the drug organization that makes a lot of money on this. Not at this location, but I'll talk about another location in Colombia where it was a really operational area that we went to and that really opened up our eyes.

One of the reasons we went down there was based on a meeting that we had with our ambassador in Bogota. He said, "If you really want to understand what Colombia as a whole and the marines and other armed forces are doing, you need to get down to Tumaco." He's the one that pointed it out on a map to us in a meeting that we had with the ambassador, that this was where all the cocaine was going. That prompted us to want to go down there on a follow up visit later on that I'm talking about now.

This is high stakes Pol/Ad stuff, in terms of working with the embassy, working with the DEA and the INL folks there, with our Defense Attaché Office and Security Cooperation Office to be able to put all of this together. I say, "We went on down to Tumaco." Well, it's a little bit harder than just saying that. There's a lot of preparation in this to better educate us and better understand the training needs and equipping needs of our Colombian counterparts.

We have a great relationship with the Colombian marine corps. As a matter of fact, the Colombian marine corps is relatively large. After the United States Marine Corps, I think it's in the top five largest marine corps in the world. They respect them quite a bit, and they do quite a lot of fantastic work. One of the other areas that we would go to a lot was their training area, which was on the northern coast of Colombia. The Caribbean coast, and it was a training area called Coveñas. It's their equivalent of Quantico, Camp Lejeune, and other Marine Corps bases all put into one. That was a popular location. We went there several times. Again, it was an extremely hot place. It was at sea level.

Actually, I made quite a good contact with the head of their marine corps when I was there, to the point where we're drinking beer on the beach at night talking about things. It was that type of thing. That was really interesting. While I was in this position – and this was in all of these countries, but in some particular ones like Colombia, Chile to a lesser degree, and Peru and Central American countries – I made really good contacts, not only with my embassy counterparts, but with that country's marine corps equivalents. When we had a change of command in Marine Corps Forces South, about halfway through my tour, when that new commander came on board, I was able to brief him not only on all the things that he should know about the politics and policies in those countries, but I

could even give him insights into his military counterparts. I thought that was an important part of my job, getting to know them and have a contact in my rolodex and stay in contact with them. I thought that was part of the value that I brought to the position, being able to do that.

Let me go ahead and mention a few other countries to make sure that I tick them off. I did get to Peru, as well. I got to know their Marine Corps equivalent commanders very well. As a matter of fact, on our visit to Peru – the capital is Lima, of course – we actually did a combined operation between the Peruvian marine corps and our Marine Corps, a simulated HADR operation, and had our Marines and their marines landing on the beach there in Lima. That was kind of cool, so to speak, for many reasons. They were coming on land not to assault, but to begin humanitarian operations in a training exercise.

This actually is for real. Peru has a lot of coastline on the Pacific coast, and they can't get to some of these remote villages along the coast via road. They do have natural disasters, whether it's volcanoes, earthquakes, whatever it is. That's how they get relief operations up there, it's by floating or steaming marine corps elements up to them. This demonstrated that type of capability that we had been helping train the Peruvians to do. I was privileged to be a part of that.

We also made it to Argentina, which was fantastic. The Argentinians have a good relationship with us, but politically, it's always been kind of fraught. While we were there, it was fine, but their military has really, since the 1970's and 1980's, taken a back position. That's partly because of the military dictatorship in that timeframe. You recall that there were a lot of people who went missing and were killed during this timeframe. But the Argentinian marine corps was still a proud unit. This is really interesting. We visited the U.S. embassy in Argentina – by the way, the ambassador's house is beautiful. It's a mansion. It's like walking into the White House or something. It's good to be an ambassador, right?

We went to Bahia Blanca and this Argentinian naval base called Belgrano. They have a museum there, which is quite educational. It's about the 1982 operations in Las Malvinas, or what we know in English as the Falklands. Remember, there was the Falklands War between the Brits and the Argentinians over this island in the south Atlantic there. The Argentinians had struck first, and they took over the place. They captured Brits, and in this museum, they have captured British weapons, British standard, their flag. They're proud of that. We were briefed, actually, to not bring up the Falklands unless they did.

What's interesting is that the head of the Argentinian navy and Marine Corps, they sound like American names, like Rob Andrew and Mark Tauber. They were names like that. They were not Hispanic names. That's really neither here nor there, but we talked to them, and since they had brought up the Falklands and Malvinas, we said, "Well, what's going on? What happened with all of this?"

He boiled it down to this. "The main lesson we learned is that you don't want to fight the Royal Navy on the seas. They're just too good." He had a good sense of humor about it.

He was in the service back then. He'd been in a long time, this fellow. The thing is, if you look at their uniforms, they look like the Brits. They look like the Royal Navy. They fashioned their navy after the British navy. This was an interesting part of my education down there, learning about all of these various interactions between us and the Argentinians.

Military to military, we've always had a good relationship with Argentina. The political relationship has been the one that's been strained, now and again. Of course, Argentina has enormous economic problems, and they continue to have these problems. Their navy and marine corps get a little less attention, but nevertheless, they're still a proud unit, and it was really interesting to interact with them. When I was walking around one of their navy bases… We were there for a couple of days, and I remember having a few hours in the morning free, so I was walking around. You know a lot of military bases here, like with the airplane above me, you'll have an airplane on a stand near the entrance or around the base? I walked around, and I saw this one airplane. It was so old. It was a type of plane that my dad, who was a Naval aviator, used to fly back in the '50s. That was kind of interesting. My dad was still alive at that point, so I took a picture and sent it to my dad and said, "Hey, guess what the Argentinians used to fly: same airplane that you did."

Q: Uh huh. Although I will say that in Key West, Joint Task Force had one of those fast-moving drug boats that are very low to the water as a sort of trophy out in front of their headquarters.

ANDREW: Yeah, the semi-submersible. I know exactly which one you're talking about. I have a picture of it somewhere because I took a picture of it. You're quite right. Those are, of course, produced mainly in the Colombian jungle and get out into the Pacific, but they can go anywhere. You're right that they do have that on display. It's kind of like captured enemy equipment, right?

Q: Exactly.

ANDREW: One other country that I'll mention here, and then I'll move on to a couple of other things, is Chile. Of all the countries in Latin America and certainly South America, they seem to be kind of the most… What's the word I want to say? They've kind of got it together, I guess. They don't have the same problems that the other countries do. They don't have as many problems with crime. Chile, if you remember, is kind of a long, skinny country, north to south. It's not very wide. It sits in the Andes, to a degree. The Andes are between Chile and Argentina. Argentina has the great plains that they have down there, the Pampas as well as the Patagonia.

The Chileans do not have the Pampas, so their growing season is rough. The Chileans would tell me, "We have to work very hard to produce food for ourselves." As a result, it's changed their society a little bit. They're very hardworking people. One of the things that was amazing to me was, I was in the Valparaiso area when we visited there, and cars actually stopped at red lights and waited for it to change. People would only cross streets

when it said "walk." They were very law and order-oriented, a bit more, in this case than other Latin American countries.

The Chilean Marine Corps is relatively small. It's a couple of thousand troops. When they're dressed up in their dress uniforms, they look just like American Marines. I couldn't even tell the difference. Chile kind of picks models from different countries for its various military branches. For their marines, they use the U.S. Marine Corps model. For their army, they use a German model, and their air force is similar to ours. Their navy looks like the Royal Navy. Thus, they kind of pick and mix-match, a little bit, their models on how they put their military together. That was kind of interesting to see in Chile there.

I think I've covered all the countries that we went to. I want to highlight one particular military training exercise/operational exercise that I was a part of in planning and observing. This is public knowledge, so this is not a secret name or anything. It was called Operation King Griffin. Our PAOs had promoted this, so I know that's fine to talk about. This was a large operation that occurred in Guatemala and off the coast of Guatemala in 2018. It was a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief rehearsal in the region there with the integration of all of the services – our Navy, the Marine Corps, a Navy ship off the coast, Marine helicopters flying in, our Army there, our Air Force there, and all of our regional partners and allies – we worked to put together a hospital out in the middle of nowhere, to do training for various types of security cooperation.

The reason I mention this is, I had the privilege to go and view all of this. Of course, I was traveling with my general. I think that I had more time in Air Force and Army and Marine Corps aircraft and helicopters while in the State Department than I ever did when I was in the Army. I flew on Air Force C-130s around Guatemala and into Honduras. I went on the big Marine Corps helicopter, the CH-53. It's called the Super Stallion. They affectionately call it the Beast. It can carry 40 to 50 troops. It's a big helicopter. It only has one big rotor, but it's big.

When you go into the Beast, you should not wear nice clothes. I quickly found out that I needed to have a field version of camouflage for a State Department guy like me, because you have hydraulic oil dripping on you inside this cabin. It's kind of one of those feelings where, if you don't have hydraulic fluid dripping on you, then it's out of hydraulic fluid and you'll crash. So, I guess that it's a good thing, but it kind of made the floor a little bit slippery. They're constantly mopping it up and stuff. I got quite a few rides in those, in and around Central America, as well as the Army's UH-60 Blackhawk. Everybody knows what a Blackhawk is, made famous by the movie *Blackhawk Down.*

I did quite a bit of flying on that for various reasons. For instance, with the Marine Corps helicopter, the Beast, we took Guatemalan and other countries' military dignitaries from Guatemala out to that Navy ship, the USS Gunston Hall, in the western Caribbean. It was about an hour or two flight. We flew over Belize and landed on this ship. Then, we taught them to understand the capabilities of this particular amphibious ship, where not only could helicopters land on it, but they had what they called this wet well. Part of the ship

in the back goes into the water, and you can bring boats into it. You think it's kind of sinking, but it's not. You open it up, and water comes into the back of the ship, and you can bring boats in easily to it, like Marines that are going by small boats or those landing craft. We did demonstrations of that for them, as well.

Then, after returning to Guatemala, we used U.S. Army UH-60 helicopters again to ferry around some of the host nation's political and military leadership up to the border between Guatemala and Mexico. If we worry about the border that we have with Mexico, the Mexicans are 10 times more worried about their border with Guatemala. These are the types of things that we were able to help bring to the equation in Central America, to our friends and allies down there.

I was a part of all of that. I really felt privileged, in this position as POLAD for MARFORSOUTH, to be able to do that. To do the traveling, to advise my commander. Obviously, a big part of my job was just keeping my commander informed about major political trends in these countries, whether it was Venezuela, which turned into a mess while we were there, or somewhere else. By the way, the U.S. evacuated the embassy in Caracas while I was at MARFORSOUTH, however, we didn't have to go down there and evacuate it. They were able to fly out on American Airlines. But we were ready to go down there. SOUTHCOM was burning the midnight oil in case they had to do an armed effort to get our people out.

There were issues with Venezuela, and then there were things like, "Hey, do we want to do a military exercise with the Peruvians in this part of the year?"

"No, elections are coming up. They don't want us down there."

"Okay, fine." I would give that type of briefing to my commander. Usually, most of the time, it was advising him on various political trends, things that we needed to be sensitive about to understand local politics down there, our policy with a certain country, and other aspects of all of that.

By the way, I was probably on the road at least two weeks out of every month. It was quite a busy schedule to travel to the region. Sometimes we traveled within the U.S. as well. For example, we would go out to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to Army South to do some joint staff talks with them. We'd go to Washington once in a while. We'd go to the Navy folks in Mayport, FL. We were terribly busy on this and stayed engaged in all of this. But one of the other things I did on a more mundane basis when I was in the office is, I would read a lot of the reporting cables that came out of the region. I would stay up on them.

As a matter of fact, I would provide summaries of these cables for my commander and the major staff bureaus within MARFORSOUTH. I worked closely with their G2 elements, which is their intel folks, as well as their G5 planners. I worked with G3 Ops also, though to a lesser degree. I would provide them a lot of information about the State Department, what was going on in politics in the region, etc. I participated, obviously, in

joint staff planning with Marine Corps Forces South and sometimes with SOUTHCOM, since we were in the same building with them.

I worked for the commander, no doubt about it, and I was a member of what was called the Special Staff. He had certain senior advisors. There was his sergeant major, his top enlisted person. He had a protocol officer, who was a civilian. There was me, as the State Department civilian. I was the only non-DOD person there. Then, there were a couple of other senior folks. Even though I worked directly for him, it was quite clear that I needed to work with his staff quite a bit. I participated in staff meetings all the time, daily update meetings. When we were not traveling, I was busy with a lot of meetings. There were meetings to have meetings, sometimes. The military loves their meetings. I did quite a bit of that.

Q: Was your background in the military helpful in particular ways?

ANDREW: Definitely yes! Number one, it gave me some bona fides with them, the Marines. We had naturally good ribbing about me having been an Army guy beforehand, and I would wear Army stuff when I came in sometimes, but it was all in good fun. They appreciated that quite a bit. I will tell you, that military background came in handy all the time. First, as I mentioned, it gave me bona fides, but second, they did not have to educate me about the military. Someone who didn't have that experience and came into that would've had a much harder time understanding their mission and what it is that they wanted from State Department. I thought that I understood that pretty well from day one. I hit the road running when I got down there and it never let up until I left. I think it's harder for people who don't have that background to be able to do that.

What I did learn is that the Marine Corps is a different military service. That seems obvious, right, but it is a unique military service within our Armed Forces. They have different terms, different terminology, a bit of a different doctrine. I did have to learn that, but it wasn't too onerous. I had to learn a little bit more about their doctrine, because they are, as I mentioned, an amphibious-oriented force. I had to learn a little bit about that, but it wasn't too difficult. I don't want to say it was easy, but it was relatively painless learning, and I didn't have to stop anything to learn it. It was a little bit of OJT (on the job training), in that sense.

Every military service has their acronym alphabet, and I knew the Army one pretty well and the State Department one. It did take me a little while to learn the Marine Corps acronym alphabet. It'd be like, okay, you just used 10 acronyms in a sentence that I have no idea what they mean. Could you tell me what you said? After a month or two, I got it. I usually could get it by context, but still, I'd be like, "What exactly does KLE mean? You keep talking about KLEs?" That stood for Key Leader Engagements. These would be like when my commander would meet with his key counterparts in Latin American militaries in the region/downrange. I became a key part of the Key Leader Engagements. That was a relatively easy acronym. There were others that were just complicated and I've already forgotten them. Some of them I don't think I ever learned, but I knew what they meant.

That was a good question, Mark. I really found that military background to be helpful. As a matter of fact, when I bid on the position, it was not only State Department that had to give me a "handshake" when I went there. I had to do an interview with the military command over the phone. They interviewed several different candidates, and I think two reasons gave me the edge over the other candidates. One, I had a military background. I could speak their language. Number two, I had in-region experience in Costa Rica. I think that made a big difference for them.

Q: Was there a particular event or a particular assignment that really stands out in your mind, that's sort of illustrative of how the State Department's Pol/Ad program is really important for interagency, all of Government approaches?

ANDREW: Yes. I talked about the Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force, the SP MAGTF, and the various permissions that it needs. But it's not just the process that's important; it's the policy of when and where to use them. That is, I think, really important for the State and DOD integration – in this case, State and Marine Corps Forces South. On the appropriateness of it, and is it even feasible…

We often try to give our military missions that are impossible. They're exceptionally good at it, or at least trying their best. God bless them, right? The Marines and the Army guys, we give them a mission and they never want to say no. They'll say, "It's not really our bailiwick, but we'll give it our best shot." Sometimes, we at State Department and DOD actually need to understand when it's not appropriate to use them. Is it worth the cost of using them for whatever foreign policy objective it might be?

It never came to fruition while I was there, but in our planning stages, we had this thing called a multinational maritime task force (MMTF), where we would get naval forces in the region organized under a common command. It didn't have to be under U.S. command. We were really preferring Colombian or Brazilian command. They had the most capable navy and marine corps forces in the region. Instead of having it just be the U.S. Marines and this SP MAGTF providing humanitarian assistance in the Caribbean, we really wanted to get other regional partners to take that mission. We want our Marines to be more focused on wartime missions, like China or the western Pacific or something.

We spent a lot of political and military capital trying to put that together. I don't know where it's at, at this point, but at least in the planning stages, the ideas were to use amphibious assault ships that the Brazilians had, put our Marines on that, and also have the Colombians be a part of a flotilla. We would have a floating flotilla in the region, doing training, but also on hand to respond to natural disasters – primarily hurricanes, but also volcanoes and earthquakes, like Haiti. Haiti always has something happening to it. I don't know where that initiative of a MMTF got to. I'm hoping that it progressed. The Brazilians, for instance, had bought a helicopter carrier ship (like a small aircraft carrier) from the British. The British sold it to them, and it was specifically going to be designed to do humanitarian assistance operations there and maybe in the Caribbean.

I think those types of things were what we really tried to do, pursuing regional solutions to regional problems. We wanted to have countries work together. We needed to be a part of that, but we didn't have to lead them. You can kind of think of the Americans as the glue between a lot of these countries. Oftentimes, these countries just weren't willing to do joint operations with each other. But if we were involved, they were all in. I think that was one of the real efforts or the real pluses to our presence, our ability to be in the region. And it did work. I mentioned that operation, King Griffin; that would be an example of it. Really, being able to put together this multinational maritime task force, they might have a new name for it now, but the idea is to pool our efforts better as a western hemisphere, to be able to respond to these types of mainly natural disaster threats. We're not talking about invading Venezuela or armed conflict. We're talking about HADR and being able to respond better as a region of partners and allies, rather than as the U.S. or Colombia or Brazil. We wanted to be able to better work together, and I think that's what we bring to the table.

Q: Was there any interaction, given all of the work you're doing in all of these different Latin American countries, with the OAS (Organization of American States)?

ANDREW: What a great question. I actually wrote that down and didn't get to it. What was interesting was trying to get legitimacy in the region, in the hemisphere, with these concepts of these maritime task forces. One of the political entities that would do that would be the OAS, as a matter of fact. Our "regional UN." The Organization of American States. As a matter of fact, this has occurred before in operations in the Dominican Republic back in the '60s. If you recall, there were a lot of issues going on then in the DR. We, the Americans, went in there first with the 82nd Airborne and the Marines, but then we turned it into an OAS operation, which was led by Brazil. Brazil remembers this. It's still in their institutional memory. This is what we were trying to bring to this.

Now, I think it would take a huge, dedicated and determined effort by the State Department to be able to do this. You would need a lot of effort from senior folks at State Department, not little old Rob Andrew, Marine Corps Forces South Pol Ad. We're talking about the assistant secretary for the Western Hemisphere, INL folks, Pol/Mil folks, working with OAS and regional countries, their politicians and militaries, to have SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) agreements. We'd be able to, if certain conditions existed, go and help out a country without delay, that type of thing. That would be under the auspices of the OAS.

Conceptually, that is a goal that we still need to meet, and I think it would require a little bit of political capital to do it, but you're right. The role of the OAS should be emphasized in this. It has not received enough emphasis to get that type of legitimacy from countries who otherwise might be a little bit hesitant to work with the Americans or another country.

Q: Then, the other question that comes up, once you raise the OAS, is, did your job as a Pol Ad include issues related to human rights?

ANDREW: At my particular level, not so much. At the SOUTHCOM level, yes. As a matter of fact, you might recall from your interview with Ambassador Liliana Ayalde that under her office was the SOUTHCOM Human Rights Office. I worked with them tangentially, but for me, it was more at that upper level of organization, rather than at my level.

Now, this did not mean that I was not sensitive to human rights issues. In that sense, I became just another SOUTHCOM person who would promote human rights and human rights trainings. For instance, there was what used to be called the School of the Americas down in Fort Benning, Georgia. Now, they call it the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, or WHINSEC. That's a laundry list of words there. In this training academy there, which is for our Latin American partners, they must receive a certain number of hours of human rights training. We, being SOUTHCOM, are integral in the fact that we promote that, and then we also, through our human rights office, are constantly evaluating our partner countries on their human rights issues within their countries.

As a matter of fact, while I was there, we had the 20th anniversary of SOUTHCOM's human rights office and emphasis in their mission set. We had a big "to do" up in Washington at the Ritz Carlton there, somewhere in Arlington or D.C. I can't remember exactly where. It was a really huge deal and a formal event where we met over several days and brought in leading human rights advocates from the region, some of whom are not very happy with SOUTHCOM. We brought them there anyway, because we wanted to hear what they had to say and stand up and take their criticism. That was an important part of that mission. I was part of it, but that was more at the SOUTHCOM level.

Q: Okay. Again, related to this, were there any frictions related to the fact that the U.S. military has integrated LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals into their units?

ANDREW: Not really so much of an issue, in terms of us having it. Certainly, no problem there. I know for me it didn't come up as a huge issue in the security cooperation with these countries, but many of these countries are behind in their progress on that. There's still a little bit of the, for lack of a better word, machismo and macho instinct in Latin America. LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) is not exactly going to be at the highest level of their attention. But I think for our primary partners, they take it seriously, LGBTQ rights. I don't know how integrated they are and how accepting they are in their military of this. For us, it's not even a thought or an afterthought now, in the American military. I never found it to be a huge issue, although I know that some of the militaries are going to be not as accepting.

Q: Okay. It's just, again, one of these curious compartments of human rights that sometimes becomes an issue, but not always.

ANDREW: Your instinct is right. If we think about marginalized communities, whether it's LGBT, minorities, women, whatever it is, there are problems. Heck, we still have problems in the U.S. But they can be exacerbated, particularly south of the border in this region. I found it particularly true, I think, that there's this pull between how Spanish you are versus how Native you are in some of these countries. How much Spanish blood do you have in you? What was interesting is you found your more elite folks tended to be Whiter and more Spaniard than your mixed-race folks. Your poverty was generally found in high rates among indigenous folks. It was quite clear, in some countries, in this particular case. But those issues were never really a high priority for my particular job in that position. It's not that they weren't for me personally, it just wasn't a big part of my daily work requirements, in that case.

Q: You also mentioned all the different kinds of military cooperation, even, in areas like counter-narcotics. What about in emigration and migration and so on?

ANDREW: Not so much. That's really going out of the purview of the military in this particular case. There might be training of immigration officers or border patrol staff, that type of thing, but SOUTHCOM's primary mission is counter-drug and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. On the other hand, I think we would all be there to try and assist migrants, to a degree, at least in their human rights and getting food assistance to them and water and whatnot. You'd think that's kind of counterintuitive from the military, but it's really interesting. When you really do a little bit of a deep dive into what our military is doing, it's not always CIA plots to overthrow governments and that type of stuff. It's actually a lot of, especially in the Western Hemisphere, counter-drug and humanitarian assistance.

Now, it is about security cooperation on real military stuff. What we want to be able to do is ask our partners in Central and South America, if it came to it and we needed to go and fight a war with China or Russia – assuming it's all conventional – and we had American military assets leaving the region, to help secure the home ground here, so to speak. I think that is one of the goals of all this security cooperation. It's for countries like Chile and Peru and Colombia and Brazil and Argentina – our allies, so to speak; they're not treaty allies, but they're allies – to be able to take up those missions in our absence.

Q: Now, speaking of them as allies… Mexico did leave the Rio Treaty, which was a post-war treaty of mutual defense. Was that much still in the minds of people, in the minds of the militaries as you worked in your job?

ANDREW: Not so much. I would say there's one particular country that we are really closest with, and that's Colombia. They are a partner of NATO, now. I think they're the only Western Hemisphere country, other than the U.S. and Canada, which are members, that is a partner. You also have partner countries like Australia. I think Australia is a partner country. New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, the usual suspects. But it's interesting that Colombia is, too, and they're proud of that fact. Off the top of my head, I do not believe that we have a mutual defense treaty with Colombia, but we have provided so much assistance to Colombia that they are what we would consider to be a major

non-NATO ally or something like this. I don't know what the exact legal definitions of it are off the top of my head.

Colombia would be the one country that we have the strongest relationship with because of Plan Colombia, the taking down of Pablo Escobar all those years ago by the Colombian government. If you look at the Colombian military, their army looks a lot like our army. They're equipped the same. They fly Blackhawk helicopters. They are in tune with us 100 percent and they are interoperable with us. I think that's about as close as we're going to get.

Q: I don't mean this just to be a niggling, boring little question, but you never got… You mentioned you never got to Panama. Was Panama still a major consideration for SOUTHCOM in the sense that the canal had been widened and the U.S. still had to consider being able to move assets through the canal?

ANDREW: Yes. Big deal. Just because I didn't go there doesn't mean it didn't get into our plans a lot and discussions. There's a huge SOUTHCOM-level exercise – I believe it's called PANAMAX – that occurs every year. This has to do with, essentially, defending the Panama Canal and ensuring that it stays open. It involves regional countries there, and of course, it involves us.

We are concerned deeply – and I haven't even brought it up yet, but I should've earlier – about outside influences in the Western Hemisphere. What I'm talking about in this case, of course, is China. We're concerned about China's influence, their entry into South American and Central American countries as part of their Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI. They've been building ports and improving infrastructure in a lot of these countries in exchange for stationing or having long-term leases on ports. As a matter of fact, we're genuinely concerned about the Panama Canal because they own some of the ports on either side of the canal. We're concerned about that. I don't think we're concerned that they can militarily or physically do anything to close it, but they can cause commercial traffic problems. Of course, when you hold up traffic going through the canal, we're talking about millions if not billions of dollars lost in trade and goods if they can't get through there in a timely manner.

Yes, the Panama Canal is important. When I said SOUTHCOM's primary mission is counter-drug, absolutely. However, keeping the Panama Canal open for economic and trade purposes is a clear SOUTHCOM mission, especially now by competing with the Chinese in the region. One of the things that was kind of interesting in my trips to a lot of these countries was that you would often find sign-in books at an airport, like where the military controlled their part of the airport. It'd be like a guestbook sign-in, and I would notice that usually, before us or maybe after us, there were Chinese that had come through, too.

They're trying to keep pace with us in our own backyard in terms of security cooperation, economic activity, etc. One of the big markets for the future to help combat climate change is better batteries, right, for battery operated vehicles and all of this. We're talking

about lithium and rare earth metals. China has a lot of them, but so do a lot of mines in South America. The Chinese are going in there and buying them up in several places, including Chile. There's a concern about all of that.

Q: One other regional issue that you may have become involved with is Antarctica. There are a couple of Latin American countries who have interests in and claim a small wedge of interest in Antarctica. Did that come up in your work?

ANDREW: Not so much. Of course, I think we're mainly talking about Argentina and Chile, down there. Of course, our jumping off point for Antarctica is New Zealand down in Christchurch, South Island. I don't know why we wouldn't have it down in South America, but for whatever reason, we do not. It is of interest to us. I know that I never made a trip down that far south to the tip of…what is it called, Cape Horn?

Q: Tierra del Fuego and Cape Horn?

ANDREW: That's it. Thanks. I never made it down there, but my commander and some of his staff went down to the Chilean side down there and looked at some training areas. We were interested in it in terms of possible Arctic or in this case Antarctic-like training down that far south, but not necessarily for Antarctica itself. That particular issue never really came up for me.

Q: Okay. That takes me to the end of my questions, but that doesn't mean that I haven't missed something that you still think is consequential and that you want to share.

ANDREW: Yes, thank you. I'm just going to briefly look at a few notes. I only have two EERs from this time period, and I'm just making sure that I didn't skip anything. Okay, I didn't skip anything from that. We talked about China, and I'm sorry, I almost forgot to talk about China. The China topic really started to dominate about a year into my tour. I guess, in a way – I'm kind of going up to the strategic level here – we'd kind of fallen asleep on what China had been doing in South America and Central America, primarily due to our focus on the wars on terrorism in the Middle East and Iraq and Afghanistan.

I would say it was probably beginning with President Obama's famous pivot to Asia – you might remember that terminology of a rebalance towards Asia – that we started thinking about China a little bit more as not being the fair competitor that we expected it to be and being more of a strategic and negative competitor. In our planning at Marine Corps Forces South, we started taking that into account for planning for operations and at least getting a good threat assessment. What is it that the Chinese are doing in the Western Hemisphere? Is any of it a threat? Is any of it not a threat?

For instance, it's public knowledge that in Argentina, for instance, there is so-called sovereign Chinese land where they put a space telescope or something down there because it was a good position on the earth. We're concerned about its potential dual use, not only for satellites but maybe for tracking of our military launches from the

continental U.S. and/or tracking our satellites around the world. That's come into our consideration.

Of course, expanding it to Russia, we're also concerned about China and Russia's role in Venezuela. While I was on my tour there, I think it was in 2019, the Russians flew a couple of nuclear-capable bombers to Venezuela, and it made a big splash in the news. "What's the U.S. doing about this?" Of course, we didn't do anything. We knew they weren't stationed there. This wasn't the Cuban missile crisis. This was them sending a couple of bombers there, showing us they could do it if they wanted to. Okay, fine. But we were not happy about it. We, the State Department, I'm sure demarched the Russians that this was a provocative act and all of that type of thing.

There were certain countries that we were concerned about in terms of the relationship with Russia and China and the path they were going on. In addition to Venezuela, we were always concerned about Nicaragua and what was going on there, Cuba, of course, and Bolivia, to a degree. Now, interestingly enough, I think our relationship with Bolivia has improved. They've had a change in political leadership, and I think that they are a little bit more amenable to the Yankees again. At least I think that's improved. Cuba's always a problem, but there's nothing new to report there.

Venezuela's the one that's kind of interesting because of the influence of China and Russia, but also because Venezuela is truly a humanitarian disaster, and we can't even get relief there. We tried a couple of years ago to get convoys in, and the Venezuelans just wouldn't let us in. They've had starvation. They've had a lot of problems. It was one of Latin America's strongest democracies and economies, and it's just not anymore. It's fallen apart. Their oil production is way down. They can't get enough engineers to fix the oil infrastructure that they have.

The Russians and the Chinese are helping them, and I think it's mainly because they've invested a lot of money there and they don't want to see their investment go down the drain. But I would say that even the Russians are probably a little bit tired of the Venezuelans, at this point. For the Chinese, I think Venezuela represents less of a potential military asset and more of an economic asset for them in this particular case. But I think those are important points. I guess this is a little bit less to do with me personally, but I was part of the planning processes, thinking about China and Russia in Venezuela and the region.

One of the last things I'll mention here, and then you can let me know if you have any other questions. One of the things that I was really proud of that I did there is, being a former military officer, I always tried to be sensitive to the people who worked as my subordinates and underneath me when I was in the military, my enlisted folks. I was an officer, and I was responsible for them, people who signed up with Uncle Sam to dedicate their lives or a portion of their lives to service to their country. Thank goodness for them, right? One of the things that I wanted to do, and I think I was successful at it, is I cultivated a close working relationship with the top enlisted person at Marine Corps Forces South, the sergeant major of MARFORSOUTH, an E-9 in the enlisted ranks. He

was a top advisor to the general for enlisted and all of that stuff. His name was Eric Cook, he became a good friend as well.

Because I cultivated that relationship with him, I also cultivated a relationship with the relatively few enlisted people that we had at headquarters. This had less to do with grand policy about China, Russia or anything else. One of my favorite things I did was interacting with these enlisted folks. I provided them a standard State Department one on one brief so that they would understand better what they were doing and how it fits into the overall U.S. government mission towards the region. Someone would say, "I do travel vouchers for these people. It's kind of terrible. I sit in my cubicle, and I check regs and I do a lot of typing, emails, and approvals. I don't understand how I fit into the bigger mission."

I think what I was able to do was to help them understand how they fit in that mission as a result of my friendship and my working relationship with the top enlisted leadership. I think that also my general appreciated that and appreciated me getting to understand his men and women who worked for him better. That's something I'm particularly proud of, taking care of those folks who work underneath you. Even though I did not supervise them, I felt, oftentimes, that I wanted to assist them, provide them some guidance, provide them some explanations of the bigger picture. However, I only did so when invited. I never went in uninvited, but I wanted to give them a better understanding of what it is that we were trying to do, how State Department and DOD work with each other, and how their particular mission is a part of that. I think that that was successful, and I'm proud of that.

Q: Okay. It sounds like we're coming to the end of this tour. What I'm curious about is what your thoughts are about next steps, whether you were looking for additional positions and so on.

ANDREW: So, I was. To cut to the chase, I retired from this position at MARFORSOUTH. A year out, as we normally do, the bid list came open, and I was… We were interested in staying in the U.S. a little bit longer, Pam and I were, so I actually had to request an extension. You could, as of 2018, you could stay in the U.S. up to six years with no problem. You did not have to make a special request. But coming out of the MARFORSOUTH assignment would've been 2019, and that would've been five years into being in the U.S. I wanted to do a two-year tour back in D.C. somewhere. That would've put me into the seventh year by the time I left, so I had to request an official approval for an extension. I did do that. It was approved quite easily. The State Department actually gave me no problem at all. You can go up to eight years with relatively no problem as I understand it. You just have to do the request and justify it. They're usually looking for people to do work in Washington anyway, because many FSOs don't like to do that, so it wasn't a hard sell.

I got the approval to do that, and we only bid on domestic assignments, because back then they were still doing fair share bidding. If I had bid on an overseas position, I would've had to bid on a hardship post, and we weren't quite ready to do that yet. My

wife and I wanted to stay in the U.S. a little bit longer. We only bid on domestic positions. I had a really tough time. I did end up getting a handshake, which I accepted, to go and work on the Canada desk. If you recall, I had also gotten a handshake two years before with them, when I instead took the MARFORSOUTH job. They were still interested enough in me. I was going to work on the Canada desk in EUR/CAN. My portfolio was going to be on border issues with the Canadians. Then, while I was there at State Department, I was going to figure out what we were going to do next – probably go back overseas, do a hardship tour somewhere, whatever the case was.

I got the handshake. But at the same time, in the back of my mind, I had been thinking about retirement. I wasn't really sure about it. What I'm about to describe did not fully get me to it, but it was a factor. What I'm talking about is the passing of my father. Dad unexpectedly passed away in late 2018, about six or seven months before I'd be departing my position. My mom had passed away in 2014. This was it. This was the last of my parents.

Now, funnily enough, Dad didn't immediately die. What happened is, he had a heart attack – two of them, as a matter of fact – and he never woke up or recovered from it. But he lasted about a week. When it happened, it just so happened it was in December, right near the holidays and just before Christmas. We were actually on vacation in Oklahoma, and I got the call. The next morning I flew out, and he was living in San Diego with his lady love companion, at that point. That was worth a whole other set of videos to talk about, but basically he linked back up with his first love after all these years. It was amazing. It was like *The Notebook* or something like that.

I went out to San Diego, and when it was clear that he was never going to recover and he was on machines and stuff, we pulled the plug, essentially, and he passed away. I was there for about three weeks taking care of his stuff. It just so happens that this is the same time that we had that long government shutdown under President Trump at the end of 2018. It lasted for like 35 days or something. It was kind of interesting. I actually didn't burn up any leave when I was on this, because I became furloughed. I had to sign papers while I was out there and send them back to the State Department. I told my Marine Corps guys, "I'd love to come back, but there's no need for me to come back because they won't let me work. I can't even look at my Blackberry. I can't even answer emails." I could check in and say I was okay, but I couldn't work.

The timing, as bad as it was to have my dad pass away, was kind of fortuitous, at least work wise. I was able to fully concentrate on taking care of Dad's effects and arranging a funeral and all that kind of stuff. But one of the things that affected me as a result of this is that we, my wife and I, had spent a lot of time away from our family and our parents in this career, between the army and the Foreign Service. I also have to admit, I wasn't exactly looking forward to going into some cubicle at Main State. So, I did the math, and as much as I might have wanted to stay, we ended up deciding to leave the Foreign Service and State Department.

I have no regrets putting in my retirement papers. Pam and I occasionally, nowadays, think about gee, wouldn't it have been nice to do another overseas tour somewhere? We really liked that. But there were certain factors that we had had enough of. We'd had enough of moving. Between my military career and the Foreign Service career, we figured out that I had moved 20 to 22 times or something like this, and it was starting to wear on us. I was also getting a little bit tired of having to do EERs and bidding every year and doing all of the lobbying for it. I think it's okay, but I never really liked the personnel system that we had. I also had not been promoted in 10 years. That was starting to grate on me a little bit. I felt like I was never going to get promoted. Maybe I would've been. I did have a tick out date or whatever you call it that would've been 2023. When I left in 2019, I left four years before my time and class expiration.

I figured that my EERs were good, but I just wasn't getting picked up for promotion. I said, "Let me run the numbers." What I did is I looked at retirement, and I ran the numbers to see if we could retire on my expected pension from State Department. Not only could we, but it looked surprisingly good. When you take things into account like you're no longer contributing to TSP (Thrift Savings Plan), and I'd been maxing that… When I look at my post-retirement income, it's a little bit less than what I was making active duty for sure, but it's not that much less, because I'm not doing all of those investments anymore.

To ice this, I emailed the University of Oklahoma before I made this decision. If you recall, when I did my DIR job here, I tried this on to see if this was something I might like to do post-State Department. I emailed the chair of the Department of International and Area Studies here at the College of International Studies at OU, and I said, "Hey Mitchell, Dr. Smith, as you know I was your DIR for three years. I taught a class while I was there. Would you be interested in me, if I were to retire and come back to your area, being an adjunct instructor or professor for you?"

My job interview went like this: He emailed me back within a day and said, "Yeah, when can you start"? That was without a resume or anything else, because I'd built a good reputation while I was there. I worked with them a lot, with the university. The rest is kind of history. I put in my paperwork to retire, knowing that I had additional income coming in in addition to my retirement. I knew that financially we would be well off, or at least have a good living wage and a comfortable life. We'd also saved money from our tours overseas, particularly in Sweden. Although we didn't get danger pay there, we got a lot of COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment). We got 30,000 to 40,000 extra dollars a year for COLA, and I was smart in my spending, so I actually ended up saving quite a bit of money, particularly on our last tour. I felt comfortable enough to be able to do it. That went into our decision process there.

We moved here to Oklahoma, but before that I ended up taking the job search program that State Department offers. It's a four-week program. That's in addition to that one-week retirement course. I'd actually done the retirement course a few years ago and I did it again, and I did the job search program. Even though I'd had a job already secured, I did it mainly because I really wanted to put together a good resume, just in case things

didn't work out here at the university. I wanted to have one on the shelf that I could dust off and update. I hadn't done one since I'd left the Army in 2002, so I really needed an update since then. That was an incredibly useful four-week program, that job search program. I would say kudos to the State Department for having that.

As it turns out, my timing was exceptionally good, because I finished that in August of 2019. My official retirement date was late in September. Then, the Covid pandemic hit the next year. In many ways, it was a nice break from the State Department. Obviously, I feel terrible for those guys working remotely in State for the last year. What would've been interesting is the border closing between Canada and the U.S. I would've been busy working on that portfolio if I'd stayed there. I don't regret missing that, but it certainly would've been interesting. It wouldn't have been boring. That's kind of where we sat at in this particular instance.

What was interesting about the job search program was, I was a relatively young guy. When I retired, I was age 52. Age-wise I met retirement criteria, and I had well more than 20 years, because I'd bought back my Army time to count as creditable service with State. Thus, I had over 30 years' worth of service. That's another reason why that retirement pension looks good, it's because of the number of years. I retired as an FS-2, so I was making roughly, in Miami before I retired, 150,000 dollars a year as an FS-2. I thought that wasn't bad. I would've preferred to have made FS-1 and gotten a few more responsibilities and continued my State Department career, to a degree, but I also thought it might be time to reinvent myself. I reinvented myself after the Army, and now I've reinvented myself after the State Department, and I'm doing something I love.

Q: That's fantastic. But then… Okay. What I usually do then, at the end of an interview, is ask you as you look back at your Foreign Service career, what is the advice you give to people considering it, either students or others, now from this vantage point of having both a military career and a Foreign Service career?

ANDREW: The advice I give people who are interested in the career is number one, you really have to be willing to go anywhere in the world. Although all of my assignments were great ones in terms of lifestyle and not too hard of a differential, you have to be willing to go to places that you may not really like and cultures that you may find difficult to adapt to. That's number one that I tell them. You just have to be willing to do this. As willing as you think you are, it's always different when you actually do it. I think that is a part of that experience. If you try to look at the glass as being half full and you go to a new place, if there are things you don't like about it, you have to try and find those things that you do like about it.

Number two, in terms of preparation, even though it's not required, and the State Department will teach you a language and pay you to learn it, I think it's really good to have a language ready before you go into the Foreign Service. For me, having Spanish as a background and French as a background before I came in was absolutely critical. I felt I was head and shoulders above people who didn't have a language already. Because of my years of speaking Spanish, when I got tenured – you know, you have to have done your

consular tour, your report cards have to be good, and you have to have your language – having a language already means you've already checked one of those boxes. That's really critical. Also, if you already have a language, it demonstrates to the State Department your ability to be not only accepting of but maybe even loving other cultures and countries around the world. That shows something, I think, to examiners.

The other aspect is education. That's what I mention to folks. This comes from my Diplomat in Residence time. I don't know what the stats are now, but roughly 70 percent of people who get into the Foreign Service have master's degrees. It's not required. As a matter of fact, you don't even have to have a bachelor's degree as long as you get through the assessment process. I've never met anyone who doesn't have at least a bachelor's, but technically, that's the case. I say you really ought to think about at least getting your graduate degree. No need to go for your PhD. You don't need that whatsoever. Do that for academia if that's what you want to do in your career. I think there is some percentage that have PhDs in the State Department, or at least as Foreign Service officers. If you don't get a master's degree in a typical area like international relations, political science, economics, communications, public affairs, etcetera, you can get a law degree. I know a lot of our peers in the Foreign Service have a law degree, even if they never practice law. That seems to be good preparation.

Then, there's some practical overseas experience that could be important, whether as an intern for the State Department or another position. Maybe it's even just traveling or studying abroad in university. Maybe you learn Spanish down in Costa Rica, or you went to school at Moscow State University for a semester or in St. Petersburg. I think the international experiences are critical, again, to the experience that you bring to the State Department, and you can talk about them during your oral assessment or when you have it in your resume. Having some experience and being able to talk about them and how you overcame adversity, how you overcame sticky situations, that's exactly what the Foreign Service is looking for. I felt that in addition to the military, like in my own career background, Peace Corps is a great way to help prepare for the State Department. I can't tell you how many of my peers and friends in the Foreign Service were former Peace Corps volunteers. I think having that as a background is a good grounding for a career in the Foreign Service.

I guess one last piece of advice I would tell people – and then you can let me know if you have another question – is, "Don't be afraid to fail. Don't be afraid. We all fail at something. Learn from your mistakes." It could be taking the test a number of times to get into the Foreign Service or you mess up a diplomatic situation. I know I did. It's not usually the end of the world, particularly if you're on the younger side and you're more junior. But just don't be afraid to make mistakes. Everybody's going to make them, and you just learn from them.

Q: Yes. Now, the other question I ask is, what advice do you have for the Foreign Service as an institution? What changes do you think would improve the way the institution does business or needs to be updated simply because it's behind the times? That kind of thing.

ANDREW: Thank you for that. We talk a lot about diversifying the State Department, and I think that it's good, but I think that we don't put enough money where our mouth is, in this particular case. I think we need to invest more in the Foreign Service, in the State Department, in making it a little bit more diverse. I think we've made some efforts towards that, when you think about fellowships like Rangel and Pickering, but if I were king for a day, I would probably double, triple, quadruple the funding that goes into that.

I just read an article today that the Biden administration, as part of their budget request, is looking for 500 new positions in the State Department between the Foreign Service and the Civil Service. I do think that we are relatively understaffed. I don't think we're so terribly understaffed that we can't do our job, but I don't think we can do it well enough. I do think that we need some, as Hillary Clinton might say, smart staffing and some smart power. Something like that.

In particular, I think we need to look at our personnel system. I bet every Foreign Service officer who you've interviewed has said the same thing, including yourself. I would look at how we do evaluations, once again. It's still too long of a form. I think that the military, for their officers, they have a two-page form, front and back. I think we should probably get to that, to make it a little bit more efficient. EER season is dreaded every year. To be honest, that actually was one of my reasons for leaving. I'd had enough of the EERs and the evaluation reports. I think that they could be made more efficient. It could be a better process, where we don't dread it. There's probably some inflation, as well, in certain terms that are used. Are people really telling the truth, in some evaluations, about what they've done? I think that needs to be looked at. I think there needs to be a worthwhile audit of the system. I'm not talking about hiring Price Waterhouse Coopers for another half million dollars to do this. I think it could be done without having to do that.

Promotions. I mentioned that I got frustrated with the amount of time to get promoted. Once I got tenured, that was fine, and I got promoted to FS-3. Then I got promoted to FS-2 a few years later. However, I sat at FS-2 for 10 years, doing what I thought were good assignments. I knew the DIR assignment probably hurt me a little bit, but even before then, I should've been considered seriously for promotion, and I wasn't. I had good EERs. I think that the percentage of people that we promote is pretty low. I know that part of the problem was that when I came in, I was part of the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, DRI, from Secretary Powell. They used to call it the pig in the python, where a bunch of people came in at that lower level, so they're progressing through the python at the same level constantly. Not a lot of people are going to get promoted. I think that's part of the problem there.

Q: Just as a quick aside, some people have suggested that promotions be automatic up to FS-3. You shouldn't even really need much of a form, simply something that says, "Yes, performing job satisfactorily," up until you get to FS-3. Really, what are you doing in those first couple of years that's going to be so dramatic that you need a whole long evaluation form talking about everything?

ANDREW: Yeah, I would sign on to that. I would agree.

Q: Anyway, I'm sorry, I mentioned it only because you brought up this notion of promotions and evaluations and what some people are thinking about in terms of making intelligent changes.

ANDREW: Yes. I like that idea. I was referring to the EERs here. There's one, two, three… I guess there are only three main pages, really. That's not too bad. That's of the DS-55 or whatever it's called on the second evaluation form you deal with. I think the other last thing that I would talk about in terms of personnel would be assignments. I'm mixed on lobbying. I'm mixed on how we assign people. In my own career, I bounced back and forth. It was a relatively short career, but I was between the Western Hemisphere and Europe. I know it's always good to have another bureau, another area of expertise in the world to be able to go to, but maybe we need to think about getting real experts, even at the Foreign Service level, for certain regions and really emphasizing that.

I would also be of the opinion that I think all new Foreign Service officers should stay domestic for a year or two upon entry and get to know the institution better, get to know the art of diplomacy a little bit better. Frankly, the orientation training doesn't really train you to be a diplomat. It's orientation. It orients you; it doesn't really train you. You kind of go out to your first post in consular stuff, which is great. It's a great way to start doing that, with on-the-job training and having some consular skills, but I don't think that it really prepares you well enough, in my opinion. My opinion would be that we should go to a diplomatic academy, like FSI, for maybe a longer official period – six months, a year, but maybe six months is enough; I don't know what the time period is – to train you to be a better diplomat. Then, you could be assigned to State Department and learn much better how the organization works. Maybe you're not quite an intern, but you're learning a little bit like an intern. I don't know. It's just a thought that I have.

Then, the other aspect on assignments is, we spend a hell of a lot of money moving people around the world, and then we yank them out after a year or two. Why don't we do longer assignments? Three years is the standard for your standard post if there's no other issues. Why not make it four or five years? Are we really that worried about Foreign Service officers going native? If they're going to betray our country, they're going to do it after two or three years. I think that they would become better at these jobs at these embassies, you would get better reporting, you would get better predictions of what's going to happen. I think you would have better input on foreign policy and better national security policy as a result.

When you bounce people around every couple of years, you're expected to be a jack of all trades, master of none. It works for some people, and for others, it doesn't. I think that it can be too disruptive. Maybe there's some cost savings in there as well for all of the bean counters. Spending as much money as we do moving people and their crap all over the world, why do we do that? I don't have a problem moving their stuff, but maybe we should do what the military does. The military only gives weight allowances by rank. Maybe the more senior you are, the more stuff you can move. From day one, I was able to move 18,000 pounds. In the military, that's not the case at all.

Is it the right thing? I don't know, but we should review those things. We should look at them more seriously and maybe implement them, certainly extending tours. I think that would be a first easy step to do. We could institute it like, okay, as of 2023, we could institute longer tours. It really wouldn't be that hard.

Q: Right. They have experimented periodically, but the experiments were relatively short, and then they did go back to the current one, two, three-year tours, and that's where we are right now. But, alright, unless you have any other thoughts, we're at the end of our interview and I want to thank you, on behalf of ADST, for choosing us and relying on us to work with you on your oral history. It's a vital legacy and the voices of American diplomats telling the story from the ground is a vital contribution to the history of American diplomacy. So, what I'm going to do now is I'll go ahead and pause, and we'll talk about how you proceed from here.