

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Foreign Assistance Series

OLIVER “OLLIE” DAVIDSON

*Interviewed by: John Pielemeier
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early years in Ohio

Wandering around the World: by jeep and bus to Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, the Nile, Sudan, and East Africa at age 20

Wandering through college- 6 years

1966: Joining USAID to work in Vietnam

Training for Vietnam: “Don’t eat the food, don’t get sick and don’t get killed”.

1966-69: Posts in Vietnam: Hau Nghia Province, Cu Chi, Trang Bang District, Binh Hoa.

1969 Vietnam Training Center, Arlington VA.

Back to college: Steubenville Ohio and Georgetown Univ., MA in Latin American Studies.

1971 Joined USAID via the International Development Intern (IDI) program.

Assigned to Ghana as a program officer.

Wife medevaced from Ghana, 1972; assigned to AFR/ West Africa

1978: Transfer to a small Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) of 25 people.

1980: Transfer from Foreign Service to a General Service position as Disaster Preparedness Officer.

Development of OFDA relationships to respond to disasters: USGS, Natl Hurricane Center, Metro-Dade Fire Rescue Service, NASAR, the military, USDA, Continental Airlines, Fairfax Co. Fire and Rescue and others.

OFDA Director of Operations: Worked on 320 international disasters including:

- 1985: Mexico City Earthquake
- 1987 El Salvador Earthquake
- Armenian Earthquake
- Papua New Guinea
- Nicaragua – Civil Strife Disaster
- Dominican Republic – replacing electrical grid
- Caribbean- Hurricane Gilbert
- West Africa locust plague
- Azores earthquake
- Iraq and Afghanistan – civil strife

Aid to earthquake victim in Armenia with Fred Cuny

Development of OFDA provisions: MRE without pork, Scrimplate sheeting, water purification units, housing, suitcase-sized satellite telephones, packaged disaster hospital.

OFDA initiatives now used by FEMA.

Promoting private sector partnerships with OFDA

OFDA's "three geniuses": Fred Cuny, Paul Bell and Robert Gersony.

Meeting with John Garang, leader of South Sudan

Executive Director of IDAC (Intl. Disaster Advisory Committee).

OFDA legacies including ReliefWeb.

On loan to FEMA

Retirement from USAID

Work for American Red Cross as Director of In-kind Donations

Work for Counterpart International- emergency planning for animals and animal rescue. Establishment of National Animal Rescue and Shelter Coalition (NARSC) and National Association of Animal Agricultural Emergency Planning (NASAEP)

LIST OF KEY WORDS

Baldwin-Wallace College
Richard Halliburton- The Royal Road to Romance
CORDS
Hau Nghia Province
Cu Chi
Binh Hoa
Trang Bang District
Parrots Beak
John Paul Vann
Vietnam tunnels
Edward Lansdale
Vietnam Elections project
Carole Siegel
USGS
Volcano Disaster Assistance project (VDAP)
Mexico City Earthquake – 1985
Julius Beckton
Julia Taft
Andrew Natsios
Fred Cuny
John Garang
How private contributions can help or hurt after a disaster
NASAR (National Association of Search and Rescue)
InterAction
DART (Disaster Assistance Response Teams)
Andrew Card
Marilyn Quayle
International Disaster Advisory Committee (IDAC)
ReliefWeb
National Animal Rescue and Shelter Coalition (NARSCO)
National Association of Animal Agricultural Emergency Planning (NASAAEP)

INTERVIEW

Q: We're beginning an interview with Oliver "Ollie" Davidson. He has had a long career with AID mostly in the latter years with the OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) but also with field posts before that. Ollie, I'm going to ask you to start this interview by talking a little about where you grew up and how you got involved in -- interested in -- international work.

DAVIDSON: Thank you, John. It's really nice of you to do this because I know it's a lot of work and yet there's a huge benefit for many people out there.

I grew up near Cleveland, Ohio, the oldest of five children, in a small town called Brecksville. I must say that there wasn't much ethnic diversity in Brecksville, so when it came time to look at the world, we had a fairly limited scope. But when I was 19 -- I finished one year of college -- there was a family in my hometown.

Q: Where was the college?

DAVIDSON: Okay. I went to Baldwin Wallace College, a small Methodist college very near home. It turned out 24 of my relatives also went to that college, including my dad and his brother, who were big football stars. So there was a long tradition of going to the college, which made it very easy because I didn't have any trouble getting in even though I wasn't the best student in the world!

So after one year of college this family in my hometown invited me to travel around the world with them in a jeep, what would be like a jeep camper. There were five of us: the father, his two sons, a professor, and me. We left Ohio and headed west and northwest from Vancouver across to Yokohama, Japan; some part of that by ship. We put the camper on a Japanese ship, and went across the ocean in 13 days, crossing the Pacific Ocean on one of the few civilian ships that were left after WWII.

Q: What year would this have been?

DAVIDSON: This was 1960. The voyage wasn't all that interesting because it was just the sea, day after day. We were on a Japanese-American meal plan so we could eat Japanese food or American food. There were a lot of people -- it wasn't a huge ship -- but there were enough people to find it interesting. So we had an uneventful but an interesting time crossing the ocean.

We arrived in Yokohama and offloaded and we were planning to spend about two weeks driving around in Japan, but it was obvious at that time that the professor and the father, who really didn't know much about each other beforehand, didn't get along very well! There were five people in this small containment on wheels... So to make a long story short, the professor and I left the other three and we traveled then by land and air and hitchhiking and any means we could travel by. From Japan we went to what turned out to be 28 countries in 11 months, mostly by land wherever we could.

I was 19 and the professor was 34 years old. I fondly called him "the Old Professor." It seems a bit strange at my age now. He had traveled a lot and he spoke enough French to be able to get along in places where English was not the only language. We had a marvelous trip. It was really stunning in so many ways. We had good cameras and we took lots of 35mm slides, many of which I still have today and they still look pretty good on the screen! We flew to Taiwan and then to Hong Kong and South Vietnam. This is 1960, so the interesting thing on arrival in Taiwan was that when we landed in the airplane, on both sides of the runway there were armed military people! And when we got to the terminal, they had a big sign that said, "Welcome to Free China." It was sort of my introduction to real politics!

We spent a week in Hong Kong and then flew to Saigon. The interesting thing for later is that the family that we stayed with was an AID family, a man named Shelton. I don't have his first name.

This was 1960, probably in July or August, something like that. We stayed in Saigon for a little more than a week to visit that area, and then he helped us arrange for land transportation to Cambodia. We left on a very packed small bus and headed out on Route 1. We went through Cu Chi and then through Trang Bang and to the Cambodian border. As it turned out a number of years later, I was the AID/CORDS Assistant District Representative in both those places! So I got to see my future work sites, but not knowing that's what I was looking at.

A common sight as we drove along were many guard posts surrounded by barbed wire and a lot of soldiers because during that time there was still the conflict between the Communists and the non-communists. In fact, two or three days after we crossed the border into Cambodia there was one of the numerous attempted coups against South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem.

When we crossed the border into Cambodia we realized that the bus passengers were low level smugglers. They had brought all kinds of contraband in the bus and when we got to the border, they had to pay off the people at the border -- the customs people and others. They must have decided that we were too big of a threat, so they put us off with a couple French couple with their car. This French couple drove us to Phnom Penh. We stayed with them for a few days, and then we went to Siem Reap, which is the home of Angkor Wat. We spent a week wandering in the ruins visiting all the beautiful temples, many of which in those days were still completely covered with vines and they weren't even traversable because there was so much jungle. From there we made our way -- again by land -- to Bangkok, Thailand.

In Thailand, we traveled to the north on a wood burning train. It was a two-day trip, with a wood burning old engine chugging along, ashes flying, burning holes in your clothes if you weren't careful. The train stopped at dark and we spent the night in a Buddhist temple. That was an interesting time because the Buddhist monks were very interested in us and we were interested in them, but we had no common language. We used a lot of sign language, crude interpretation and drawings on paper. The train took us to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand where we spent a few days.

There was an interesting footnote in Chiang. Years later, when I worked in Vietnam, Bud Collins, the tennis commentator from the Boston Globe, came on tour with Arthur Ashe, the tennis star. Bud was from Baldwin Wallace College in Berea, Ohio where I graduated. I learned that Bud's Dad was raised as a missionary's kid in Chiang Mai, Thailand. After this trip, when I returned to Baldwin Wallace College, I lived with Bud's mother in off campus housing. She was 74 years old and I helped take care of the house. His Dad, Pop Collins, regaled me with stories about swimming in the river with the King's kids in Chiang Mai.

Northern Thailand was also a smuggler's haven because they were moving opium and other illegal goods back and forth across the border. We didn't see or understand much about that and tried to stay out of those kinds of things. As a result, we didn't have trouble with either the authorities or smugglers as we travelled from country to country. If you're traveling on your own and you don't have any official status you have to be very careful.

In 1960-61 you could not enter Burma easily. There was no air service into Burma and there was no land service because it was still very isolated. We ended up flying from Bangkok to Calcutta, India. The professor got sick for a week so while he was in bed, I was out moving around the city with a lot of the young students who were studying in Calcutta. The brother of my classmate Bipin Shaw, an international student at Baldwin Wallace College, was working in Calcutta. While the professor was sick, I would often visit Bipin's brother at his trading company -- it's like a general store.

The "old professor's" name was Robert D. Meade. He taught at Trinity College, Hartford, CT. when we met, but he subsequently moved on to Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. Recently I sent him a letter and the letter was returned, noting his address was a vacant property. I'm sorry to have lost contact the professor was a very interesting guy, and he knew so much. I learned a lot from him.

Bob loved Richard Halliburton, a famous adventurer and travel author in the early 1900s who wrote "The Royal Road to Romance" and a number of other novels and adventure travelogues. The professor decided he would try to do everything that Richard Halliburton did which included sleeping on a street in India! We tried to explain to the local policeman walking down the street that we were okay, we weren't crazy, we were just two guys who wanted to spend the night sleeping on the street. We asked if he didn't mind, he could wake us at 7 in the morning. He seemed to understand and we unrolled our sleeping bags and we went to sleep. Every hour the fellow came by and pounded on the ground with his night stick, wanting to know if it was now time to wake us up! It wasn't a very comfortable night, but we slept on the street in several places like Lucknow and Benares.

When Bob and I travelled we stayed in very odd places depending on the circumstances. In some places we had a host, e.g. someone from my college or somebody that the professor knew. Often, we were fending for ourselves staying in YMCAs, schools, and churches, even jails. Mostly, we bought our food from street vendors.

As we travelled, people were so nice. Indians were among the most hospitable people we've ever met. Although they were poor, they would welcome us and if they had anything to share, they would share it. I guess the most memorable part of that sharing experience was as we traveled for five weeks by train in India, then to Nepal and Kashmir on side trips. We were traveling 3rd class in the train, people would bring their food with them wrapped in an oilcloth, a little carrying bag, and invariably they'd offer us some of their food. I mean these were these poor people -- I can remember like

yesterday -- a man in the luggage rack sitting cross-legged facing the center of the train and he opened his little package and offered us some of his food. And that was not an isolated occasion, it was again and again

Traveling by 3rd class train was so crowded. Passengers had to go in and out of the window when you got to the station. You couldn't go out through the door because you couldn't get to the door. Passengers would send somebody to the door one stop ahead of the time when there was still room to move. That person would come on the platform to the window near their seat and people would hand out the luggage to the person on the platform. Usually, Bob made his way outside and I handed the luggage out, we only had two backpacks. At the last minute, I would dive out the window and he would pull me from the outside. We were pretty good at it, except one time when I scraped my ribs going out the window! .

We travelled light, a back pack with one set of clothes—which we washed every now and then. In India, since we're staying frugally in places that had no sheets, linens, or other amenities, we made sleeping bags out of comforters, big blankets. We bought a small Primus brand kerosene pressure stove and a cooking pot. We put the Primus stove and all the pieces inside the cooking pot. When we cooked, we put it together and used the pot to cook a stew made from vegetables, at times with canned meat.

Most of the time we ate food sold on the street. It was very cheap stuff. Our budget was \$1 per day, not including film or an occasional air flight. We would carry exposed film and every two-three weeks, when we found a secure post office, we would send the film home to be developed. We did not get a lot of quality food by budgeting \$1 a day and you didn't get very good accommodations!

Our next stop was Nepal, straight north of the center of India. It was December of 1960 so we had Christmas in Kathmandu! To get to Kathmandu by land we had to get special permission. We went in by narrow gauge train for a day, spent a night in some little place, then transferred to a truck that was transporting a load of toilet bowls. That truck took us across the Himalayas. The road built by the Indian Army hadn't been open very long and it was all muddy and frozen. We sat on top of the cargo because, first of all the view was really good, but secondly, if that truck was heading for the cliff, we were going to bail out on the non-cliff side! There were a couple of mishaps, but we got through fine and we spent Christmas in Kathmandu.

Later on in my AID disaster work, I was able to use the experience and my knowledge of the countries we visited to provide better disaster relief to those countries. AID sent disaster relief to India and Nepal after earthquakes. This trip gave me a small glimpse of what was there and I had some feeling for the condition of people living in the disaster-stricken country.

We then came back to India from Nepal and went across India into Kashmir. The sad part about Kashmir today is that it's very hard to travel there because of armed conflict between India and Pakistan, but it's one of the most beautiful places in the world. In the

past visitors went there, as we did for tourism and stayed on small houseboats that you rent. For a very small fee you can rent a house boat that has somebody with it. We had to rent a house boat because that was the thing to do and it was absolutely gorgeous.

Q: What was the name of the lake?

DAVIDSON: It is Dal Lake, in Srinagar, the capital. We spent a couple of days on a house boat. When you travel, particularly in India, you speak a lot of English and you see signs, many in English. I have a picture and the fellow's card -- it was a guy who had a shop and it was called Honest Injun. He was selling miscellaneous things as many of the shops did. Anyhow, it was just one of those funny things that you remember.

Then we crossed from India into Pakistan. There was tension and conflict so you could not take a train into Pakistan from India; you took a train to the border, went through the customs and border security into Pakistan. It was January, 1961 -- I remember because I had my 20th birthday in Pakistan -- and we were headed north into Afghanistan. Again the transportation there was not easy so we hired a seat on one of these big old cars that looked like a taxi only it had ten times more people in it, and we drove through the Khyber Pass from Pakistan to Kabul Afghanistan.

It was winter, January, and it was very cold. We stayed with a missionary family who showed us around this old and somewhat primitive city. When we were ready to continue, the snow had blocked all the roads from Kabul to Kandahar and then from Kandahar to Iran. Today these places are well-known because of the war in Afghanistan. The roads were bad to start with, but they were all blocked by snow and the rumor was that the Soviets didn't provide gasoline for the bulldozers to clear the snow- so the roads were closed. We traveled by air from Kabul to Kandahar and spent a few days there before continuing by air to Herat, on the border with Iran.

I can remember that Kandahar and Herat were the coldest places I've ever been, just freezing. In Herat we stayed in a religious facility of some kind, but we were sleeping on the floor with our sleeping bags, which weren't very warm. When we wanted to have warmth, we had to buy tumbleweeds to put into the small potbellied stove. We would buy a handful of tumbleweeds, put them in the stove, and we'd stay slightly warm for a very short time.

We went from Herat to Meshed by bus where we met a U.S. consular officer. US Government staff were always interested in what we're doing because we were really Bohemians to them. We were strange things because in those days they didn't see many people traveling like we did. We told him that we really liked the Afghan bread, the naan, which of course you can buy here today, In those days naan was something that you could only buy in that part of the world. We found the shop to buy naan by looking at the sidewalk in front of the naan shops covered with gravel. They made the naan with whole wheat flour and then put inside the oven with the bottom covered was stones. The bread would cook on top of the stones. They used a hook bring it out, slap it against the side of

the counter and you'd have the most wonderful, nice tasting warm bread. If you had cheese you had a naan and cheese sandwich.

We explained that to this American consular officer, and he said, "Oh, I don't know whether I could eat that. I'd probably get sick." We invited him to have bread and cheese with us. The next day we went to see him at his office and sure enough, he was out sick! We don't know what happened to him, but it was one of those things where we were living on the economy, and nothing bothered us. The professor was sick several times, but I was only sick for one day. We couldn't afford to get sick! We didn't have any medicine, although you could buy medicine over the counter in many of the countries, but you still had to explain to somebody what was wrong to you so they could then prescribe some kind of medicine.

We went from Meshed to Tehran by bus, a long slow trip though desert-like geography. The homes were domed adobe construction, many which were destroyed by subsequent earthquakes. In Tehran, even in those days, there was a lot of intrigue between the students and the professors and local government, and we got a taste of some of the intrigue from the academic people we were staying with. Teheran was and is today a gorgeous city where we found many nice people. Near Tehran we saw people skiing out on the slopes. There was plenty of snow on a Sunday afternoon it was filled with families enjoying themselves.

We went on from Tehran to Isfahan and Shiraz, more beautiful and ancient cities that you read about both in your books as well as in newspapers today. They were cities with beautiful temples with many people producing arts and crafts.

We went across from Iran to southern Iraq. We found when you're crossing a border you never know what to expect. In that border there was no road across. There was a border station on one side and a border guard on the other side and we didn't know what was in between. We could see barbed wire and a path, but we really weren't sure that we should be walking across between the two countries.

We talked to the border guards on the one side and we could see the border guards on the other side, and they said, "You can walk across there. We can't go there, but you can go." So we took our backpacks and we walked through this no man's land and the Iraqis welcomed us on the other side. We spent the night there because it was most of the day getting across the border. I have pictures of all the border guards standing there with their ancient weapons and some not to clean and or pressed uniforms. It was in the middle of nowhere, but they were very nice. We probably spent the night in their jail. We spent a lot of nights in jails but most of the time they didn't lock the door on us. It was a cheap sleep, shall we say.

We went from Basra to Baghdad by bus and spent a few days in Baghdad. Every conversation had some degree of tension and apprehension between students and government, and being a professor and a student, we had a lot of contact with people like

that. It was very interesting to listen to their stories and there was what we could call today repression; we felt a lot of tension.

The trip from Bagdad to Beirut, Lebanon was in a big cargo truck across a dry desert-like plain. Travel by truck is always interesting because most truck drivers are very entrepreneurial. Many times we had to pay the driver, but most of the time it wasn't very much money. On the trek at night, I remember a long, long stretch -- the road was raised - - and we were in a line of truck . The truck in front of us kept moving toward the edge of the road. The driver was obviously falling asleep! Our driver would flash his lights, sometimes blow his horn, but he would be laughing hysterically all the time, waiting for that driver in front to roll that truck; laughing as the guy pulled near the edge. We of course closed our eyes because we didn't want to see the big rig rolling off the side of the road. Anyhow we made it without incident or accident. We travelled for 11 months and didn't have one accident, and we rode in some really decrepit vehicles.

While in New Delhi, for example, we stopped at the New Delhi Flying Club and the professor decided he wanted to see an aerial view of New Delhi. So he went over and conned a flying club member to take us up in their airplane, in an open cockpit biplane. There was the pilot and one seat so we each went up and he flew over New Delhi. When the pilot wanted to have some fun, he would either roll it over or drop the nose and just scare the dickens out of you. At one point my pilot was flying in the river bed right along the top of the water, and I got a picture of the river bank higher than the airplane wing. We did a lot of crazy things and took a lot of chances and I would not suggest that that's the way that people should do things today!

We spent a few days in Beirut camping on a hill outside the city with a beautiful view of the Mediterranean Sea. Since our visit, Beirut has experienced such conflict and destruction to a once beautiful city. We went by ship across to Alexandria, Egypt, and spent a month traveling up the Nile.

These are places where today you cannot travel. Now in Sudan there's the war between the Arab northerners and the black African southern Sudanese and also the southerners fighting among themselves such that you can't travel on the Nile. We spent 16 days on the riverboat, cooked our own food, and slept in 3rd class. Our sleeping bags were handy and we cooked with the primus stove. There wasn't much to buy even to eat. We brought canned meat along so we'd have a little bit of food. We were drinking water that wasn't very sanitary so we both had, shall we say, cases of diarrhea at different times and it wasn't all that pleasant, but we were on a boat so the bathroom was nearby.

When we got into southern Sudan we were traveling with southern Sudanese students who had been in Ethiopia studying, and those students were coming home on vacation. They could not study in northern Sudan at that time because of the problem with the Arab government, they were discriminated against so they went over to Ethiopia. They told us there were secret police on the boat and that we needed to be careful. I was taking pictures, and when we arrived in Juba in southern Sudan, a secret police officer said he would arrest me because I had taken pictures illegally. Being a young fellow, I argued

with him and I was accused of insulting them. The guy told me I could either spend the night in jail or give him my passport. Well, when you're traveling the passport is not something you want to give up, but on the other hand you don't want to be in jail. So we figured it was easier to run without our passport than it was to break out of jail and run. So I gave him my passport. It was probably the most miserable night I've spent in my whole life being in the south of Sudan. Actually I was in the middle of nowhere with no rights, no privileges, I mean we were in an area where people could disappear very easily.

We looked through our logbook for someone to contact. Every place we went, we would ask people did they know somebody in a place where we were going in the future, so we remembered that we met somebody who said they had a relative in Juba, Sudan. When we looked through our journal and we found the name of a person in Juba!

The next morning we set out to find this person, figuring that any local contact was a good contact. And as it turned out, that fellow was the governor of the province and the fellow that had arrested us was his deputy. The governor of the province was a black African. The deputy, his Arab deputy pretty much ran the place because that was what the northerners did in the south. We very humbly explained that we didn't really mean to take illegal pictures, that there was a misunderstanding and we felt very badly and we loved Sudan and on and on. The Governor clapped his hands and said something and my passport came out. He said he was sorry that there was this misunderstanding and gave us the passport and we left his office.

There was a South African couple with a Volkswagen minivan on the boat to Juba and then they were driving from Sudan into Uganda and on to South Africa. We begged them for a ride, and 125 miles from Juba into Uganda we saw the British flag, still British territory at that time. We got off in Uganda and traveled again by bus throughout East Africa. We flew from Nairobi to Addis to Greece then by train to Luxemburg and our flight across the Atlantic.

It was 11 wonderful months in 28 countries. I have all my letters saved by my mother, my journal and lots and lots of pictures which I go through every now and then to throw out the ones that are not so meaningful. It was an amazing trip.

I think of that trip and my career, several things were evident. There were lots and lots of wonderful people in the world who mostly wanted what we all wanted, which was a little bit better life, and something better for their children. They wanted health care and other things and they were very generous, if you approached them as a human being and not as a sort a person behind the camera lens, or someone with a microphone in your hand. We tried very hard to listen to people and ask lots of questions, and we were humbled by their hospitality.

This part has been a long story, but I think that's probably what set me out on a career of helping people, working on development, being very open to people from different places and different walks of life. We spent a lot of time arguing with people about different things in life and politics, but we respected where they came from and what they

believed. Although we didn't agree with them on everything, we recognized that they had a right to their opinion, and in most cases, it was easily understood why they had that opinion.

Q: So how long did the trip take?

DAVIDSON: Eleven months, 28 countries, and most of the countries we stayed a while. It wasn't like we went one day, one country. We spent enough time in each one to learn about it.

Q: So you went back to college then?

DAVIDSON: Yes, I went back to college, to the same place. The college had an international program so I was able to take international classes. For the next few years, I would take a course on Russian history, and I was able to go to Russia, and so every summer I traveled somewhere.

I would take a course on Latin America, and I'd go to Latin America. I tried to integrate my academic part with my travels: in 1962 I went to Europe again; In '63 and '64 I went to Latin America and in '65 I went back to North Africa. I finally graduated in 1966.

I remember when the AID recruiter was interviewing me, he said, "Well, what would you do in South Vietnam?" I said, "I've been there and I've seen that a little bit so I know some of the things that I'm getting into. When AID was recruiting, even though they didn't take people right out of college, I went from graduating in January and in June I was in South Vietnam.

Q: So you finished college. What was your major in college?

DAVIDSON: Remember, my parents and many of family went to that college. It was 13 miles from my home, so I knew everyone from the president down to the janitor, football coach, and everybody else. They kept saying, "Ollie, you have to declare a major." I went there for six years. And every year they'd ask me the same thing, and I'd say well I haven't decided yet. So when I finally decided I wanted to get out of there and graduate, I took all the courses I had taken and put them on index cards and I shuffled them back and forth. You needed 10 classes to do political science. You needed five for a minor in history and you needed so many for economics. I just kept moving them around until I met all the requirements and I declared my major which I think was History or Political Science with a minor in whatever the other one was. I really didn't think it made a difference; I just decided it was time to get out of there, and I declared a major and I graduated in January and then I was out, gone.

Q: So let's see, you were both wandering around the world and wandering through college!

DAVIDSON: I tried to take interesting courses from the people who were knowledgeable. In a small school back that many years ago you didn't have a lot of people that had been everywhere and done everything. I mean even the French teacher -- one of the French students said, "She can't even speak French," which I didn't believe because she was my French professor. And the French students said, "She speaks terrible French!" But I loved her, so it didn't matter!

Q: So how did you connect with USAID then? Had you met people from USAID in your travels and thought that was something you wanted to do?

DAVIDSON: The connection with USAID was not related to the earlier visit to South Vietnam, but I'm trying to remember exactly what the link was. I started looking for work in my last quarter in school, and I found International Voluntary Services and then also I found AID. During that time we were subject to the draft. I was younger than 26 years, so I had been deferred and deferred and deferred because I was traveling and in school. I had a very nice relationship with my draft board who knew me personally because I had been there so many times asking for another extension, but that wasn't to say she wasn't going to put me in the military. So I made an application to IVS (International Voluntary Service), which was the predecessor to the Peace Corps, and I also made an application to AID. I was accepted to both -- IVS was in Laos, and AID was in South Vietnam. I was still thought that the war in Vietnam was a war against communism, and so I decided that I wanted to be in that place. My college friends and high school friends were all in the military and they were in South Vietnam risking their lives.

Q: And what happened when you finally joined AID? Did you go through a training program of some sort, or were you shipped out fairly quickly?

DAVIDSON: Now it's April-May 1966, and there was a big ramp up of personnel and they were looking -- for I want to say bodies, but it sounds pretty grotesque -- but anyhow they were looking for people willing to go into rural areas of South Vietnam and be the civilian counterbalance to a lot of the military and other things that were going on. They were looking for young people, and of course I had the educational background as well as having traveled and been able to sort of land on my feet in places that were pretty strange.

I came to Washington for a week of orientation, and then they sent us right to South Vietnam. We had a week of orientation in Saigon, and I was assigned to a garden spot of South Vietnam, a place called Hau Nghia Province, which is about 30 miles outside of Saigon. It was on that same road that I took to Cambodia and where the Parrot's Beak was probably the most prominent name. The Parrots Beak was where the Viet Cong were coming from the Cambodia through Hau Nghia into Saigon to do their mischief and also cause trouble on their way.

So, I jokingly say that the training and advice I got was, "Don't eat the food, don't get sick, and don't get killed!" And that was pretty much all the training that we had. The Province Senior Adviser that I went to work for had no clue about development. I mean it

seemed that they were hiring anybody they could find. He was a former military person who happened to come from the Philippines, and he had no clue as to what to do, but he was a very goodhearted person and he wanted to help people. Mostly our job was passing out food rations and then cement, roofing, lumber, and things that would help rebuild when the Viet Cong or the U.S. military bombed someplace or shot it up or destroyed it in some way. It was a pretty thankless job because you'd go out and make a food distribution, or you'd dedicate a school that had been rebuilt or repaired with AID money and then a few weeks or a month later somebody would blow it up or it got hit by U.S. military fire. Then you'd go out again and give them more cement and more lumber and more roofing, and so the pattern.

There really was no development work even though we dug wells in places for people where they needed water. Well digging was one of the most memorable projects after we found a couple, a man and a woman who dug wells. This couple was found by my staff. I had two or three Vietnamese staff who were with me the whole time that I was in the rural areas. At that time, you dug a well by putting a cement culvert that was about two and one half to three feet in diameter on the ground. One person got in and started digging. They would dig and dig, and as they dug the culvert would go down and down. After they got down one culvert deep, e.g. two feet, they put another culvert on top of it, and the person would keep on digging and digging and digging, and the culvert would go down and down and down until either they hit water or the guy got tired of digging and said, "Look there's no water here anyway so that's the end of it." The funny part of it was, this was a blind man. He put the dirt into a military helmet liner with a string on it, and his wife was the person on the top who emptied the helmet and passed it back down to him. And all of a sudden, from time to time, you'd hear this huge argument. It was the man and his wife arguing. I asked the staff, "What are they arguing about?"

"Well, the man is saying he's doing all the work, and she's telling him to dig faster so they can get paid." Another day I heard them arguing, and I asked, "Why are they arguing?" "He wants a smoke and she said you dig and I'll smoke!"

These were scrawny little people, again this poor blind man, all he was wearing was shorts, no shirt. Down in the hole with a very crude instrument to dig and that's how wells were dug. I can't remember how many wells we dug. We had lots of villages, and many of them didn't have much water, and it was just...

Q: Well I hope you paid these people something.

DAVIDSON: Oh yes. The one thing about my work, I didn't work for IVS so I had extra money. I figured that I could donate and give away a lot of my salary and still be way ahead of what I would have gotten paid if I was in IVS.

Q: Right.

DAVIDSON: I paid for the food for all my staff. Most of the time, we males lived in the same building. Well, building is kind of a misnomer, in one place we lived in a house.

One of the men was very clever; a great mechanic. He could do anything, so we rewired the house so at least there was electricity, reliable electricity. Now mind you, the fuse was a piece of wire, and when the piece of wire got hot, the fuse blew. We would unscrew the two ends, put in a new piece of lead wire. Every time there was a power surge, it blew the fuse. But there wasn't anything to the power anyhow. All we had was a small refrigerator from time to time, a few light bulbs, and a ceiling fan if we were lucky! That was at one of the places.

In Chu Chi I lived in the back of my office, a long thatched hut building which had a partition so in the front part of the building was my office. I had an old decrepit typewriter which was my own and a tape recorder that I could play music. I had a little radio I could listen to, but there wasn't much to listen to on the radio. Behind the partition I had a folding cot with a mosquito net over it and that's where I slept. I ate all my meals outside and my staff and I usually ate together. One former military fellow served as a bodyguard, and one point I had a driver. The two or three of us were always together, and we would go out to eat and I would pay for the food. Mostly they would live in the same building, so I would try to take care of them. In Chu Chi, I would also pick up the shoeshine boys who were hanging around the area to shine the shoes of the American GIs. My shoes didn't need shining but I would pay for their food too, and they'd ride along with us from time to time. It was an interesting time, but it was not, I'd say, very gratifying. It was pretty sad, especially near the end of my tour (1969) when the fighting increased.

Q: Did you meet John Paul Vann and that crew? Were you part of the winning hearts and minds approach there? Were you indoctrinating yourself in what you were doing? Was there philosophy to it?

DAVIDSON: Yes. Hau Nghia was the province where John Paul Vann had been the senior advisor, before he moved to become the Regional Senior Advisor, III Corps. I worked for John Paul Vann as the Regional Director. He treated me very specially because I was in his old province used his old vehicles and I had his staff. I had a beard, and I found out later that John thought it was a religious beard, so he treated me as some sort of a religious person doing good. I was his guy in Hau Nghia and he always wanted to know what was happening, any news.

The bad part of Hau Nghia is that my predecessor had been kidnapped. This was Doug Ramsey, who was kidnapped by the Viet Cong and held for many years. He was kidnapped in one of the vehicles that I drove. Every day we'd tried to find information about him, but we never heard any word, nothing. I never was shot at, but I also knew that I needed to be very close to my Vietnamese staff. So when they said, "Today we will go over here. We're not going over there," I wouldn't say, "No, I want to go over there," because I knew over there something was going on that we didn't want to get involved with, and it was dangerous. One town I lived in was Chu Chi, now famous for the tunnels.

Q: The Viet Cong tunnels.

DAVIDSON: Yes, the same place. There's actually a book called *The Tunnels of Chu Chi*, where the author interviews Viet Cong who had built the tunnels and then American tunnel rats who went in them to flush them out.

The local story was that the US 25th Division was looking for a place to build their headquarters and they found a place near Cu Chi. For whatever reason, they never checked to see what was under the ground there, and there were already tunnels in that area! And so for the first year or so, the Viet Cong tunnel rats would come up out of the tunnels at night and set explosives next to the helicopters and blow them up, and then disappear into the tunnels. The tunnels were very hard to find, and they were also very cleverly done. There were snake traps in them. If you picture a toilet and the trap on a sink or a toilet where the bottom of it had water in it, but you didn't know there was only a short distance through the water. The stories in the book were very interesting, the tunnels preceded the U.S. military base.

After a while they found most of the tunnels and sealed them off, but today if you go to Vietnam, there are tours to Chu Chi to see the tunnels. Not too far from where I lived they had a three-story hospital underground. One of the tactics the US military used was called the Rome plow. Huge bulldozers with great big blades on them would go through and knock everything down and they would also scrape the top of the ground so they could see some of the tunnels from time to time. So every now and then a Rome plow would sink in the ground into a bunker area, a tunnel that had a big facility underneath it. That was one of the ways that the military thought they were going to win the war, by clear cutting and there's no place to hide, so nobody could be operating in that area.

And one of the things you can see on the tunnel tour now, was the Viet Cong had a tank buried under the ground, they would run a generator on the tank to provide electricity for lights and radio communication. The tank was buried underground and it had obviously the intake and outlet above ground, but most of the tank was under the ground and they used that to generate electricity and maybe they had a hospital operating suite down there I don't know. But it was all pretty primitive.

Q: Did you ever go down into any of those tunnels?

DAVIDSON: No. We knew they were there, but those tunnels were still very dangerous. There was no point in going down the tunnels at that point. Now I have a tee shirt that says "Tunnels of Cu Chi," with a picture of the tunnels on it that a friend brought back from Vietnam, but at that time we only heard rumors about the tunnels, we didn't know where they were.

Q: How long were you there?

DAVIDSON: The tour there was three years, and I came out twice. Again, John Paul Vann was really, really nice to me. At one time I came back to do recruiting for AID. I was sent back to the States to four or five cities and did recruiting for more people to

come to work for AID in South Vietnam. The only memorable part of that was the person who was coordinating the recruiting tour was the person who recruited me to work in USAID's OFDA many years later. Carole Siegel was the contracts officer in OFDA and said, you have the skills and experience to work on disasters in OFDA. I had one R&R to Hawaii for a week.

Work in Vietnam was very strenuous. First, it was very hot. The food was all Vietnamese food, which I loved then and I still love, but it was what we bought on the street in small restaurants. A funny food thing, we had a woman that was sort of the maid and she would be the secretary. A few times when we sent her to the market she always bought spoiled eggs! Finally the guys said, "Look we can't teach her which eggs are good and which aren't, so tell her to stop buying eggs and we'll just go out for breakfast!" I didn't have anybody cooking for me.

The two male staff and I, we'd go out every morning and usually take breakfast on our way to somewhere. We had our breakfast spots which we knew they were safe. We set up a little perimeter so nobody could sneak in behind us and blow us up, because they were just as vulnerable as I was.

I lived in four places, the provincial capital of Hau Nghia Bao Trai, a little tiny town in the middle of nowhere. Every night the Vietnamese military cannons would go off over the house because they were shooting into the Parrots Beak to interdict Viet Cong moving supplies. It was called "Harassment and Interdiction" fire. Today, I wear hearing aids because my hearing was damaged during that time.

I moved to the town of Chu Chi, near the U.S. 25th Division near the main road to Cambodia. I lived in half of my office until the Vietnamese District Chief invited me to stay in his house. He was a wonderful man. I think as honest as anybody could be. His wife and his children lived in the house, so they were all there together, even though it was dangerous. The district chief and I would travel around to all the ceremonies and to inspect village projects. He was evacuated to the US when South Vietnam fell to the communists and he died in the U.S., far from his beloved country and most of this family.

I moved to Trang Bang District, further along the road toward Cambodia. After I moved there, they put an air-conditioned trailer and I had seniority so I got to move into the trailer. It was a beautiful small town with many trees and even a few small businesses. I even had a root canal done on one tooth by a Chinese dentist. Although generally peaceful, some will remember the photo of a small naked girl who was burned by napalm. That's the town where that picture was taken.

Q: The one who was screaming.

DAVIDSON: I was not there during that time. It happened immediately after I left South Vietnam.

The trailer was right next to the CORDS (USAID) office, and in front of the Vietnamese police station. The trailer had electricity so there was some air conditioning. Life in every location was fragile, for example, a story of the fellow who my place in that district. One night the Viet Cong shot a rocket at the police station and a piece of shrapnel bounced off the station and went right through the trailer-right through his bed. Fortunate for him -- he was noted for his drinking and had fallen asleep in his chair in front of the television, and the piece of shrapnel went right through where he would have been sleeping!

Q: Oh my goodness!

DAVIDSON: Drinking isn't very good but it's not all that bad in his case. So between Cu Chi and Trang Bang I worked in Binh Hoa, the regional headquarters where John Paul Vann was Director. We had a cadre of Vietnamese surveyors who went out clandestinely and did attitude surveys about what was happening. You could say it was intelligence or you could say it was attitude survey, there was a fine line in between; it was both. And it wasn't to try to find out where the Viet Cong were, it was to try to find out what they were saying in order to counter their propaganda, which was a huge effort.

Working with these Vietnamese was very interesting because they would go in as if they were sales people, or they would be some itinerant something or other and they were very skilled at getting information. They were very skilled and we came to know that they were really wonderful people. I managed the team that went in to Hau Nghia editing their reports. I tried to sanitize the reports so it wasn't obvious what they were doing or how they got the information. This was a really interesting program.

Q: Did you speak Vietnamese?

DAVIDSON: No, however, I learned to get around and communicate basic messages. The survey teams wrote in Vietnamese, which were translated into English. I edited the English part and then we sent these surveys around to the different groups. Remember in those days the USIA (United States Information Agency) had psychological warfare, and the military had psychological warfare units that were trying to figure out what is the message the Viet Cong are promulgating and why are they being successful. We also found out how many chickens and other things they stole at night. In some villages, during the day the South Vietnamese military would come in and take the chickens and the eggs, and at the night, the Viet Cong would come in and take what was left! That's the worst description of things; it wasn't everywhere, but it was frequent. The people were caught in the middle and all they wanted to do was to survive. They weren't communist, they weren't democrats, they were just trying to survive and not have their kids kidnapped by either side.

Q: Let me ask you -- it's been many years now since you went there -- when you left, did you feel like you had accomplished something significant? As you look back on it now, how do you feel about what the U.S. was doing in your province and in South Vietnam and how successful you were?

DAVIDSON: That's really difficult because I think to be most generous to the whole effort, it was probably like putting lipstick on a pig. The saddest thing is that no matter what happened, in the end it all fell apart. No matter whether it was destined to happen or whether we screwed it up and it happened. In the end, lots and lots of innocent people who believed what we were telling them and what we were teaching them, died. For example, the district chief and his family who I lived with, was able to escape in the end when Saigon fell. He got out, and I think he had one boy with him. His wife and his daughter did not get out, and they came out later on one of the boat lifts. I don't remember whether it was just the wife died or they both died, but she never made it out.

The district chief and his wife were the most loving couple. They did everything together, she lived with him in Chu Chi, an insecure area. He wanted to show the best face of the government, and he took her out with him whenever it was reasonably possible. He was a major official, a captain and then he became a major. There were the Vietnamese who worked for me, who and after I left, one way or another, they were killed. There were other people in Saigon, people put in re-education camps and all kinds of things. Regardless of whether we had a chance or whether we screwed it up, a lot of people suffered. Interestingly just last week we went to hear Max Boot talk about his biography of Ed Lansdale.

Q: Yes I just heard about that

DAVIDSON: He had a column in the Washington Post and this Sunday a book review by somebody else. Max Boots was at Politics and Prose last week, and we went to hear him. It's a fascinating discussion of how Ed Lansdale had worked to counter the communists and other insurgencies in the Philippines. He was very successful because he listened to the Filipinos and he tried to address the ills they had, and he undercut the propaganda that the hucks were using to get under cut the government. He advised the government to do honest programs to help people. In the best of all worlds, you could take Lansdale and put it in South Vietnam, there might have been an opportunity to succeed, which was what the optimists think. The sad history of Lansdale was that he got discredited for trying to do something in Cuba and when he went back to South Vietnam in 1965 he was with the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) program which I eventually worked for too. I was an AID employee but I was assigned to CORDS so when I was in Trang Bang, the one with the air conditioned trailer, I was the CORDS representative in the district.

First they offered me the district senior advisor's position because I had been there for so long, but I said, "I've never had any military experience." I didn't know enough. And I said, "I don't want the responsibility of advising and leading and managing a military advisory team. There were probably 10 or 11 military people. So I lived in this civilian life, and a one and one half block from the military bunker where they lived. So I said, "Look I'm happy to share the responsibility and be cooperative and whatever, but I'm not going to be the district senior advisor." So I was the CORDS person there for a relatively short time before I left.

If you took the best of Lansdale and you made it work in a place like Trang Bang, it might actually work. There was a reasonably honest government there. The police chief was an honest government employee as far as we could tell. The Vietnamese civilian deputy was good. The military in the district was good as far as we could tell. But the reality is that we had no chance of being successful, just because the cards were stacked against us. We were trying to support a bad government. We had little very few ways of countering the Viet Cong propaganda. The Vietnamese have always been anti-foreign, whether it was anti-Chinese, anti the Koreans, the Filipinos...for all kinds of other reasons.

Q: The French....

DAVIDSON: The French. The Vietnamese are just very strong people and the more pressure you put on them, the worse it was. So I think that in retrospect, it was a massive waste of human resources.

Q: You finished three years and then you were assigned elsewhere or did you get to bid for another AID assignment? How did that process work?

DAVIDSON: The last three months in South Vietnam were really painful, because the Vietnamese and U.S. military invaded a small village that was right next to where I lived and destroyed houses and temples -- and we're talking about ancient facilities where people had lived. The reason the Viet Cong were in there is because the government had abandoned that village because they couldn't protect it, and yet it was so close. If I had to throw a stone three times I would have hit that village, that's how close it was to where I lived and worked. And every day people would come in and out of that village and nobody from that village would do any harm to us, so they were trying to be peaceful even though they were in this Viet Cong controlled area.

I tried so hard to help protect those people. I went many times to try to stop the destruction and my staff and I would go in there during the day when it was quiet because most of the activity would happen sporadically. One day with my so called bodyguard, because he was a former military person -- we walked in and there was a U.S. GI standing by a tree on guard. My Vietnamese employee went over and picked up a hand grenade booby trap with a trip wire, which was on the ground right next to the U.S. soldier. That was the second time he had found something like that, because he knew what to look for, and he could pick up the hand grenade, as long as you hold the pin. The GI was right next to it, and just fortunately he hadn't tripped it.

So during that time was all the tension, and I weighed 160-170 pounds. I lost 30 pounds in two months, and I ended up with amebic dysentery and had a ready had hepatitis and other things, so by then it was time to leave. I was okay, they sent me home, and I was assigned to the Vietnam Training Center in Arlington Towers in Arlington, Virginia. These were the next group of CORDS people -- AID people mostly -- going to South Vietnam.

Q: What year was this?

DAVIDSON: This was mid-1969. I got to South Vietnam about June 1966 and I came back after the New Years in 1969. I was in the Vietnam Training Center for a few months. Many of the people on our Vietnam listserv were students there who went to (South) Vietnam. They are younger than I am and are an important link back into Vietnam.

I was at the training center when Nixon started ordered the bombing of Cambodia, I couldn't take it anymore. Well let me go back just a little bit. Before the Tet Offensive , I thought we were making progress, because we could travel on the roads longer. In the beginning when I got there, the U.S. and Vietnamese military had to clear the road daily; they went down the road with mine detectors and would blow up all the mines that been put on the road the night before. It was the only road to get in or out. Every morning they'd go out and clear the mines on the roads and then we could travel out and go places and visit our projects.

Just before the Tet offensive we were able to travel and be on the roads longer every day. We wouldn't get sniped at in the late afternoons; we weren't so worried about it. We could go to a lot of places we couldn't go to before, so I thought we were making some progress. I left on the recruiting trip to the US, and when I was on my way back the Tet Offensive took place. I found out the reason that we were able to do all those things was because the Viet Cong didn't want us to be focused on them while they were moving supplies for the offensive. It wasn't that we were winning; it was that they were allowing us to do more and fooled us into thinking that we were winning. It was a very interesting thing that happened.

When I came back and after the Tet Offensive, I recognized that no matter what we did and no matter how hard we worked, we were on the losing end. The Vietnamese were playing us for what that could, because that's what they had to do to stay alive, and when Nixon bombed Cambodia and caused an expansion of the war, I said, "I'm resigning to go to graduate school." So I left with the intent of going to graduate school.

I spent a year at the College in Steubenville, Ohio working as assistant dean of students, and then on another Vietnam related project, and then started graduate school here in Washington. While in Steubenville, I ran into my old college friend and we were married...

Q: Did you run into her because you went to Steubenville by chance or did you go to Steubenville because she was there?

DAVIDSON: When I went to Steubenville I realized that she had grown up in the town nearby, so I had a person at Steubenville who was from that town and I asked if Roxanne was there, and she said, "Well, she's at home taking care of her mother who had a heart attack." So it was just happenstance and we had dated in college but we'd both gone our

separate ways. She was in a little place called Burgettstown, PA taking care of her mother. We started dating, were married and moved to Washington.

I was working in a nonprofit group called the Vietnam Elections Project. The thesis was that during the Vietnamese election (1971-72) if the U.S. government said that we would support any civilian candidate, it would take the onus off of the military solutions, would undercut the military. This was the time when the military was running for the presidency, but there was also a civilian candidate. So our thesis was if you support the civilian candidate, and break the link with the military, you have a chance of actually putting in a good government.

Q: In Vietnam?

DAVIDSON: Yes, in Vietnam. Several of us worked for six or eight months and the only interesting thing was that Henry Kissinger called us in to meet with him about the Vietnam Elections Project! In retrospect, it was a very clever move by Kissinger because he was interviewing all the opposition to the VN war to see whether they had any strength, power, support. We went in there thinking we were going to make this big impact and how important it was to go and meet Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security advisor, etc. etc. However, in retrospect, it was just Kissinger's ploy to find out what the strength of the opposition to the war.

The other person that we met with a number of times was Charlie Cook, who is now the big political commentator who does the prognostication on elections.

Q: The Cook Reports.

DAVIDSON: Yes, Charlie Cook. We went to his house one night and had dinner and had a nice talk with him, but in the end, of course the U.S. supported the military candidates and that was when Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky became the president and vice president in South Vietnam which at that point then pretty much sealed our fate, I thought. The Vietnam elections project couldn't do much and that was the end of my effort about VN.

I have to say that the memory for many years of Vietnam was very painful. I didn't read anything about Vietnam. I still don't go to war movies. Even today in the paper there was an article by a chaplain about his work in Vietnam. I read the first two paragraphs and it was just so gruesome and so grim that I couldn't read anything about it. It wasn't until a year ago that I even did anything with Vietnam. I just completely stayed away from it because it's still very painful, I mean, to think about the two guys in particular whom I loved, who kept me alive, they're gone. And the district chief who was just the most beautiful person and his wife, they're dead! And for what I don't know.

We had another Vietnamese civilian with the most incredible story. His name was Do Quy Sang and he was the civilian deputy in Trang Bang District where I worked. He came to the U.S. on an AID scholarship and Sang was in Washington. He and I would go

around and talk to church groups and schools about Vietnam and about Vietnamese and would try to educate people about what was happening in Vietnam. It was not an anti-war talk; it was about Vietnam and the people of Vietnam.

During the time when he was in the US, South Vietnam fell. His wife and one or two children were in South Vietnam and he was here. During this crisis, somebody who knew him, just an American guy who knew Sang, bought his own plane ticket, went to Vietnam, found Sang's wife and child and got them on a plane and brought them to the US. The most unbelievable thing.

Sang was a really well-educated civil servant type Vietnamese guy. They were settled in Cleveland, near my family and my mom and dad adopted and helped Sang and his family. They moved to New Jersey and then to California to work for the liberation of South Vietnam! Several years later, he died of lung cancer even though he was not a smoker. He was an ardent anti-communist. He tried to organize the resistance to go back, which I told him was futile. He was in so many meetings with all the Vietnamese who smoked that he got lung cancer and died. For me it was another very painful memory of Vietnam.

I went to Georgetown as a graduate student.

Q: What was your major?

DAVIDSON: I entered the Latin American studies program, which is what I was interested in before I went to South Vietnam. I had traveled in Latin America, all over South America and as an undergraduate student, I took Latin American studies. I graduated with a Masters in Latin American Studies. Then I had to look around and figure out, "Now what am I going to do?" I had an MA and I needed a job again. I looked around and explored a number of different options and AID was an option. At that time the only way I could get back into AID was through the IDI (International Development Intern) program.

Q: So this would have been 1973, perhaps?

DAVIDSON: Yes, and I applied to the IDI program. I was accepted. It was very funny because the AID people that were interviewing me obviously knew that I had worked in South Vietnam for AID and there was some interesting moments there about Vietnam and the work in Vietnam. So I was accepted in the IDI program and they assigned me to Ghana!

Q: Did you speak Spanish at the time?

DAVIDSON: Yes, I did my all my papers on Brazil and I had studied Portuguese...

Q: Oh, I was in Brazil at that time! You should have come down there.

DAVIDSON: That would have been so nice! I love Brazil. I was in out and out of the Amazon -- I traveled up and down the Amazon so many times -- and other places in Latin America. I think they started out by trying to send me to Mozambique or Angola, which would have made much more sense, but somehow the position, the timing and everything wasn't right, so we ended up going to Ghana, and I was the program officer in the agriculture office. Now during that time Nancy would come to work in Ghana. Your Nancy, Nancy Pielemeier, would come to do her....

Q: Her dissertation work.

DAVIDSON: Is that right? I don't remember.

Q: First it was working with a contractor and the child growth chart and eventually it became a subject for dissertation.

DAVIDSON: Well she was a welcome person. We had a nice time when she came.

I always say the Ghanaians were the nicest people in the world. They were the most hospitable, nice, they were educated, and they were so much fun. We just loved the Ghanaians. And the person who was our contact for the development work, a very interesting guy because he was educated in Poland during the time when the Russians were trying to influence Africa. They brought all these students to Russia from Africa, and fortunately or unfortunately, it didn't work very well for him. He was a good development person but he wasn't at all pro-Soviet or pro-communist or pro-Russian. He was just a very smart guy.

He was our link to a lot of things, and one day our telephone didn't work. We asked "Eric, how do you get your phone repaired? He said, on such a road that you take to go home, you'll see a telephone pole and on the telephone pole there's a box. You go to that pole, open the box, and there's a telephone receiver there. You pick it up and when someone answers you tell them your address and that your phone is spoiled. I thought, that is outrageous, it will never work. He said, "Trust me, trust me!" We went to the pole, took the receiver, told the person on the other end what our address was and our phone was spoiled. Several days later, the phone was working!

Q: Ha ha!

DAVIDSON: We always suspected Eric went to the telephone office and said do you remember the guy who called from this address? Fix his phone before the 100 other people. We don't know. It was just a very funny story.

Q: Well now you were a relatively junior officer still. I recall when I first joined AID and people were coming out of Vietnam, we'd say these people don't know anything about how to run an AID program because they'd only been in Vietnam! So you probably had to learn the ropes on how to do more traditional AID programming.

DAVIDSON: That's exactly right. Not only did I not know anything AID going into Vietnam, I didn't know much about it when I came out of there, because VN was no traditional AID program. Remember, "don't get killed and don't get sick," that was my frame of reference! In my Latin American studies, I had tried to take as many development related courses, but none of them dealt with AID either. The good part of the master's degree was that there were practitioners from the IADB (Inter-American Development Bank), IAD (Inter-American Dialogue) and other places that were our professors. There were part time professors that you could take if you wanted someone who was more of a practitioner.

I don't know if you know Dr. Thomas Carroll who lives in the Chevy Chase Village, he was the expert on land reform at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). He was an IDB employee, but he was teaching part time at George Washington University when I took the course there; he was the professor. He now lives in Chevy Chase Village and I see him frequently. My professor is 97 years old, and he went to Paris to celebrate his 95th birthday! He's one of these people that I wanted to have a longer term relationship with. I was invited to Cornell to give a talk to their international students about international work. I thought, "Who are the persons who influenced me over the years. I picked Dr. Carroll to interviewed and found out he's a graduate of Cornell. He is still an amazing person who has accomplished so much.

When I arrived in Ghana, I had no clue about AID programs. The IDI program was a good program but it wasn't all about the AID program paperwork. In other words there was a lot of leadership training, work with local populations, social kinds of things, which of course I didn't need because that was my approach. We were trained in management and leadership, but it wasn't, "What kind of paperwork do you do in an AID project and things like that." I think it was before the logical framework. Oh, I hated those things!

Q: You said you were the program officer in the agriculture division or section. How many Foreign Service officers were there in the mission in Ghana at that time?

DAVIDSON: I was the assistant in the agriculture office working for the Ag officer, Oleen Hess, a very senior agriculture specialist, Mike Zak was the Program Officer and Ray Martin was there and his wife.

Q: Ray must have been the Health Officer

DAVIDSON: I'm trying to remember how many others there were. It was not a tiny mission. The mission director's name was Irv Coker, a black American. There was another Ag Officer, Bob Bartlett. There were a number of people I could learn from. Mike Zack was the program officer, so whenever I had any questions I could always go to Mike. The most memorable thing I thought during that time in Ghana was the economy was terrible. The Ghanaian currency was called the cedi, and the black market exchange rate was 12 times the official rate so nobody could buy anything at a reasonable price. If you wanted to buy something in the store you had to pay 12 times what it was

worth in order to buy it. Also, there was not much for sale. People would take everything they made and they would sell it to the neighboring country to get hard currency. As government people we did not and would not change money on the black market. Even going out for dinner was beyond our means in most cases! The nice part was the Ghanaians were wonderful people and they would invite us for dinner and we would go to see things with them, and that was nice. But the economy was really in bad shape.

At one point I was supposed to be managing a grant program, an agriculture grant program. In order to get the money programmed, we had to have proposals. There was nobody to write a proposal, so you went to the agriculture community in Ghana and said, "We would like you to write a proposal." And they said, "What is a proposal and what does it look like? Can you give us a model?" This time my wife was able to travel with me, so we got in a big Chevrolet suburban, AID vehicle, with my little non-electric typewriter and we were sent to the mission stations in northern Ghana to develop proposals which the mission station staff and local government officials would submit for the agricultural grants.

Q: You say mission station, you mean?

DAVIDSON: These were missionaries who were in contact with the local people and who knew what was going on in the areas and had a real working relationship with local tribal people. I had a format for the information I needed for the project approval process. I would interview people and find out what they needed or wanted. It was agriculture-related small business development project, so the ideas that we came up with after talking with the people was a grinding mill for millet and other small grains, bicycle repair and small motor repair, tools and equipment. Well there wouldn't be much equipment, but tools.

There were several different small business type projects. We'd see a line of women and we ask, "What are you standing in line for?" And they explained, "We're standing in line for the grinding mill." There was one grinding mill for 50 women, and so you grind what you brought and then you gave a portion of what they ground to the owner of the grinding mill for payment. Our purpose was to proliferate the number of grinding mills, particularly women-owned grinding mills, so that there would be a better economy and they wouldn't be standing in line wasting so much time. I took my little portable typewriter and typed up all the proposals in draft and we did a budget. We'd work with the missionaries and they would then work with the local women's groups and finalize the proposals and send them into the agriculture office. At that point I and others would review them in Accra, and approve the proposals or tell them how they needed to change or add more information.

We spent more than a week traveling up to these different missionary outposts. At that time you couldn't buy any gasoline because there was hardly any gas. We would buy gas from the missionaries who somehow figured out how to get gas, and we stayed in their guest houses and paid them for our stay and local food. It was the nicest part of being in Ghana because we saw all the areas and we talked to many people. Even though I wasn't

supposed to -- I picked up people hitchhiking along the road. One day I picked up a man with this huge gun. He was out hunting and he had this big long rifle. My wife said, "Do you really want to pick him up? And I said, "Well, he's not going to get anywhere if we don't pick him up!" So we picked him up and he told us where he wanted to get off. He was no problem at all. Just an interesting episode.

Q: How long were you in Ghana?

DAVIDSON: Well that's the saddest part of the story. My wife had a misdiagnosis which resulted in a ruptured appendix. The lifesaver was the Ghanaian doctor in the military hospital. He figured out what was wrong and saved her life. They operated on her in Accra. She had to stay in the hospital there and then was evacuated on a commercial plane on a stretcher. They took six seats out of the plane and they flew from Accra to Baltimore, and she came by ambulance from Baltimore to Sibley Hospital.

She had more operations here and they let me stay here during that time and then they were going to discharge her. She was still pretty much incapable of doing anything because she'd had her insides all disrupted, and they tried to send me back to Ghana! And I said, "I'm not going back to Ghana leaving her like this. She has nobody here, no family, nothing." We had a huge conflict with the bureaucracy, and I ended up getting assigned to the Africa Bureau under Haven North. I'd say he was the one who probably defended me against the bureaucracy. He was head of the Africa Bureau and I was assigned to the African Bureau, the Ghana Desk.

Q: Wow.

DAVIDSON: It was not a happy time. Even to this day it's not a happy memory.

Q: Wow. So all your goods were piled up and sent back.

DAVIDSON: Well, the nicest thing about Ray Martin and his wife is that they helped us, particularly Lou Anne -- who unfortunately has passed away -- but she was just wonderful, very helpful. I went back one time and got something started, but she was the one that really made a difference. We really do depend on good people in different places and people that you don't always know very well. We didn't know Ray and Lou Anne very well, but they turned out to both be very wonderful people and so helpful.

Q: So you came back here and rented a house, or bought a house?

DAVIDSON: We had actually bought a house while we were in graduate school so it was one of those funny Washington stories. We were both in graduate school. Neither one of us working, so how can you buy a house and get a mortgage and do all those traditional things? We found a house that we liked, and since I had saved money in Vietnam and she had a little money for a very small house, we paid cash! We didn't have any problem with that part of it.

Q: You rented it and then you moved back into the house when you came back?

DAVIDSON: Yes.

Q: So you were in the African Bureau working on West African affairs?

DAVIDSON: Yes, and Norm Olson, one of our colleagues was the desk officer, and he was very helpful in figuring out what I could do and what I couldn't do because I was without a detailed background of AID work, and again I was struggling my way through AID paperwork. The people on the desk, was there a Joan Wolf?

Q: There may have been. There was a Joan Silver.

DAVIDSON: No, not unless she got married after.... She was very good. She was over several countries, and Norm tried to keep me from making too many mistakes. I probably offended Haven North. I remember riding with him in an elevator. Remember this is the guy that I had a relationship with, who had helped me. So he asked me how work was going, and I said, "Working for the African bureau was like asking for a headache." It was terrible! I don't know what all the problems were, but I remember I suddenly regretted that statement for all my life because Haven was the nicest person! But working in the Africa Bureau at that time was not easy, and I don't know exactly why; I can't remember all that. Anyhow you work on what you're given and try to do the best you can. One day a friend who had organized the recruiting for Vietnam -- she was still an AID employee and she was assigned to OFDA.

Q: Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance

DAVIDSON: My friend, Carole Siegel said there was a job opening in OFDA and that I should come down and apply for it. I was in the Africa Bureau working on the West Africa things, pretty much out of my element given that I didn't have any real training in those kinds of things. I was doing the best I could and there were never any problem with my work or my quality of work. It was just that I wasn't very familiar, so I had to work extra hard to do what I needed to do. She told me about the job in OFDA so I interviewed, was accepted in OFDA, and got a transfer to that job.

Q: Now you were still a Foreign Service Officer?

DAVIDSON: I was still an FSO. OFDA had a mix of foreign service and civil service people, but they liked foreign service people in there because it gave them a link into the countries where the disasters would occur. They always tried to have a mix of staff. It turned out that one of the people in OFDA was a guy that I had worked with in South Vietnam. Bob Clary was a senior Foreign Service Officer and I was a junior action officer.

Q: How big was OFDA at this point? Was it small?

DAVIDSON: There were about 25 people.

Q: Twenty-five people, and had it been created many years before?

DAVIDSON: No, OFDA was created after the Yugoslav Earthquake when the U.S. government's response to the earthquake was very disjointed.

Q: So what year would that have been?

DAVIDSON: I have to go back and see when that would have been.

Q: We're going to finish this part of the interview and come back later.

Today is January 28, 2018. As we finished the last interview, Ollie had just been asked to transfer, and he was transferring to the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, which he said at the time had 25 employees, which is quite different than today. It is one of the most well-known and impressive parts of AID today but much of Ollie's career was related to the development of that organization that he knows that very well.

So Ollie, tell us a bit about what you found when you moved to the United States and OFDA, and what year it was.

DAVIDSON: It was 1978 and I had no formal disaster experience, however, I'd come from Vietnam, which was a disaster, I'd had lived in a conflict zone and was familiar with emergencies. I was invited to interview and had several people from my Vietnam work recommended me. Carol Siegel in OFDA was a key part of the office and knowing me, recommended that I come down and talk to the deputy director in OFDA.

Q: You say "come down," is that from the Department of State?

DAVIDSON: Yes, I was in the Africa Bureau in one of the upper floors and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance was on the 1st floor. OFDA had an operations center, a horseshoe shaped table filled with phones and positions where different specialists could sit and help coordinate the disaster responses. I talked to the Deputy Director.

All the directors of OFDA and some of the deputy directors have been political appointees. The directors, and every now and then a deputy director or a lower level officer will be the staff from somebody's political campaign. It's an interesting thing because disasters are supposed to be apolitical, but they are very political. We can talk a little more about the politics and how it impacted our work and certainly the staff there. All the technical staff were strictly apolitical; just trying to do our jobs, which is what any good civil servant would do. I have to say that the senior people were not trying to bend things politically, even those who were very partisan, were not trying to do things for political reasons.

Q: Who were the other people in OFDA? Were they General Service (GS) employees or were they Foreign Service Officers, or who were they?

DAVIDSON: Good question. The director and the deputy director at that time were political appointees. There were three senior people. One was a foreign service officer, Bob Cleary, and George Beauchamp, a longtime retired military. The retired head of the Indiana State Police was also a senior person in the office.

There were several -- I'll call them older gentlemen, relative to me at the time, including Bill Dalton, one of the deputy directors. Stan Guth was from the Indiana State Police and a civilian, Dalton Griffin. Fred Cole, a civil servant. There were about five of at the senior level and several technical people.

Three of us were young, assistant action officers. Margaret McKelvey, who recently retired from State Department as a refugee specialist, meaning working on refugee programs, not a refugee, although she was a refugee from OFDA. If you ask, I will tell you the story of her transfer. Margaret and Bill Kelly, were former Peace Corps volunteers. They added a science officer. He often had sort of disheveled red hair and we would call him the "mad scientist!" He was very productive, very productive, although probably we had more conflicts with Paul Krumpke. We always accused Paul of being science for science's sake, whereas Bill Margaret and I were disaster relief for people, and there was always an inherent conflict. Paul would say, "I've got this great thing." And we'd say, "What good is it for people?" And Paul sometimes had trouble figuring that out in the beginning, but when we did the budget, everybody had to agree on what the budget was going to be used for. So Paul would present his science project, and we would say, "What's it going to do to help or save people?" And we had this ongoing conflict. Paul was really productive and he made so many good innovations. But I'll tell you one more and I'll go back to it at some later time.

Volcanoes around the world were very dangerous; Indonesia, Philippines, and then there was one that started to become active in Colombia, a volcano called Nevado del Ruiz in the area of Armero.

Q: What year was this?

DAVIDSON: That's hard to pin down, maybe early 1980s.

OFDA had an interagency relationship with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). One of the benefits of being a small office with money and a worldwide mandate was that we made interagency agreements to use the best scientific technical people from a lot of other USG agencies. I'll just talk about the USGS at the moment, because we sent a team of U.S. scientists to Armero, Colombia. USGS had a relationship with the Colombian seismological staff and they came back and told us that their best opinion was that it was their opinion that it was not going to erupt soon, but that we should put instruments on it. OFDA and USGS would make a cooperative project and put instruments on it to make sure that if it got worse, there would be some warning for people. Well, one of my

saddest stories is that within a couple of weeks of the scientists coming back and before we put the instruments on there, the volcano exploded in the Armero area, and about 23,000 people were killed overnight. The snow at the top of the volcano melted and created a massive landslide with water and debris, it was one of the worst things that anyone has ever seen, and one of the worst disasters that we experienced.

Even today when I think about that event and talk about it, the lesson was, you can't really evaluate the risk 100 percent. But if you have any way of doing something, do it immediately - if nothing happens, great! Because if you don't do something, and it happens, you can look back at Armero and say, "We estimated on the cautious side and 23,000 people lost their lives." Now it would have been a terrible disaster no matter what happened, but there could have been warnings so that when that thing started to erupt more people could have been warned - they could use church bells; amateur radio, etc. There's lots of ways of warning people to go to high ground because in most places, whether it's flood or avalanches or in this case the landslides, there is high ground. There are places to go to escape the danger, if there is a warning.

Paul wanted to do all these projects. He wanted to put together what is now called and exists is a volcano disaster assistance VDAP (volcano disaster assistance project.) and a VDAT (team). He wanted to do many things, but we really ran him into the wringer, because you can dump a lot of money into scientific gadgets, but they do not help people if you don't have some practical application of those gadgets to a threat situation. We kept asking Paul questions, asking him questions about how his activities would really help people. One morning we walked into the office and in the back hall Paul had put up a flow chart of all the things that were part of the project and going down the hall he showed us how all these things fit together and what the impact was to protect people from danger. On that day we all said, "Paul, did you did an amazing job!" We agreed with his logic and we started to fund this volcano disaster action project and team. Now if you go back and ask the USGS today about this project. If you ask them where it came from, quite likely they won't know the answer, but I can tell you exactly where it came from! Paul Krumpe, our red-haired crazy scientist!

Since I'm talking about Paul and technology, I'll say two other things. One typhoon season about 78,000-80,000 people lost their lives in a cyclone in Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal. After that happened Paul worked with the scientists and developed an early warning system. Today there are lots of early warning systems in that area, and they stem back to what Paul did with the U.S. scientists in NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), the USGS, and other scientists.

Another of OFDA's legacy is from Paul talking to the U.S. Navy. "So okay, Paul, what are you talking to them about?" "I'm talking to them about probability forecasting for hurricanes and cyclones." "What's the probability that something major will happen?"

"Initially the probabilities are usually pretty low until the storms are very close to land."

“We told Paul that we don’t really care much about whether these storms hit a navy ship or not, but what can you do for people living in the path of a major storm?”

Paul went back to talking with the navy and he came back and argued with us, and he said, “Look the Navy has agreed when they come up with the significant probability, they will inform the U.S. embassy nearby when the storm is coming into their area and there’s X probability that that storm will hit in the area where the U.S. embassy is. And of course that’s where a lot of local people live.”

Finally, and somewhat reluctantly, we gave Paul the funding to do this probability study, to refine the system. To make a long story shorter, the National Hurricane Center in Miami and the staff at that time really did not like probability forecasting, because the probabilities were very high or very low, meaning they weren’t very certain. So they didn’t support probability forecasting, and therefore, were always at odds with Paul because he was always pushing them.

He would tell them, “You ought to learn about this, you ought to try this.” Twelve or thirteen years later the Navy project manager became the director of the National Hurricane Center which refined probability forecasting. Today the National Hurricane Center they use probability forecasting. They’ll say this is the cone of uncertainty, etc. and the whole scientific piece of it. Well a lot of that came out of the OFDA project with the Navy 25-30 years ago. And it goes back to this guy who was so persistent as a young scientist.

Part of OFDA’s legacy was the technology that we pushed forward. We were a very small office; we started with a 20 or 25 people. We used to joke that OFDA had 25 people and \$25 million and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) had 250 people with \$250 million. It was not accurate either way, but we used to joke about it because we were rivals with FEMA. FEMA always wanted to do international work and we always wanted them to stay in the United States. There often was an ongoing conflict or tension or competition between OFDA and FEMA.

I was in the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1978 to the beginning of 1996. I calculated, I had worked on 320 international disasters.

Q: Over 18 years.

DAVIDSON: Yes and most of the disasters were fairly significant. There were a few declared disasters when we just wrote a check to the U.S. embassy or the USAID Mission and they implemented the response activities. The process then and today is the same. The U.S. ambassador, he or she declares that the disaster exceeds the capabilities of the local government and they have asked for or are willing to accept assistance. In the case of Mexico and Brazil and a few other places, they would never ask for assistance, but we would provide the assistance because they were willing to accept U.S. assistance. They didn’t want to be asking, but they were willing to accept it.

One of the earliest disasters was a major earthquake right in the center of Mexico City.

Q: Year?

DAVIDSON: This was 1985. To go back just for a little bit, I started out as an assistant action officer and since my background was Latin America I did some of the Central America and Caribbean activities because I had traveled in all those places. I knew almost all those countries from having been a student and doing my master's degree in Latin American studies, so I was familiar with a lot of the places. My colleague, Bill Kelly was a Spanish speaker so he had mostly South America.

I was watching and listening to people in the greater Caribbean area. They said that the Metro-Dade Fire Service Spanish speakers-were going out on their days off and training people in the mostly Spanish-speaking countries on fire fighting and rescue and in the airport rescue. Then, I did what no government person should do, I went to Miami and met with the fire service people and I said...

Q: What was the office?

DAVIDSON: The Metro-Dade (County) Fire Rescue Service.

This was at the time when they were reorganizing but they had this really "Cracker Jack" fire rescue service. So I went down and I said to them, "I know what you're doing. I've had the Latin American officials tell me and give you high praise for what you're doing. If we give you money, you could do more!"

Well, you could see how this might get me into serious trouble, especially today, but that's what I did, because they couldn't do it on their own budget. They had no mandate or no capability to go out and do this. They were a group of people who were just so committed to helping that they were going on their days off! So it was very interesting because we got two proposals from Metro-Dade to do a cooperative agreement. We paid some of the cost and they provided some assistance, so it was a cooperative agreement. The proposal was signed by the fire chief. We decided that the fire service had the depth of people that we really needed, so the OFDA ended up in a Cooperative Agreement with the Metro-Dade Fire Service. This was in early 1985. They were coming and going on mission to various Latin American countries when the Mexico City earthquake hit. We immediately sent a Metro-Dade rescue team headed by some of the firefighters to Mexico City, they began work, but the disaster declaration didn't come right away. This was the time when retired General Julius Becton was the Director of OFDA.

Q: Before you get to Julius, the people who were going from Metro-Dade were all Spanish speaking?

DAVIDSON: Yes, and later on when we sent them to Armenia, we found a Russian speaker in the Metro-Dade fire service! Very interesting. So Julius Becton -- I'll go back and talk about the political parts of disaster in a little bit -- but Julius Becton was retired

four-star, African-American general, one of the best managers, probably one of the nicest men I've ever met; just a wonderful man. He had 13 principals of command which he used and when he came to OFDA he changed the title from command to management (principles). The principles included integrity, having a sense of humor, not worrying about dissent -- dissent was honest and productive. It was 13 principles everyone could adhere to. And he lived by them! It wasn't just that he had them; he managed by them.

The Mexico City earthquake occurred, and we were waiting and waiting for the request or for an agreement that the Mexicans would accept our assistance. So Julius went off to dinner with one of his general friends. During that time in the State Department lobby the Mexican ambassador and a U.S. State Department official made a statement saying the Mexican Government would accept US assistance. Immediately, we called "General Becton, we've had a request for assistance." He came back to the office, but he hadn't finished his dinner and brought his dinner plate back. We gathered around the operations table discussing what we were going to do and how we were going to do it.

The big problem with any disaster is figuring out what happened, how serious, and what was the niche the U.S. government could provide. One of the early innovations of this young group of OFDA staff was to try to transition the disaster assistance response team, often a military team because they were the people who were on standby all the time all over the world. When I got to OFDA, the disaster assistance recon team or assessment team, was mostly military people with senior OFDA staff leading it.

Well, we were civilians and we wanted civilian technical people who we could have a relationship with for a long time, so we wanted to develop this disaster assistance response team. We started putting together the criteria, the papers, etc. to put together a civilian team of people that had the skills that we needed to do the relief work. But we hadn't gotten there yet. In 1985, when the Mexico City Earthquake occurred, we put together the best team we could find, but some of the reactions were very interesting.

First, we didn't really know what the need was and we were getting many requests. One of them was for helicopters that could fight fires. The Forest Service has helicopters which drop retardant and so we got a huge military aircraft and put on some helicopters and we sent it to Mexico City. It was a massive waste of money because by the time it was all assembled and got down there, there weren't any fires. They could still use the helicopters to do some reconnaissance. The best thing that we did was to send members of the National Association of Search and Rescue (NASAR). They were meeting in Nashville and had rescue dogs and rescue specialists, all meeting with this nonprofit national organization. They kept calling and calling and saying, "We can help, we can help, we can help." Well, we didn't know what they could do and we didn't know what kind of help was really needed down there, but there were people trapped and these were dogs that could go into the rubble and smell humans, hopefully live people not just bodies. Eventually we said, "Okay we'll send an aircraft." We picked up a group of these rescue people and sent them to Mexico City. At the same time the mine safety specialists -- a part of the (U.S.) Geological Survey, I think -- in Pittsburgh were calling saying, "We

have a television camera we can put down into a crack and wind around and look and see if anybody's alive there.”

Q: My goodness! These people were just volunteering!

DAVIDSON: They were volunteering! You remember that the Mexico City Earthquake was the biggest thing that had happened in years and years. Being right next to the (U.S.) border generated thousands of phone calls, a lot of them came to United States. Most of them were asking about their relatives, but many were volunteering and had technical skills, we had hundreds calls. A small group of us had to evaluate, “Are these people we could use? So we flew the truck with the television crew equipment, the mine rescue team, from Pittsburgh down to Mexico City. There were the dog rescue people, the mine rescue people, the helicopters that weren't particularly useful, but were down there. We'd heard that somebody at the embassy remarking that “There must be a high unemployment in Washington because they're sending us all these people!” Well it turned out when we added it all up, we sent about 147 people to Mexico City with no management. In other words there was this group and that group, but one of the most interesting things was how the US Embassy in Mexico managed the vent. There were many USG agencies working in Mexico. In Mexico City there was enough of an FBI contingent that they managed the warehouse of all the earthquake relief supplies coming in! The embassy was pretty well organized, I mean, it's a huge embassy, was then and is now, so the embassy organized and the FBI was given the role of managing the warehouse in Mexico City where we were sending in the relief supplies. Everything we sent in got cataloged by the FBI and then it was released when requested by the Mexicans or by our rescue teams or whatever.

One of the earliest public-private operations was with Continental Airlines, which was flying into Mexico. They offered to fly any piece of legitimate (requested) equipment, not trailers and bulldozers and things, but small pieces of things into Mexico City for free. Groups or companies who wanted to donate requested items could take jackhammers, saws, cutting tools, etc. to any Continental office in the United States, they would put it on an aircraft. They would rendezvous -- I think it was out of Houston -- and would fly it from Houston to Mexico City. The FBI would take possession of that and when somebody needed that, they would release it. That was probably the first public-private partnership and Continental Airlines was just wonderful. We were in contact with them every day, every hour of every day, and it was really an amazing operation.

Then the City of Los Angeles called up and said, “We're collecting heavy equipment to send to Mexico City because Los Angeles and Mexico City are sister cities.” They wanted us to help facilitate it. We had good contacts in California and we had good contacts in Texas, and we brokered it with the U.S. embassy, which coordinated with the Mexican government. The Mexicans received 67 train car loads of equipment from Los Angeles that came down by rail to Mexico City! These were bulldozers, dump trucks, backhoes, 67 train car loads! It was the most amazing thing.

There were lots of interesting lessons out of Mexico. One of the lessons was in OFDA where managers worked a 12-hour shift with a couple hours overlap with your

replacement. I worked 12 and the next guy worked 12, but there's an hour overlap in the beginning and in the end. I was doing the day shift when we got a call from somebody in Texas who said they said had a whole lot of equipment and wanted to donate to Mexico. Given that we knew Los Angeles was doing all this and Texas was also trying to do something. When I left my day shift, I told one of the senior fellows to check out this offer of assistance and, if it was legitimate, begin to move it with the Defense Department aircraft because it was the only aircraft that was big enough to carry it. When I came back in the next morning, I asked Fred Cole, "Fred, what's the status of the offer of equipment from Texas?"

He said, "Oh I've got it ready to move. It's going to take five C-5A aircraft. That's the biggest aircraft the Air Force has, C-5A."

I said, "Well, did you check with such and such and such and such just to make sure everything was legitimate and did somebody go out and inspect the equipment before you sent it?"

He said, "Oh, I thought you said 'Move it.'"

"No, Fred, I said evaluate it. A Huge difference!" When we checked, it turned out it was a lady, and she was crazy. She was calling up and offering all these things, and she had nothing, not a thing! Therefore, if I had taken a day off and Fred had just followed through with what he thought I said was "Move it," This is the importance of the written word. This was a lesson we included in the procedures and processes we were developing and expanding. After that we had much stricter procedures about operational information, writing things down!.

Another lesson of Mexico City was also that the media portrayed all of Mexico City as having been impacted by the earthquake, when in fact it was a narrow strip in the center of Mexico City and a lot of the rest of Mexico City was not touched. The limited impact meant that relief supplies and equipment could come from nearby places in Mexico or the City. Also the people living in those areas that were not impacted were not in danger. They weren't killed and they weren't injured. The lesson was, if you precisely describe where the disaster is, you reduce the number of phone calls from the public who could think that everybody in Mexico City and everybody's aunt and uncle has perished! After that we emphasized when the media is focused on the impact, focus it on the exact place. One estimate was that the State Department got 3,000 calls an hour that were never answered. In other words, 3,000 people called and got busy signals. And that was largely because the area of impact was relatively narrow versus what the media was portraying it in the beginning.

Q: Was there an AID mission in Mexico City at the time?

DAVIDSON: There was an AID representative. The AID representative played a really important role because the AID reps have relationships with people that are different than

the embassy and the CIA, FBI, or whatever. The AID representative, and at the moment I can't think...

I might remember his name but he really played an important role because things got political. There are a lot of politics in disaster situations, no matter what happens. The ambassador was a Reagan administration appointee. This ambassador didn't trust the Mexicans too much. When it came to collecting money for the relief operation, the ambassador said to send the money to a nonprofit group in Mexico City, somebody that he had confidence in and probably was AID's go to organization in Mexico City for humanitarian food and relief activities. Well, this caused a huge brouhaha between the Mexican government and the State Department because the U.S. ambassador was saying don't give the money to the Mexican government; send it to XYZ nonprofit organization. So these tangles come up all the time and at that time the U.S. ambassador only had the authority for \$25,000. We couldn't second guess the ambassador. If the ambassador wanted to use it for XYZ, we generally had to accede that that ambassador could use it for XYZ. Sometimes we suggested that we would use that \$25,000 to pay for transportation. Often they used it for local purchase, which was good because they could buy things quickly and they were appropriate kinds of things on the local market and it would help the local economy.

The Mexico City earthquake response was a huge learning experience. When the rescue teams came back and the Metro-Dade fire/rescue people came back, we brought them all together to do a lessons learned summary. They were really hard on us. They said, "Look you sent us down there with no equipment, no agreements, no health care, no emergency provisions. You just sent us in and we were happy to go because we were volunteers, but you can't run a professional disaster operation like that again." So out of the Mexico City Earthquake came the Metro-Dade's much more structured fire rescue operation. An arrangement was made with the National Association for Search and Rescue to develop a trained team of dogs and dog handlers who would find people in the rubble to help rescue them. A whole training program came out of that. In addition, I was introduced to the Fairfax County fire chief, Warren Isman.

Q: Fairfax County in Virginia?

DAVIDSON: Yes Fairfax County in Virginia. David Gratz, for Montgomery County, MD Chief now with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) introduced me to the Fairfax County fire chief. And I did the same thing I shouldn't have done the other time and said, "If we pay your expenses this time,..." I wasn't saying if we give you money, but I said, "If we pay your expenses, will you develop a team and help us work on international disasters?"

Of course the fire chief in Fairfax County was a very progressive guy and he saw a great opportunity, so he said, "Sure." We started negotiating an agreement with Fairfax County, which today OFDA still has the agreement with Fairfax County. In fact Dewey Perks, from the Fairfax county fire service, is now an OFDA employee, or paid by

OFDA. He handles all the collapsed structure rescue, all the search and rescue coordination.

After the Mexico City Earthquake came the El Salvador Earthquake in 1987. There have been subsequent ones, but the interesting innovation for El Salvador was that the Metro-Dade people found a suitcase sized satellite telephone. They said, "We can buy these satellite telephones. We don't really need them for Metro-Dade work, but they would be really good if OFDA had another disaster, and we could deploy with those satellite phones."

We said, "Go ahead and buy them." They were used apparently by the pope during a visit to somewhere -- that's what they told us. Anyhow we bought two satellite telephones. In 1987 they deployed the satellite telephones to El Salvador after the earthquake. Now these were marine telephones you were supposed to be used on shipboard. They weren't for general distribution; they were a restricted commodity. So when we deployed them, I said, "If anyone asks who you are, just tell them you're a ship". They were set up in front of the building where the people were trapped and we were talking to them from Washington. It was just as clear as just standing here and talking to you at your table. I would go home at night from the office and they would call me at home on the satellite phone and I could hear them as clear as a bell. They were just beautiful connections.

In the meantime State Department had these scratchy intermittent military satellite phones and they were trying to transmit the names and information about people who had perished. Well, every time there was this "shhh" sound on the phone. They didn't know whether they had lost a name or whatever. It was a really inefficient way of transmitting information, because it was to protect people's privacy. However, we couldn't give the State Department our satellite telephone number because we knew the minute we gave them our telephone number they would tie up the line forever.

Anyone who wanted to make a phone call would have to call our operations center and we would then do what we call a phone patch. We would link them to the place in El Salvador. We had two satellite phones. One was at the embassy and one was in front of the rescue site where the Metro-Dade people could call to exchange information. Another legacy, we pioneered was the use of satellite phones. After that we used the satellite phones on every disaster in Latin America. By the time the Armenian Earthquake occurred in -- I think it was -- 1988 or 1989, we had a FCC telecommunications officer on the staff on retainer. Arthur Feller, the FCC communication engineer, worked with AT&T to establish an open line into Armenia. We did not try to send the sat phones to the Soviet Union after the Armenian Earthquake because we were afraid that if we sent satellite phones in there, they'd think we were spying! So we sent the team with no communications, which -- another lesson -- you never want to do that!

The next big effort that was sort of trendsetting and important was the Armenian Earthquake which occurred in the Soviet Union. We had no idea that we would ever respond to the Soviet Union, so we had no plans, no procedures, nothing. The State Department didn't want us to respond.

Julius Becton, who was the (OFDA) director during the Mexico City Earthquake was called to become the director of FEMA because there was a scandal over at FEMA. He came to OFDA in a scandal to get rid of a previous director, and he went to FEMA as kind of the knight in shining armor, right? Anyhow he became the Director of FEMA.

Julia Taft came to be the director of OFDA. Julia came from the Ohio Republican Taft family. Julia had experience with the refugees exiting Vietnam after the war, and Julia was both a very skilled manager as well as well-connected politically. Her class as a White House Fellow included Colin Powell and Caspar Weinberger. She knew everybody and she was married to the deputy secretary of defense Will Taft. OFDA Director Julia Taft was very experienced and very action oriented. When the Armenian earthquake occurred ...

Q: When you say experienced, what kind of experience did she have?

DAVIDSON: She had been a Health and Human Service (HHS) officer during the time when Vietnam fell when all those Vietnamese refugees were coming to the United States. She became involved in that operation and eventually headed the refugee resettlement of the Vietnamese in the United States. She had management experience, she had refugee experience, she had a wide network. Everything that she was doing was action oriented. She served as a consultant to the Pentagon on humanitarian assistance, but then when her husband was named deputy secretary she had to leave the Pentagon because it would have been nepotism. Unlike today, nepotism at that time was not allowed. So she came to be the OFDA director.

One of her first big disasters was the earthquake in Armenia. OFDA had no plans and no relationship in the Soviet Union the State Department did not want OFDA to offer any help (State Dept role). State officials were willing to help, but they thought it was impossible; that the Soviets wouldn't allow assistance. Julia was very persistent, and this goes back to the Eagleburger connection, because Larry Eagleburger as I remember was the deputy secretary of state, and Eagleburger as Ambassador to Yugoslavia during an earthquake was one of the people who helped found OFDA. Julia called Larry Eagleburger and asked, "Can I call the Soviet embassy and offer assistance?" The State Department desk said, "No." Larry Eagleburger said, "Yes." Julia called the Soviet embassy and they said, come over and tell us what you have. Julia went to the Soviet embassy.

Q: This is where?

DAVIDSON: This is here in Washington, you know, up on the hill, on...

Q: Wisconsin Avenue.

DAVIDSON: Yes, right. Julia went over there and said we can do this and this and this and this and we're ready to go tomorrow. All you have to do is tell us that it's okay and

give us the landing permit to bring in aircraft in. The Russians said, "Well, we'll think about it."

I was in Jamaica doing a disaster evaluation and I got a call that said that I needed to come back because I was needed in Washington for this Armenian Earthquake. And Julia got a call back from the Russians saying, "We accept your assistance and you can be there tomorrow. If you can get there."

In the meantime Carol Siegel, the contact officer -- a friend from my Vietnam recruiting tour -- had chartered a civilian aircraft, and the aircraft was to take people from Washington. The flight included: Metro-Dade fire/rescue, Fairfax County fire and rescue, a disaster specialist named Fred Cuny, and an assorted team of doctors with some OFDA staff and equipment, cold weather equipment. This was in the middle of winter and it was freezing in Armenia. Everyone had to take heavy clothes and equipment.

Again we had not planned to be there, and there were new relief team volunteers. We took a group of four or five doctors and put them with the rescue team because there were medical issues, however, we had no previous relationship with these doctors. They called up and volunteered, untested. They got to the airport where the charter plane was and I was told that one of the doctors showed up in his Gucci shoes. And people said, "Where's your cold winter gear?"

And he said, "We thought you were providing it." At the airport the freight forwarder for the charter company was taking some clothes to donate to Goodwill. She went to her car and brought all the clothes that she was going to donate and gave it to our rescue team people, some of whom did not have appropriate clothing. And after bits and pieces and everything else and a lot of last minute buying of things, they took off. But they did not take the satellite communications equipment because they were afraid the Soviets would think we were spying on them!

While the team was there, other conflicts occurred. The U.S. embassy in Moscow kept asking us for more supplies, more equipment, more medicine and supplies. The U.S. embassy was talking to State Department, and we were talking to Julia and our team on the ground through the AT&T connection that Arthur Feller had made. There were two, sometimes conflicting channels. We followed what Julia authorized. I had advised Julia that when she left for an emergency, she needed to name two people in charge, one person in charge of the emergency relief and another person in charge of managing the office. Managing both the office and managing the relief operation was too much for one person.

However, when she left for Armenia, she left me in charge of the whole thing, not just the relief operation. The AID administrator, Alan Wood, would come down and sit at our operations table and we would call Julia a couple times a day. Julia would tell us what was happening and what she wanted.

At the same time the U.S. embassy was telling the AID administrator and us that they needed more of this and more of that and more of something else. So there was a conflict between the embassy and Julia on the ground. This is a frequent occurrence, the technical people in conflict with the political level people. If you ask the people in OFDA today, I'm sure they would tell you the situation hasn't changed much, that there are always these tensions. But we're all one government and in the end we sent supplies that Julia asked for -- another aircraft and another aircraft and more people and more specialists. Out of that disaster came other lessons learned, better procedures and more people trained, it was a major event.

Q: Let's go back and look and see who else staffed OFDA.

DAVIDSON: We had the senior people, we junior level staff, and had some specialists. Since we were a very small office, we did not have the skills to do everything, and we augmented what we had in the office with interagency agreements. We had an interagency agreement, which I believe still exists today, with the Department of Health and Human Services for medical related people. So we had at that point (someone) I would jokingly call our doctor, actually he was a public health trained nurse, Jack Slusser, a wonderful guy who was very creative and very helpful. So we had this HHS medical capability.

We usually went to the Defense Department for logistics, and during the time when Julia was the director, we did an interagency agreement with the Department of Defense, they assigned a logistician. Then he retired and became an OFDA staff person. His name was Bob Keesecker. He's unfortunately since passed away, but Bob was very good at trying to organize and look forward. He was the one who came up with the Meals Ready to Eat that had no pork in them, because when we sent MREs to certain parts of the world they couldn't use them, so he developed MREs with no pork. That was another major innovation.

He also sent out plastic to put roofs on people's temporary shelters. Plastic disintegrates in the sunshine therefore, Bob worked with the military testing facilities and came up with a plastic that did not deteriorate which included Scrim. It's like packing tape with the fiber inside it, so the plastic sheeting was blue plastic with this scrim inside. They tested it and tested it and they perfected it. At one point we were selling it to FEMA because they didn't have any blue plastic stockpiles. When FEMA needed some we would do that on a reimbursable basis, and now they have their own. So that was another Keesecker innovation. Bob was very creative in trying to use the best of available materials. He'd also worked on better water purification units.

We had a disaster going in Papua New Guinea. One night he called me and I asked, "How's it going?" He said, "Well everything's going, but it will take a long time for the relief supplies to get there." We had a stockpile in Guam, which is not too far from New Guinea when you look at the map but looks close, but it's a long distance.

A while later Bob called me and he said, "What did you do?"

I said, “Bob, I didn’t do a thing. You told me the schedule. I passed the schedule along to Julia who called me and asked me what was happening.”

He said, “Well right now we are on war mode. They’re going to have an extra aircraft and an extra crew and that material is going to arrive in half the time that we had thought it was going to arrive.

The next day I said, “Julia, what were you doing last night and what happened to the operations?”

She said, “Well the secretary of the Air Force was at my house for dinner and I asked him why it was taking so long for our relief supplies to get from Guam to Papua New Guinea?” He left the table during a couple of the courses and apparently he put the Pentagon on war mode for OFDA!” After that OFDA operations were on war mode during the whole time Julia was the director. We had to reimburse them for the work, but we only reimbursed them for a part of it, not the whole cost of the operation. Anyhow, Julia became the lady known for the war mode, because our priority was second to war. Even today I think OFDA still gets a pretty high priority for the work with the Department of Defense.

The Defense Department is every expensive. They have lots of different rates. They have the Department of Defense rate. I’m sure this has been refined several times since I left, but there’s the Department of Defense rate. That’s the rate they charge the Army and Navy and everybody working together. Then there’s the next level which is the U.S. government rate, but not the Defense Department rate. Then there’s another rate and another rate. Well, when something really big happens, we would respond as best we could with what we had. At times, we would go a little slowly because we knew that if we waited a little, people would complain to the White House that it wasn’t going fast enough and then the White House would tell the Department of Defense to do it at their own expense. It would save OFDAs budget but the stuff would get to the victims faster. We sort of deployed the Defense Department at their own expense whenever we could because they’re very expensive.

There were lots of lessons. Probably one of the best things we ever did was to establish an agreement with the Department of Agriculture, but the relationship was really with the U.S. Forest Service. There were some forest fires in the Caribbean and we sent a forest fire team to the Dominican Republic to advise them. When they came back, they said, “Look we can work on forest fire issues for you in a lot of places, because all over Latin America there were forest fires going on and people were not well trained.” We decided to establish an interagency agreement with the Forest Service managed by the Department of Agriculture to do forest fire training and then respond to disasters when we needed them. The interagency agreement with the Department of Agriculture implemented by the Forest Service assigned people to work in OFDA, at first Bob Mutch and Chuck Mills, later Tom Frey and others. They helped us to develop the strike teams with operating procedures and a lot of innovation, and they did the lessons learned when

we brought people back from a disaster. It was a good relationship and it was really helpful. It professionalized our relief teams and our disaster operations.

When Chuck Mills retired from the Forest Service, he went to work for the National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) and they became our nonprofit group to work on developing the rescue teams, the volunteer search dog teams, and coordinating the OFDA training of Fairfax County and Metro-Dade, and the medical team. There were a couple of really good doctors that came out of the Armenia Earthquake response who agreed to continue to work with us, not for us. Joe Barbara, now with George Washington University was one of the medical doctors, and the relationship with Joe and the medical team became one of our really good relationships. We sent that medical team to the Philippines and lots of other disasters, and they became specialists in many ways because OFDA kept sending them out and they learned a lot of things. They actually became part of the FEMA rescue team. OFDA had two rescue teams and FEMA after a while developed a process where they now have 26-27 teams that look very similar to the OFDA teams. Fairfax is an OFDA team and a FEMA team, and now Los Angeles is the second team with OFDA. Metro-Dade is a FEMA team, but no longer deployed by OFDA.

You never want to offend too many people because it turns out that the Dade County fire chief that I had negotiated with originally later became the FEMA director. The chief who helped us put together the Metro-Dade fire rescue team, Dave Paulison, became the head of FEMA during the W Bush administration.

Q: Tell me, in some of these emergencies, would you spend your nights down at the office, or where did you work from if these things would continue on 24-48 hours?

DAVIDSON: We didn't want people to work 24 hours a day; it's not effective. All the studies say to send people home even if they don't want to go home. We would have a 12-hour shift with an overlap at the beginning and end of the shift. On a 24-hour operation, we would try to split the staff up so we'd have some experienced people working on both shifts. By that time we had a couple more staff, and interagency people, and we always had some good linkages with the State Department and AID desk officers. The AID desk officers were very helpful for countries with AID programs. They were our go to for everything local. In the past, when AID had specialists, we sent those people on disaster assignments, for example housing specialists working for -- Peter Kimm in AID's housing office. They were our best friends because they would always loan us people to go out. We would pay the travel and expenses, but we could mobilize those AID people -- the water sanitation people health people, engineers, sometimes foresters, agronomists, and a lot of technical people. I think that a lot of those people, those skills don't exist in AID today, which is too bad, because it means in some cases we had to go to contractors.

Fortunately we had people that I would call our "three geniuses." Not sure what a plural genius is, but we had three people who were really of the genius level. The first one I already mentioned was Fred Cuny who as well-connected and well-experienced in the

disaster world. He was and a real pain for us as technical people because he didn't talk to the technical people; he went directly to the office director or the ambassador or the general or the highest authority. He was an amazing person who knew what to do and he wasn't afraid to take risks and chances. There are a couple of books written about him. Unfortunately he was killed in Chechnya and his body was never found. He left a strong legacy of a lot of things and a lot of people that he trained.

Q: He came from Texas originally?

DAVIDSON: He came from Texas. He had some experience and he just sort of parlayed his experience and his bravado into other work and he became one of the strongest supporters of OFDA and one of our best people. He was particularly close to Julia Taft and to Andrew Natsios, two of our strong directors. At one point he crossed between Sudan and Ethiopia with a ton of money, cash that he was using to buy relief supplies and carried it across the border because there was no international banking system. I mean they trusted him enough to give him cash and he just went and spent that cash to buy relief supplies, an amazing story.

I didn't work on the Africa events; I did mostly Latin America and then I became the operations director. When you asked, "Where did you work?" I worked mostly in the operations center, and it was my staff who did the logistics and the Defense Department, the medical, and the forest service agreement. At one point I had responsibility for the budget and some other things. I didn't go out on relief operations for the most part. However, I did go into Nicaragua after the Sandinistas took over the Nicaraguan government. I was on one of the first relief flights flying into Nicaragua, which was the civil strife disaster type.

I did the paperwork for a major electrical project in the Dominican Republic where the hurricane had come through and the president of the Dominican Republic had called President Jimmy Carter and said, "Would you help us with the electrical project?" I flew into the Dominican Republic with a team and we put together a package in six months. We had the transmission lines back up so that then they could do more of the distribution line work. The work on that transmission line was done by the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority. In those days they had helicopters, trained linesmen, and they had a lot of supplies and equipment. We reimbursed them for all of that when they re-established the electric grid in the Dominican Republic. And it was a \$6 million, six month project; it was an amazingly fast project. Consider their situation today where they can't seem to do very much for themselves, a pity.

I wasn't the one that made it all happen, but I did the paperwork. We calculated that if we gave them electricity it would save poor people money because a light bulb cost less to operate per month than the continuing cost of a candle that kept burning out and had to be replaced. We justified the use of relief money for electric power expenditure by showing that we were helping poor people by restoring the electricity which is cheaper than candles and also less dangerous.

Most of the time I stayed in Washington managing the operations staff and I would organize coordination meetings. One memorable trip I went to Panama with Julia Taft to visit our warehouse and discuss operational issues. We could dispatch things very quickly from Panama, but the US commanders in Panama were very strong generals. It didn't matter whose administration, they were all very strong personalities because Panama and Latin America was an important part of the relationship with the United States. It's the same command that current White House Chief of Staff General John Kelly came from, the Southern Command. Julia went down to coordinate with the Southern Command which at that time was headquartered in Panama, supporting OFDA's relief supplies going in and out of Latin America. In the middle of the meeting the general said, "If something happens in let's say El Salvador or Honduras, I'll send my team in there."

Julia responded, "Excuse me, General, but when something happens in the area, I will ask you and we will pay for your team to go. If we don't ask you, you don't go."

The general was taken aback a bit. And I'm sitting there as her operations officer thinking, "Okay, Julia, I know your husband is the deputy secretary of defense, but this is a real strong statement!" They went back and forth, but the law is very clear, OFDA is in charge of USG disaster relief. The military serves in response to either the president telling them to do something or OFDA telling them to do something, or in the domestic side, FEMA telling them to do something. So this thing went back and forth a little bit and I tried to be the intermediary because I was managing the stockpile in Panama.

A few years later while Julia was still OFDA's Director, something happened in El Salvador, the earthquake in 1987. The general sent a military medical team by air that landed in San Salvador and the ambassador was afraid to let them off of the aircraft. These were medical people who were armed! He called Julia and they were back and forth, back and forth. Finally after sitting on the runway for an hour or two, they turned the aircraft around and they sent the medical team back to Panama! They never offloaded that medical team!

Sending medical people into a foreign situation always puts you in conflict with the local medical expertise. They use different means of treating wounds and illnesses and frequently introduce high-cost, high-level techniques to people who don't always need the most sophisticated treatment. Not that they don't deserve good care, but it's always been a conflict with the local medical community, if you try to send in the highest level U.S. medical capability. In that situation the ambassador and Julia turned that aircraft around and sent it back. The general was not a happy camper that day.

Subsequently, Julia went to El Salvador to see what was happening. She and the secretary of state -- George Schultz at the time -- were flying in to El Salvador and as airplane was circling the runway and there were no aircraft on the runway. In other words, the airport is pretty empty. And Schultz supposedly said to Julia, "Julia, there are no relief supplies coming in there. You have to let the relief supplies come in."

She responded to the secretary of state, I don't control what the Salvadorian government allows in or doesn't allow in. That's the Salvadorian government's prerogative." What happened was during that time there was a civil war going on in El Salvador. The El Salvador government was very reluctant and very careful about what they let in, because they didn't want weapons being smuggled in with relief supplies, and they didn't want a lot of people coming in who would then go back and say, "Oh there's torture, there's imprisonment, and there's whatever."

The Salvadorian government was not allowing people to go in there just willy-nilly. In a lot of disasters everybody goes in willy-nilly and it makes a huge mess of relief supplies that are of little value and not targeted toward a population. In that situation, the Salvadorian was being very careful and it wasn't Julia who was holding it back, although we have to say Julia was not encouraging just anybody to go down there to do whatever they wanted. We sent in the rescue team, a relief teams, and we sent a lot of supplies in. We were doing our part, and a lot of the other countries were sending in, relief supplies.

Q: You worked mostly in Latin America, then. You didn't work on Africa or Asia?

DAVIDSON: I started working on the Latin American activities and Margaret McKelvey, one of the three younger staff, had been a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa. She knew the Africa continent very well, and she did most of the Africa-related activities until she was moved to the State Department. Bill Kelly, the other mid-level staff with a Latin American background also had been a Peace Corps volunteer. He spoke Spanish, did a lot of the Spanish speaking areas. Fred Cole and Ray Dionne worked on Asia operations. I did work on one at the end of my OFDA tenure, an earthquake in the Philippines and there was a lot of activity at that time.

I was working public-private sector coordination for OFDA. My role in the operations center was no longer the director of operations, but I was the person that was liaising with companies. A man called in the middle of the night saying he had a company in the Philippines and it was near one of the Air Force bases that the U.S. still operated. When I was talking to the Air Force base -- I think it was Camp Hayes, -- I asked them to please check on the welfare of this little industrial complex. I got a report back and I called the man up and said, "We've found out that your plant is still there. There's not a lot of damage and your employees seem to be fine, in another day there would be communications re-established and your people will get hold of you." He was so happy because there was his investment halfway around the world and no information from them.

Most of my preparedness and response work was in Latin America, just because that was where their expectations of the US were high and we had good relationships. One time as a hurricane was approaching the Caribbean and I called the disaster director in Jamaica to ask, "Franklin, I need to know whether you want us to come down and help if something happens." He was the Jamaican disaster coordinator, Franklin McDonald. "Franklin do you want us to come and help?"

He said, “Ollie, we don’t want you to come and help. We expect you to be here, and if we can’t call you and ask you to come, you must come on your own. You have to know that we expect you to be here!” That was hurricane Gilbert 1989. The hurricane hit and we sent the team down there, but before the airplane could land, we had to find out whether the airport was open. One of our relationships was with the amateur radio group. Again, our communication engineer, Arthur Feller, had developed and done training of amateur radio people in the Caribbean and Latin America. He called down to the Jamaican amateur radio club and said, “What’s the situation on the airport and tower?”

They said, “The tower is out but the airport is open. The runway is clear.” They said, “We will go down and walk on the runway and call you from the runway to tell you that it’s okay to send the relief airplane in.”

The amateur radio people called on the ham radio back to OFDA and we called the Defense Department, and said, “You can send the aircraft with the people and our relief supplies. DoD coordinated the landing with the amateur radio people; we gave them the radio frequencies and they landed. For a couple of days the tower was still somewhat sporadic so we provided the information that the runway was open. Somehow the Miami Dade County Airport tower was talking to Jamaica so they were able to put aircraft in there.

At one point, we phone patched the Jamaican prime minister with his ambassador here in Washington through U.S. Air Force aircraft, so the Jamaican president could talk to the Jamaican ambassador.

There were lots of interesting things that came out of the hurricanes. There was a long time when there were no hurricanes, and then all of a sudden we got David, Frederick, Gilbert and Allen. The first one you don’t do very well, the second one you do a little better, and the third one you do a little better. We had just finished Hurricane Gilbert when a storm went through Central America going from the Caribbean across to the Pacific Ocean side. It reminds me of the time when we had a political situation where we were not successful. The storm went through and did a lot of damage. We wanted to have a disaster declared in Nicaragua, but it was during the time when the Sandinistas were the government of Nicaragua and the Reagan administration would not allow a disaster declaration. They kept telling us, “Don’t encourage a disaster declaration,” and they were telling the U.S. ambassador in Nicaragua, “Do not do a disaster declaration.”

Somebody leaked the fact that people needed help and the U.S. government was not going to accept the disaster declaration. Well this caused a big brouhaha in Washington over who leaked the fact that there was a need for disaster relief and the U.S. was willing to provide it, but the U.S. government – the Reagan administration wouldn’t allow it. So there was this big fight. We didn’t win. After the Gilbert experience, we had relief supplies in Jamaica that we could have sent over to the east coast of Nicaragua where there are indigenous people and Moravian Christians and not just Sandinista supporters on the Spanish speaking side. But the Reagan administration would not allow the relief operation. We could have done both the humanitarian work as well as made the

Sandinistas look very bad because we had put shiny new tin roofs on all these poor people's houses. That was the only time that I'd ever seen where there was an identified need when politics interfered with our disaster work.

Julia Taft was just beside herself, because she had gone to Colin Powell at the White House; she'd gone to everybody she knew. Everybody said, "Can't do it, Julia". It was very surprising, because Julia didn't take no for an answer. Of all the directors probably she did the hardest things, the most difficult, the most complex, very successfully.

One thing that came up during that relief effort, let me talk about it. The bad part of the Jamaica relief operation was that we put in a lot of metal roofing. We put in so much metal roofing that the factory that was making metal roofing in Jamaica was put out of business. One of the really bad things you have to worry about in disasters is if you put in too many free relief supplies you can kill local businesses, and in this case, we killed the corrugated roofing business. After the local need was met, we had a lot of roofing sitting there. And it wasn't just us. We flew in roofing to trying to jumpstart the housing effort. If you look at what's needed, if you have enough food and water and there's not a lot of medical problems, what do you need? You need shelter. And if you put tents or plastic sheeting in, it's a temporary thing. That's not very good. Because of our experience -- and I was the one that took the lead on the thing -- I figured out how to send in roofing sheets by air which was not all that expensive because it was close to the USA. Then we told everybody else, "Don't send roofing in because we're already meeting the need."

Q: The other donors.

DAVIDSON: The Canadians, the Europeans, they sent roofing in also. Anyhow, we had enough. The only good part of the story was the next year another hurricane hit in one of the neighboring countries and we just sent the roofing from Jamaica. We had a stockpile then and we sent it, a little bit of a silver lining. Overall, it was not a good operation. Again it's the difficulty of assessing what's needed, how fast, and what are the other donors doing?

We always had a relationship with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). We always had a good working relationship with the UN, the Canadians, and also with the European Community. In fact the European Community and OFDA worked together on a Caribbean project, where European community put in \$250,000 and we put in \$250,000 to establish a unit in the Caribbean that was disaster related. It was preparedness training and relief coordination. That same organization, although not funded by donors now, still exists. It started with people taking a chance, putting in the money. I was the project manager for the initial project and Paul Bell -- I think you probably knew Paul Bell. He was Peace Corps staff, and then he was hired by OFDA to work throughout Latin America. Paul's first job was coordinator of that unit in the Caribbean.

He was the second of our "genius" guys. We had Fred Cuny and then you had Paul Bell. Paul Bell was raised by a missionary family someplace in Latin America, I can't remember whether it was Panama or where. He was the most amazing guy, and he was a

senior Peace Corps person at one point. I think he probably had a falling out with some political person and I found that he was available and I hired him. We put him into the project in the Caribbean and it turned out the Europeans paid his salary, which was a bit unusual. They weren't real happy with paying an American's salary in the Caribbean, but he ran this coordination unit there. Then after he left, he went to work full time for OFDA out of Costa Rica. He was in Costa Rica for a number of years and the person that took over the role in the Caribbean was a Jamaican female medical doctor. Then Franklin McDonald from Jamaica took it over, and again it became Caribbeanized. Today it exists, its name has changed several times (CDERA) and it's all done by Caribbean people with coordination with the Red Cross and with E.U. and OFDA. It really is a beautiful example of interagency and inter-governmental cooperation.

Q: As I recall from some of my career assignments, there were programs that were called disaster preparedness in many countries. Were those also OFDA programs?

DAVIDSON: I'd say yes, but some of them could have been mission-funded with some OFDA technical help. We really tried to indigenize whatever was being done because we recognized that doing it from Washington is not the answer. The US mission was our real arms and legs on a lot of these projects, and some of them were congressional appropriations that were after OFDA activities. Congress wanted to do rehabilitation activities, particularly in Central and South America and Caribbean countries (many ethnic voters in their districts/states). Some of the projects were in countries that were so impacted by disaster that the mission and the regular AID budget was twisted. I shouldn't say twisted as in a bad way, but twisted to meet the need of what there was. So if it was health or housing or some other activity, or Food for Peace, those activities were mission run. Again, it was coordinated with the OFDA but it didn't have to be OFDA money. OFDA was successful because we had somewhat of an endless pot of money. It wasn't always endless, but it looked endless. And secondly, we could borrow money from the bureau and from the missions' budgets, and we seldom paid them back. We called it borrowing authority, the missions and the bureau called it "theft!"

Q: Ha-ha! There is legislation that allowed this?

DAVIDSON: Yes. It wasn't just legislatively allowed, but it was strong armed in many different ways. If the AID project wasn't working well because of the country being impacted, then Congress and the bureau would recognize it's better to use that money for an OFAD-related disaster project. Often, shall we say, OFDA's borrowing was not well received! If you talk to anybody in the Latin America Bureau, they will tell you, "Oh yes, OFDA borrowed the money but they never gave it back!"

We could also buy anything and everything. It was called the "notwithstanding clause." There's a clause that says, "Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, OFDA can do this or that..." You could buy things that were on the restricted list. I mean if you wanted to buy things from Cuba, or from other places, usually we could finesse the paperwork and make it happen. And it would happen very quickly. We were very careful and I don't remember us ever getting into trouble for doing extraordinary buying of

anything. We made some mistakes, and we paid too much in some cases, but Carole Siegel, our contracts officer, was so careful and so methodical, and meticulous that she would make sure the paperwork was done right.

Carole was my friend who was on the Vietnam recruiting trip and convinced me to join OFDA. I can remember hearing her shout at a civilian contractor with whom we had an airplane contract. She said, "If you don't get this thing loaded and operational by tonight, I'm going to have the White House call you!" Now she never did that, I don't think, but it was a real threat. We had a contract with an airplane group in Miami, and they said they were going to deliver the relief supplies tomorrow. When we had the relief supplies at the Miami airport they were supposed to deliver them the next day. Well the next day came and they said, "We have to wait one more day." She was furious because her word was we were going to have that aircraft deliver them that day!"

We had a friend in Miami who was a sister cities' board member and a businessman selling spare parts for military C-130 aircraft. He did two things for us. He had a pass to the airport and could go onto the airport ground. We said, "Great, go and look at that aircraft and tell us what the story is, because now they're telling us it's going to be two days before it leaves." Ray went out to the airport and he found out that the aircraft needed 22 items of maintenance before it could fly, an outrageous number. He went to the owner of the company and Carole was talking to the owner on the other side threatening to cancel the contract. Ray said, "You've got to get this aircraft to fly."

He told us that in the afternoon it looked like ants on an anthill. There were people all over that aircraft pulling the maintenance on it to get the thing ready, and it did fly the next day. Ray went to the airport, he knew the people, and he really put the heat on.

Another time the Colombian government asked the US to loan them a military aircraft to do some relief shuttling. I knew Ray sold C-130 parts, so I called Ray and asked, "Ray how many C-130s do they have?" "They must have 20 or 30 of them." "Why are they asking us to provide an aircraft when they have their own aircraft?"

He said, "I sell them parts. I know exactly how many aircraft they have, it's some number like 22, but only four of them are flying." That was the reason. But the point is, it was the relationship that we had with Ray that allowed us to make sure we weren't just wasting our money. It wasn't that I had the relationships, it was somebody in OFDA or USAID always had useful relationships.

One day we got a request from the U.S. embassy in Caracas to send heavy lift helicopters for relief supplies in this coastal town that had been impacted by a hurricane. We couldn't figure out -- they wouldn't tell us -- what they needed these heavy lift helicopters for. Through our ham radio operator we got a contact at a Venezuelan base in the center of where the impact was. We asked the base there, "Why do they need these heavy lift helicopters?"

The guys in the base said, “Oh, people came for the weekend from Caracas down to the shore, but the roads are all blocked now and they can’t get back, so they want the heavy lift helicopters to lift their Mercedes cars from the coast back to Caracas!”

We said, “Oh my gosh, that is not what relief operations are supposed to be!” So we politely told them that we weren’t going to provide that. It was one of the political people whose name would be very familiar today who was the ambassador in Caracas was at the time. He didn’t do his homework to make sure that that was not a waste of USG resources!

One more story that is really interesting and very helpful. We always try to stop the impact of the disasters. In other words, the word “prevention” was not a word that we used a lot. It was “preparedness,” or “mitigation” sometimes, but we very seldom used the word “prevention” because we thought it was somewhat arrogant to think that we could prevent a disaster. Often we knew we could reduce the impact. West Africa had the threat of a locust plague that would eat most their crops. It was at the time of Director Julia Taft. Probably only two directors in all of our history would have done something, because it took guts to do what she did.

She sent a small assessment team from the Department of Agriculture to look at what was happening in West Africa, to determine, “Is this locust threat real? How serious would it be?” They quantified it as best they could. They came back and said. “The only way to prevent a locust plague is by spraying.” Now mind you, we don’t like to spray because most of us were environmentally friendly and didn’t want to just spray willy-nilly. But after an intense review, we decided we needed to spray because if we didn’t spray the crop would be lost and there would be major hunger, etc.

We did two things -- this was a Carole and Julia operation. First, we hired a couple of aircraft that sprayed firefighting retardant. We needed more and smaller spray aircraft and Carole found a couple of aircraft. I don’t know how it actually happened, but OFDA bought three small spray aircraft. It was amazing to us, she actually purchased the aircraft for OFDA and put them in West Africa! They would go out daily to spray. The way you determine where the spray is going, is to have a person on the ground with a piece of cardboard and the number of splatters from the spray tells you where the edge of the spray pattern is. It’s highly technical but very simple. A piece of cardboard held by a person at the edge of the spray pattern.

She organized the spraying and bought these three aircraft, which we owned for some time. We jokingly called them the OFDA Air Force! A sad part was of the operation was the large spray aircraft -- these former firefighting aircraft in the old days -- were really old, old aircraft. One day one of the aircraft took off from Dakar, Senegal. The pilot couldn’t tell the difference between sky and water and drove the aircraft right into the sea, killing three or four people. It was very, very sad.

The three small aircraft were used throughout West Africa for a while. The crop was fine. People were fed.

The lesson was - Julia was willing to take the chance When you prevent a disaster, there are no accolades. Nobody remembers because nothing bad happened, right? When you're looking to prevent something, it's not easy to document. This West Africa locust plague "prevention" lesson is probably not very well documented anywhere because it wasn't a disaster!

Q: Right! What kind of publicity did you do along with activities that were successful?

DAVIDSON: One of the innovations was a contractor that was doing research for us. They put together a lessons learned system. Chris Holmes, the person who hired me, organized a lessons learned program. Every time we had a disaster, the action officers and people were supposed to fill out the lessons learned, and it was put into the computer. Then OFDA published public situation reports. The Situation Report (SitRep) documented a disaster occurred at such a time and this was the damage and this is what organizations and countries are doing -- the Europeans, the Canadians, and the United States or the UN. Today, situation reports are available for most of the disasters since the 1970s. If you go back in the archives you can find detailed situation reports.

The public information that went out initially were the situation reports. There were many reasons for publicity. Obviously, we wanted our taxpayers to know what we were doing and how we were doing it. These situation reports went to the Congress. They went to state governors and to everybody that was a part of our community. They went to FEMA and all the USAID agencies and then anybody could use the information they wanted.

Another reason was we wanted to show people not only what was needed, wanted, and what was being done, but also what was not needed and not wanted. One of our big vexing problems, which still occurs today, is that people see on television people with all these needs and they want to help. Obviously that's good if they want to help, but how are they going to help? We and our disaster partners put together campaigns to donate cash to your favorite charity. That's the best way to do to help, but a lot of people don't want to donate cash or they don't have cash to donate. Groups collect things, and the collected goods are frequently not very valuable and too expensive to transport.

One of several things that we did internationally, and then was adapted by FEMA domestically, was our in kind donations management and the volunteer effort. If you want to volunteer and you've never been to the country before, you don't speak the language, and you're not bicultural, you often are a drain on the resources as opposed to being helpful. When volunteers are well trained and experienced they can help, but volunteers that just call up out of the blue because they want to spend a week in such and such a place are not usually not accepted. We used the situation reports to do a lot of education and to try to channel the help.

It was New Year's Day in 1980, I believe, many OFDA staff were at a New Year's Day party. This was in the day when you had landlines in houses and you had a lot of extension phones. The Azores earthquake occurred. The State Department called and told

us about this big earthquake. I can remember Stan Guth, Acting Director, was on the 3rd floor, Bill Kelly was on the 2nd floor, and I was on the 1st floor, all discussing what we could do? The earthquake wasn't the most horrible thing that ever happened, but it seemed that every Portuguese person in the United States -- the Boston area is where many Portuguese live (the Azores is Portuguese). Every Azorean American, every Portuguese American, wanted to help. The cash part was easy; no problem. But they collected tons and tons and tons of basically good stuff, but how were they going to get it to the Azores?

Two things happened. One, they had all this stuff and they were pressuring us to transport it to the Azores. The Congress was calling OFDA to move the donated material. I was getting many of the phone calls. Bill Kelly and I were the two action officers. It took us three weeks of working 24 hours a day to get the thing subsided to the point where you could actually manage something. We flew one aircraft of baby related supplies, diapers, formula, and things like that. Then we called organizations in the Boston area and asked "Who has a big facility up there?" We identified an Air Force hangar that was not fully utilized. It was January and it was freezing. We called the Salvation Army who had called us and asked, "How can we help.

We said, "You can manage the warehouse of all this stuff." So Stan -- I can't remember Stan's last name -- he was the most wonderful guy, low keyed. He took in all the Azorean donations and helped the Azorean community package it. They sent some of it by ship.

One lesson, again about putting people out of business, is that the Azorean government told us, "Do not send that stuff! Do not send it anywhere quickly, because you will put every small business in the Azores out of business." We got into a big conflict with the congresswoman from Massachusetts whose name will go unmentioned who was saying, "They need help, they need help!" and the Azorean government telling us, "Don't send the help because you'll put every business out of business."

We spent a long time coordinating the donated goods, and as far as I know, a lot of that stuff went very slowly, hopefully was absorbed into the community. If we had sent all those relief supplies, or encouraged them to be sent quickly, it would have had a major negative impact on the economy.

Many times we experienced that the congressional representatives were not helpful resolving the issues around donated supplies. In Jamaica following Hurricane Gilbert, we had the same problem. The Jamaican consul general in Miami was asking for relief supplies and she put a container at the consulate in Miami to send to Jamaica. Jamaica got 300 shipping containers of supplies with no invoices! Now how do you get a container out of customs if you don't have an invoice saying what's in it? They found garbage bags filled with all kinds of things and nobody knew what they were. Somebody from Europe tried to smuggle a small car in a shipping container. They put a car in the shipping container and filled it with relief supplies and sent it to Jamaica. Another one was a shipping container that had a good amount of salted fish coming out of Canada! You can imagine what that container was like two-three months later when they couldn't

get it out of customs. In the meantime, the containers just piled up in the port and nobody could get legitimate imports out of the port because there were shipping containers in front of it! So it was a huge mess for months!

We were involved with InterAction, the consortium of disaster and development NGOs. Julia Taft went there after OFDA to become the head of Interaction, which was wonderful for us because we had a good relationship and a good liaison. Interaction still exists today and is supported by OFDA -- in part -- and it's still the best source of disaster information.

We organized public education campaigns about disaster issues, donated supplies, etc. and an InterAction member Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA) sent out situation reports. Later VITA became the Center for International Disaster Information, an OFDA-funded operation as a contractor, but in an NGO relationship. The Center for International Disaster information organized public education campaigns against spontaneously donating things in kind, and they even worked with us at FEMA to try and reduce the amount of donations that were inappropriate. Cash was fine, but the other donations were very problematic.

Q: Did you have contacts? Did you have any strong supporters in the Congress, people who supported you budget wise? And did you have long-term contacts with your office?

DAVIDSON: We could not have done the work that we did without the help of Congress. So the answer is yes, but we used the AID legislative office to do all of that. Betty Cook, whom you know from the alumni association, was our person who did the congressional liaison. She was and still is a just wonderful person who knew us inside and out and knew who to call. She would call the person on the OFDA staff that she knew was credible on the subject that she needed the information. She was very good and she knew which people in the Congress to tell what things in order to try and support OFDA and also to undercut some of the problems (e.g.) when a donor called up OFDA and said, "I want to donate this."

We had a problem a lot of times with packaged disaster hospitals (PDH). It sounds like a great thing, but these were old, old civil defense hospitals. They were packed in -- I use the word Cosmoline -- because it was packed up like a weapon so that if there was a big disaster you'd break it open and set up a portable hospital. Well, the problem was these things were 30, 40, and 50 years old and everything in them that wasn't made of metal was no good any more. These packaged disaster hospitals were sitting in the warehouse, and someone would say to the congress man or woman, "We have this packaged disaster hospital. We really need to get it out of the warehouse because it's costing us a lot of money." Donate it to XYZ disaster.

The first call offering the PDH would be to OFDA and we knew it's not something we needed or wanted. The impacted country would not take it, the WHO would not take it, and nobody else would take it. When we said, "No" they would call their congressional representative. Their congressional representative would call Betty Cook, the first line of

defense. Betty would say, “We’ve had experience with that and we’ve found that they’re not appropriate and you could do XYZ with it.”

Usually, they wouldn’t take NO for answer from Betty, even though she was absolutely right. Then she would put a conference call together between our office and the person with the equipment or the congressman or whomever. We would go around and around. The only time when I really had a personal experience was with Hurricane Gilbert in Jamaica where a congressman called up and had this packaged disaster hospital. We said “No, they don’t need it and don’t want it.”

The Congressman’s office called the U.S. embassy in Kingston and somebody in the embassy, who didn’t know what they were talking about said, “Oh, I’m sure it would be useful.” Then the congressman wouldn’t take no for an answer. I arranged for a Coast Guard aircraft to carry part of it, not the whole thing, but what was most useful, bedpans and things that wouldn’t spoil. I put a person on the aircraft from ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) who knew what to do with what was left. So the Coast Guard aircraft landed in Kingston, somebody took the ADRA staff this way, took the hospital that way, and never the twain would meet! We never could find out if the embassy and the AID mission knew that was a very useless thing. The Jamaican government took those supplies and put them in a warehouse somewhere and we never found out what happened. I would ask where it went, and they said, “This is a question you should not ask, and we will not answer.”

I said, “Okay, I understand that!” But it was an interesting story.

Q: There were teams I guess in other parts of the world called DART teams. Did you work with DART teams and what were DART teams?

DAVIDSON: So DART teams started out as a reconnaissance teams. They were military teams sent out by OFDA in the 1970s.....

Q: DART means?

DAVIDSON: Disaster Assistance Response Team. They do assessments, but the name that most everybody recognizes is DART. When I first got to OFDA there was a DARF with an “F” and there were a couple of other iterations that were basically military-related teams that OFDA would send out. Then we would try to find the civilian skills, and we developed these disaster assistance response teams. Now they have many more iterations, they have a disaster operational coordination team, they have lots and lots of different iterations, tailored to meet the situation. Today, some of them are there for a long, long time.

During the 1970s and 1980s we were 25 people on staff, a few contractors and some NGOs. Our objective, our modus operandi was get teams in and get them back out because the next disaster was right around the corner. We would try to put people in for one or two weeks, maybe three weeks. When I went to Nicaragua after the Sandinistas

took over the government, I was there for about a week and a half and my role was just to smooth the transition from one group to another and to try to promote the things that we knew we could do in the long term. Most teams were very short term at that point.

When I left OFDA it was in the time when civil strife was beginning to be the most predominant disaster. There were famines, civil strife, hunger in the Sudan and the beginning of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. All those events were happening while I was transitioning out. They were not the kind of events that I worked on in operations. Mostly I worked on natural disasters, a few man-made disasters like an air crash or an oil spill, where we had a minimal role. We didn't want to work on those kinds of things that were industry related. If it was an air crash, we tried to get the airline company to handle whatever there was; if there was oil spill, it was those who spilled it who should take care of it. If it was a chemical incident, we used the EPA and we tried to get the chemical industry responsible for doing those things.

The disaster DART teams today play a much different role than the small teams that we used. And there are amazing people. They have people under contract and others that they've used for years, and they stay in the place for a long time and they really do a wonderful job. It had its origins way back then, but it's much different today.

Q: You obviously were there for a long time and you probably were no longer a Foreign Service officer because you didn't go back overseas. When did you transition and did you transition to general service? What did you do?

DAVIDSON: We came back from Africa because my wife had had a ruptured appendix. In order to get her continued medical treatment and also to have children, we needed to be in the States on a long term basis. I applied for and got a civil service job. This transition happened in OFDA. As a foreign service officer, I was the assistant action officer, but when I applied for the civil service job it was for disaster preparedness officer for Latin America. It was a posted position I competed for, and I transitioned into the civil service. I was in the civil service from 1980 through when I left in the beginning of January 1996.

Q: That's a long career! One place and one job.

DAVIDSON: I think one of the criticisms of military and everybody else these days is that the short tenure is really counterproductive. You just get working on something, you know enough about it, you know the pitfalls, and whatever and then you're off somewhere else. This was one of the big reasons why we wanted to change from military-related DART to civilian DART. We had wonderful relationships with the military people, but after we got them all up and working, they transitioned out, and we had to then go through the same process again and again.

This is where the Forest Service was our real strong backbone, because we knew that those were Forest Service today, Forest Service tomorrow, and in many cases, Forest Service forever! We sent the Forest Service people all over the world and, to a lesser

extent, some U.S. Department of Agriculture people. Looking back on it, that relationship with the Forest Service has been the backbone of OFDA operations for years. Based on our successful experience, we even went to FEMA and said, “FEMA, this is operational capability that you could use also.”

There were a lot of things initiated in OFDA which went to FEMA. The collapsed structure rescue teams (USAR). We had two, they now have 26. We send our teams out before the event, because we said, “You can’t do what you need to do if you can’t get there.” We would send the team into the Caribbean, tell them to hunker down and when the hurricane passed, put the antenna up and talk to us. We would take the chance on pre-deployment, before a declared disaster (no declaration – no funding). FEMA does that now, but they never did it for years and years. We had the stockpiles of plastic sheeting, water purification and other relief supplies but never food, because it would expire.

There were a lot of things which we helped FEMA innovate. Today, they pre-deploy, they have stockpiles of material, and have organized and trained response teams. OFDA started the collapsed structure rescue teams (USAR), we paid for the first year of the development of FEMA’s USAR teams. Funding mechanisms take time you can’t do A to B with some overlap without the funding. OFDA paid for their team development knowing that if FEMA had those teams, we could borrow expertise from them. Following the last Haiti earthquake, the OFDA sent FEMA teams into Haiti! Now that’s the good news! The bad news on the Haiti response was that a lot of those teams weren’t trained for international work. OFDA has always been reluctant because if you haven’t been trained by OFDA, we don’t want to send you. There’s a continuing tension whether it’s a FEMA team or HHS people, unless they go through OFDA training and do things the OFDA way. That is an interesting topic that’s best not to discuss. They’re pretty territorial, we were then, they still are, and with good reason.

Q: While we’re on that topic, very recently there’s been criticism of the U.S. government response to the disaster in Puerto Rico. I know several people who said, “Why couldn’t OFDA go out and help respond to that disaster? What’s the answer to that question?”

DAVIDSON: Well that’s very interesting because it’s not the first time, if you remember when hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Many countries offered assistance to the US through State Dept to FEMA. I remember, FEMA’s preference was not to accept the offers, but larger political considerations often temper the discussions. OFDA was asked to coordinate some of the international assistance. Today, within the National Response Plan, there is a section about how the US will consider, accept and coordinate international offers of assistance.

Politics and inter agency rivalries always influence disaster activities, even if disasters are supposed to be non-political. It’s been an interesting to watch since I left OFDA, but I don’t have many substantive examples.

I experienced that when OFDA and AID were strong, FEMA was not very strong. During the Clinton administration when OFDA wasn’t very strong FEMA was powerful; it had

strong experienced leadership and a personal relationship with the president. James Lee White, the director of FEMA was from Arkansas and a longtime friend of the president. Another example of success was Julia Taft and her relationship with her husband and the Defense Department -- there's a lot of cache in being close to a person in power.

I'm going to take a longer time to answer the question than what you asked, but one of the other OFDA directors who was very strong was Andrew Natsios. I met Andrew Natsios when I was doing a speech up in Boston and he had been recently named OFDA director. He will tell you that he didn't know a thing about OFDA. His story is a very interesting one. He was George H.W. Bush's campaign manager in Massachusetts, and he wanted a political job. He did not want the OFDA director's job. However, it wasn't very long after he took the job that he found out -- and he'll tell you -- it was the best job in the world. I was his operations officer, and we tried to guide him through the initial stages. The guy has brass balls, I mean he is a very tough guy. Although he didn't know anything about disasters when he came, but he took a lot of chances. He's very smart and he's very aggressive. I wouldn't talk about Julia (Taft) being aggressive, I'd use assertive with Julia, but Natsios I'd say was aggressive.

The southern Sudanese leader, John Garang, came to Washington for what he wanted to be a state visit. Now mind you southern Sudan was not a state, it was just a rebellion. Nobody in the government would meet with John Garang. Andrew Natsios met with John Garang to find out what was happening, and to this day Andrew has a very close relationship with southern Sudan. It's not always a very good one because southern Sudan is pretty much of a mess, but anyway, Andrew went to meet with John Garang.

Another time when the Soviet Union was looking like it was falling apart, Andrew Natsios was called to the White House and they had a long discussion about what to do about this imminent fall of the Soviet Union. Natsios was told, You're not to make any plans. You're not to make any pronouncements. You're not to do anything. We're just going to let it fall apart. Now this is again my recollection, but I think it's pretty close.

Natsios came back and within a day or so he called all of our OFDA staff together, he included some people from State Department who were invited. Natsios said, The (Soviet) Union may fall apart. We are going to put together some plans, a working relationship. We are going to do all this planning because I'm not going to get caught like we did after the Armenian Earthquake where OFDA had no plans. We're not going to get caught like that again. We're going to make plans. And he said, "I've been told by the White House not to do this, and I want you to know that if anyone says anything about it, you send them to me, because we're going to go forward with the planning." We did and it was a positive thing.

This was Director Natsios during the (George) H.W. Bush tenure, and then you remember that Clinton came in and beat Bush I. Natsios came back as the AID administrator under George W. Bush. During that time OFDA had a lot of transition, some of which I'm not at all pleased with because OFDA was put with the Humanitarian Assistance Bureau. There were a lot of bureaucratic things. Whereas Alan Wood would

come down to OFDA and other AID administrators like Peter McPherson and Jay Morris and had a very one-on-one relationship with OFDA and the director, after OFDA was put into a bureau, there were two or three layers to the administrator. Until the restructuring, OFDA had had giants as directors of OFDA. I won't say anything about the leadership now because I don't know them, but it's a different bureaucratic level of people.

Julia Taft not only had the name, she also had job security because, if she was fired, got thrown out, whatever, but it didn't make any difference, because she had her family, her family resources, her name, and her financial stability. Natsios, not a rich man, took a lot of the same risks, but he had a benefactor. Andrew Card, the chief of staff of the White House, was Andrew Natsios' roommate in college. So Andrew Card protected Natsios when he was doing these outrageous things because they were, first of all, right; Andrew did the right thing. Secondly, he had the political protection of Andy Card.

The interesting story is, Andy Card left the George W. Bush White House and Natsios was still the AID administrator, so what happened to Andrew? The story which I got from a pretty close source was, they had meetings with President George W. and the National Security Council staff at the White House. Andrew would be sitting in these meetings during these discussions. The president would say, I assume that all the staff is in agreement with this decision.

Andrew, in his typical Andrew way, would say, Not all the staff is completely in agreement with this recommendation. Well, he only had to say that a few times after Andy Card left the White House before Dick Cheney got angry with him and had him fired. Now whether that's 100 percent true or generally true, I think it's pretty close to the truth. The lesson isn't how to get a job and how to get fired; the lesson is, what makes a good leader, right?

General Becton had his 13 principles that he lived by, all of them really good. Becton was a career military man who had his pension, he had a very strong ego, but it was a nice ego in the right way. Julia Taft had a very strong ego. Her management style -- according to her -- she managed the staff by chaos. She kept the staff so chaotic that she was able to control all these hard Type A people! I said Julia that's horrible! I said we need structure, we need some management, and we don't need chaos! So her management style was not what I would agree to, but she had the political backing, the financial support, etc. Andrew Natsios had those skills.

Q: Okay you haven't mentioned the third person.

DAVIDSON: Oh, okay, the third person. You have a very good memory! The third person was a guy named Bob or Robert Gersony. He sort of dropped out my sight and I think it's because his wife had triplets.

Q: Oh boy!

DAVIDSON: Gersony was sent into the Caribbean a number of different times after destructive hurricanes. Later OFDA sent him to Africa, and he also worked on the Palestinian issue. I managed his activities in the Caribbean with the US Mission Barbados after Hurricanes David and Frederick, 1986-87. He was supposed to be designing a relief effort and kept calling me on the phone to coordinate. Finally I said, "Bob, I can't take the notes and type them up. I can't remember all these things. You have to send me something on paper so I can show it around to the rest of the staff because it's really good ideas and things. That was on a Friday.

On Monday morning we walked into our room where the teletype machine as located -- in the old days we had a teletype machine. There was this massive amount of paper; I mean it was like you walked into a room with toilet paper everywhere! It was all one string! He had typed up this massive report and when I read through it, I couldn't find two or three typos. We're talking about 60-70 pages, I mean huge! What he designed was a subsidized sale of roofing and other materials to rebuild people's houses. He proposed selling the relief supplies at a subsidized cost because he calculated that people could pay for it and they wanted to pay for it. Instead of taking our relief supplies and making it a \$100,000 project, he translated that into \$500,000 of relief supplies by getting people to pay for the relief supplies.

He had the forms, he had an organizations set up, everything. It's just the most amazing example of how we really should do relief. We sent the material in and they started the sale. There was an election coming and the candidate -- it must have been the prime minister who was not getting a cut of all these relief supplies. He said that because the program was coming so slowly, he was going to take the relief supplies and he was going to distribute them himself. Bob got a tip that the prime minister was going to try to steal the supplies over a weekend. Bob and staff took a front end loader and they put pallets of cement on top of all the tin so when they came to steal the supplies, they couldn't get it out!

In the short term there was as huge political backlash against the guy who not only wasn't re-elected as the prime minister, he was not even re-elected in his own little district. Eventually, I think he went to jail for something else, not for stealing the OFDA stuff. This was the brainchild of Bob Gersony, and I have the forms, a triplicate form, and it was just an amazing thing that he did.

Q: That was number three.

DAVIDSON: That's number three. He's still around and I'd love to see him, but he's been busy with triplets.

Q: He's no longer at OFDA?

DAVIDSON: No. His wife was one of our lessons-learned contractors. They got married and had triplets!

Q: Two questions: First, what are the things that you are most pleased about as you look back on your OFDA career and are there some things that you're not pleased about? And the second question: How has the organization changed during that period?

DAVIDSON: I think the most interesting thing for me, and the thing that I'm happiest about, is OFDA did so many things that are now a regular part of emergency management in the United States; particularly FEMA but also with other organizations. One thing I didn't mention when we talked about public-private relationships and how we worked with the business and industry, was when George H. W. Bush and Dan Quayle were president and vice president. Carol Adelman, an Assistant Administrator of AID, was a personal friend of Marilyn Quayle. Carol and I were friends in the sense that she had disaster prone countries and I was in OFDA. She said, "Marilyn Quayle is interested in disaster work. Her mother died of breast cancer so she's going to promote breast cancer awareness and prevention. She's also thinking about disaster work and I want to know what your suggestion is.

I said, Carol I have two questions. One, is she serious, and two, is she smart?" "We've had enough experience with political people who had been in our business who were not particularly helpful. So is she smart, and is she serious?"

Carol Adelman said, "She's both."

I responded, "Okay, let's talk to her."

Carol and I had lunch with Marilyn Quayle and she asked for suggestions. I said, "We have a relationship with other government agencies and we don't need any help there. We have a relationship with nongovernmental organizations like Interaction and other groups, but the place where we have no relationships or not many or in no systematic way is the business community -- business and industry. We really need business and industry to both work with us on relief as well as help solve some of the problems of disasters. Three are businesses that are helpful on disasters like transportation, food, medicine, but you also have businesses which are causing disasters which could be a transportation accident, a chemical incident, an oil spill, etc. We need a relationship with the business community.

She said, "That sounds like a good idea."

I said, "Let's develop a formal international development advisory committee, a formal advisory structures within the government."

She said, "I can be the chairman!"

I said, "Chairman? Not chairman, chairwoman! She wanted to be the chair.

We discussed where she had relationships and where we needed relationships, and we came with AT&T, American Airlines, Atlantic Richfield, which was an oil company,

Xerox, Bechtel, the construction company, Arthur Daniel Midland with food. The formal advisory committee has to be balanced so the union of operation engineers, a labor union, Purdue university, which is where Marilyn Quayle graduated, and also the University of Miami because we had a lot of activity in Latin America. These were the initial members that were formally invited and accepted to the International Disaster Advisory Committee (IDAC). We built a strong relationship with the chemical industry and other organizations through their trade associations, and also with the franchise industry.

AID put together a disaster advisory committee and Marilyn Quayle was the chair. I was seconded, kind of on loan from OFDA, to be the executive director. I had a staff of two people, a program officer and an administrative assistant. A foreign service officer, Ann Bradley, she came out of the executive officer cone of AID, a very well organized, very tough lady. She was the program officer. During the Bush-Quayle administration, we put together a several official meetings a year and also technical meetings and strategy meetings.

We organized a Latin American business-industry committee focused on the Caribbean and Latin America headed by Rick Morrell, the CEO of Tropical Shipping. Tropical Shipping was a major transporter in the Caribbean and he was also very good on disasters. When a storm was coming, he loaded relief supplies on his ships and put out to sea away from the storm. When the hurricane passed, he would land his ship right afterward filled with relief supplies. He was a hero, and he is still a hero, an amazing guy.

He had fellow named Butch Trousdale, his number planner for strategic things and disaster work. Butch later went to work for Palm Beach County, Florida as their strategic planner and disaster officer. He was a business person, a disaster specialist and then he became a government official doing business industry mitigation in the south Florida area. It has been the best model of public-private partnership to reduce disaster losses.

The Bush-Quayle administration ended and unfortunately in the transition between the Bush I and the Clinton administrations, the Clinton administration said that the government should get rid of some of its advisory committees. AID had three committees. One that was really important, one that was really unimportant that was easy to abandon, and the one of which Marilyn Quayle chaired. AID got rid of two advisory committees, including the International Disaster Advisory Committee.

The legacy is that James Lee Witt, the new director of FEMA, under President Clinton, saw the importance of a public-private relationship and probably also some of the political advantages. He came to the last advisory committee meeting, even helped me set up the chairs in the Old Executive Building. After AID discontinued the disaster advisory committee, James Lee Witt invited me to go to FEMA and help establish their private-public partnerships, which they eventually called Project Impact. They established an advisory committee, which included the insurance industry and some other key industries including the franchise industry. Today, FEMA has a well-staffed and vibrant Private Sector Office and many state emergency managers have established a similar office. OFDA's legacy!

AID abandoned that committee, IDAC, which I think was a major mistake -- somewhere between a bad management decision and a tragic mistake. Not because of my job, because it really didn't matter, but because they dropped the relationships with all those companies at the CEO or the senior vice president level. It was not a technical relationship; it was a senior level relationship.

One good thing that came from the Committee in the mid and long term, is that the internet was just becoming viable and AID was at the forefront of using the internet. I could communicate with the missions overseas long before anybody else in government or even in State Department had it and where it was all classified. The AID system wasn't classified so a lot of information could be shared..

Looking at the technology, today there's a group called ReliefWeb that is part of the international disaster community. ReliefWeb started out with Delorme Mapping Company in Maine. David Delorme put in several hundred thousand dollars to try and get an internet-based disaster/humanitarian relief communications system that would identify what's needed, what's wanted, and communicate the information really fast. He hired a person who came to Washington and worked on it. On one side this ReliefWeb is one of the greatest legacies of OFDA. The activity was picked up by the State Department, the United Nations, the Red Cross and everybody in the relief community uses it.

OFDA could have had the beginnings of it, the catbird seat, let it go. It was scuttled by the attitude of, "If somebody make a profit, something's got to be wrong with it." David DeLorme did NOT intend to make a profit from his contribution. Unfortunately a lot of government and even non-governmental people have the attitude that if anything's related to a business it can't be good. I always try to remind people that those businesses are what's paying the taxes and paying our salaries. That was both the good and the bad. To this day one of my greatest regrets is that David who wanted to do this admirable project spent a lot of money and his personal capital, but is given little credit for his effort. I took him to FEMA to meet the director and deputy directors, and they thought that what he was doing was just marvelous. And today DeLorme Mapping is a big company and they do GPSs and lots of things. That man was way out on a limb in the right way. So, that was one of the good things and the bad things.

OFDA's legacies are the things that I've mentioned, the hurricane center modeling, the USAR disaster teams, the public private partnerships, the donation management effort, the blue plastic materials, the technology, the satellite radios, all which helped many disaster victims and became main stream at FEMA. A lot of those things that FEMA has picked up and does today, many people don't know that they came from OFDA.

One of the funny things, I talked about was Julia Taft managing by chaos. One of my management lessons was that if you pick the best people, they're not very easy to manage, but they can be the most productive people in the world. Bob Keesecker, from Department of Defense, Carole Siegel from AID, Art Feller the FCC communications engineer, Denise Decker, our training officer, Chuck Mills from the U.S. Forest Service

and Jack Slusser. Jack and Chuck were the easiest to manage; the rest of them were more difficult to manage! When there was no disaster, they would fight among themselves and argue. Some days it was painful. I would ask one of them to take another to the cafeteria to talk over lunch to civilize him! Those people were the most wonderful, productive hard working people anyone could ever manage.

My lesson was, you take the tough people and give them a mission. I didn't have any staff when I was the Latin America preparedness officer, I had only a half time assistant. One day the director asked: "Could you use Denise? I said, "Yes." Denise, newly arrived in OFDA, was blind. This was about 1980-81 when people with disabilities were not supported by the technology which exists today.. What does a blind person do in a disaster office? I talked to Denise and found she was a Spanish speaker had a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne and had been all over the world and doing things which sighted people would not have been able to accomplish, perhaps. We talked about what she could do, and she became the action officer on some disasters. She was so good that we promoted her to be the OFDA training officer. She pushed technology and she pushed OFDA to buy talking computers and other technology to help her work. She was very good, and she was very persistent.

One night we were working an operation and I heard her on the phone across the Ops table talking in Spanish. "Denise, who were you talking to?"

She said, "Some guy is calling from the Dominican Republic and he wants to talk to the secretary of state." I said, "Oh, you can't get rid of him?" "No, I think he's drunk!"

He wanted an audience with Cyrus Vance (Spanish accent)! I said "Okay (foreign accent)!" I told him he had a meeting, next Monday morning. It was one of the funniest conversations we had, but you get all kinds of calls in the operations center. They put you through to people you shouldn't be talking to!

Denise left OFDA and she became the total quality management specialist for the Department of Agriculture's soil conservation unit and earned all kinds of accolades. Then she was on early disasters and disabled persons issues for the UN as a representative from the United States, a wonderful person. Denise is example of people with talents that you don't expect when you just first meet them, a fantastic person.

Q: Well it sounds like you had a stable of really Type A, aggressive, energetic, dedicated people who didn't want to sit on their butts doing nothing!

DAVIDSON: That's for sure! Now you asked me, "What's the difference between then and now?" The interesting part is that a lot of things are exactly the same. The ambassador declares a disaster. The ambassador has his or her same fiduciary authority, which has changed from \$25,000 to \$50,000. We joked about how the ambassador could now waste more money! The divisions that I managed had one staff to handle many different activities. Today, they have a whole a section of people doing those things in OFDA. Whereas I had one military person, they have a military liaison division. OFDA

people are stationed in military commands in different places around the country and in various countries worldwide in regional offices. When I was there, OFDA had one person in Latin America managed by Alan Swan, one of the foreign service officers. Alan managed the Latin America Section and had a Latin America Regional Office, but now they have offices in Africa and other places. I don't even know how many they have, but a number of them.

Q: Is Alan Swan still doing this?

DAVIDSON: No, Alan was a FSO who retired.

Q: He was an excellent former executive officer who worked with me in Liberia.

DAVIDSON: He was a very good guy, a very strong person. When I moved to operations, he took over the Latin America position, and we worked together on a lot of very good things.

Now it's just bigger and bigger. For example, they have relationships with a lot of the other government agencies. Again, they try to train those other government agencies and work with them. I think the technology part has gone a lot more sophisticated. They still have the relationship with Interaction, with the Forest Service, Health and Human Services -- I'm trying to remember how many other government agencies. I think that the only downside is that they don't report directly to the administrator.

Q: It may change in the latest discussions I've heard, about reorganization -- again.

DAVIDSON: We did a lot of advising of other countries, how they should structure their disaster group, and where should it report. We always said that the disaster unit should report to the prime minister or the president, and OFDA is several layers down. Some say that OFDA should have been doing the Office of Transition Initiatives within OFDA, but that's just a judgment call. Who knows? You could do it this way or that way.

Anyhow, I think the fact that they're doing so many civil strife....

Q: Well they talk about having five emergencies going on right now!

DAVIDSON: yes, huge things! At one point I think they forgot how to do natural disasters because there weren't any for a while, then Hurricane Mitch hit in Central America. From what I've heard, what they did there wasn't very good. It was like they had forgotten their roots and then FEMA got a pile of money from Congress and went into Central America and did some disaster projects. .

Q: FEMA did?

DAVIDSON: Yes, FEMA set up operations centers, not FEMA operations centers, but they advised on the devolvement of operation centers in Central American countries.

Some of the OFDA staff were not happy at all about that. Anyhow, I think it's back and better now than it was. But FEMA was a big player in some of this, because the Congress gave them the money and James Lee Witt was a friend of the President. AID was not in a high mode anyhow.

Q: All right. You decided to retire, what year and what age?

DAVIDSON: I retired because I had no place to go within AID. Prior to my retirement, I spent more than a year on loan to FEMA and then AID wanted me back. They wanted me to come back, but what I realized was they wanted my position; they didn't want me. They put me in the PPC (Policy and Program Coordination) office and OFDA didn't want me anywhere near their work because I knew too many things, and I wasn't enamored with the current OFDA management. I decided there was no place else to go except to become a political appointee and I didn't want to do that. I had enough years, 23, and was old enough, 55. When I retired, I went to work for several nongovernmental groups.

Q: Which one?

DAVIDSON: I started with Red Cross at the national headquarters. They're big on disaster things, but they're mostly big on Red Cross and fundraising. I loved the chapters that are out there in the towns, but I have to say national headquarters is a difficult place to work. I was there for 18 months before they downsized my position, Director of In Kind Donations. I left and I went to work for Counterpart International on a contract.

Counterpart had a relationship with the Humane Society of the United States, work which I never had envisioned, but I started working on emergency planning for animal situations and animal rescue with the humane society. I took the search and rescue model and tried to apply it -- I think somewhat successfully -- to the animal organizations. I worked with the animal organizations for another 12-13 years. The most challenging disaster was Hurricane Katrina which hit New Orleans. It was a huge animal emergency situation because people were trapped in their homes because they refused to leave their pets. The awareness of the issue was all over the newspaper and the media because people were separated from their animals.

As a result of Hurricane Katrina, the animal groups which previously fought with one another and competed for funding, decided to form an organization and cooperate - for the good of animals and people with pets! Today there is the National Animal Rescue and Shelter Coalition (NARSC), which has all the major animal groups as members, except the humane society of the United States, which dropped out. All the other groups are working together on standard training, joint operations; all the activities which NGO could work together on. Even more surprisingly, the state government agriculture offices that had always fought with the animal groups are working together and with the NGO animal organizations. Previously, state ag agencies shunned the animal groups who were always looking how to protect animals and reduce the killing of animals and humane slaughter and all those contentious issues. Therefore, the state veterinarians and the state

animal agriculture people did not like the humane groups. As a result of some very serious negotiation between some of the humane groups and the state agriculture people and veterinarians, the state governments now have their own organizations which are cooperating with the non-governmental groups.

Today you have the National Association of Animal Agricultural Emergency Planning (NASAAEP) and NARSC the non-governmental group with Red Cross and pet food companies. It's just the most amazing, beautiful example of what the ideal disaster world should look like. There is very little downside to these relationships.

Q: Are you still doing this?

DAVIDSON: I still go to their meetings every now and then. I'm a little bit of the historian because I kept forging the alliance and helped these groups work together. They still invite me to lunch with the groups. I worked for a lot of them. I worked on a contract with several of them, and I was one of the ones that insisted on having the Red Cross back into that group because Red Cross is the primary shelter organization for the country. If you want pets in the shelters, you've got to have an alliance with the Red Cross. They don't like to have the animals inside the shelter, so they now have co-located shelters where they have animals and people or even a conjoined animal- people shelter. People can bring animals into the shelter. FEMA is a huge player in this as well as the Department of Agriculture. FEMA and the state agriculture officials and the non-governmental people really do work together. It's an unbelievable organization and such a nice group of people. You could give them all an award. It really is that spectacular.

Q: Wow! Anything else you'd like to say before we terminate this really interesting interview?

DAVIDSON: I want to say I had the best life and an important thing is that my family has been really important. Nobody can do this kind of work, with this kind of intensity, without a wonderful family. My wife's been with me all the time, traveled with me, and been supportive. When I was sent to Nicaragua on that relief flight, my father-in-law was in intensive care in the hospital, and I was going away leaving my wife with that burden.

I was in the Caribbean one time when she called and said the dog had to be put down because it had cancer. There were just so many times when she was so supportive and helpful. It's been 47 years and going strong. I couldn't have done it without her, she's been my support, my inspiration in a lot of things! And she's not afraid to tell me that the dishes need to get done!

Q: Right.

DAVIDSON: John, thank you again for this opportunity.

Q: Well, thank you! This has been a real pleasure.

End of interview