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Foreign Assistance Series

JOHN LOVAAS

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is Tuesday, May 2, and I am beginning a series of oral history interviews with my friend and colleague, John Lovaas. So, John, please get started.

LOVAAS: Good! This story begins in Washington, DC, where my parents met, courted, married, and had their first of six children-me! Mother was one of six daughters of 100% Irish parents. She came to Washington, DC from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1941, for a, quote, "temporary job," with the Navy Department in the early days of World War II. My father came from a family farm in Battle Lake, Minnesota, a tiny little town of about 300 people. The closest real town was Fargo, North Dakota. His parents brought Norwegian and German to my heritage mix. My father had moved to Washington after dropping out of seminary school, ending his parents' dream of his becoming a Lutheran minister. +

I was born March 27, 1943. Shortly after, my father volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army Infantry, and he was off to fight the Nazis in France. My mom and I moved back to Massachusetts to live with her family while he was serving in Europe. We remained with my Londergan grandparents until after the war ended. After he returned, we lived for a short time in Washington, DC, then moved across the Potomac to Arlington. Home was a small unit in the Shirley Homes, a complex of long, multi-unit one-story cinder block buildings. That's where I began elementary school.

In summer 1949 I caught polio and was laid up with it for most of the summer. In fact, I was fortunate to have a mild case. I had a first cousin who contracted crippling, bulbar polio, which required treatment in an iron lung and resulted in a shortened life. In my

case, the main effect was that I could not walk. I spent my days lying on the living room sofa where I could watch the neighbor kids playing outside and they could talk with me through the screen door. I was a great curiosity. At night my dad carried me to bed. I think I was over it before the school year began.
In late 1951 the family, now including two little sisters, moved to College Park, Maryland. From 1951 to ’55 I went to Berwyn Elementary School and then to the new Hollywood Elementary within walking distance of our home. Upon graduation from the sixth grade at Hollywood, I was honored with the class Citizenship Award.

During my latter elementary and junior high years. I was happily occupied when not in school. I had a Washington Star paper route, delivering newspapers Sunday mornings and Monday through Saturday afternoons. I played twelve- and-under football one season and played little league baseball for three years. I was an all-star pitcher and first baseman. Baseball was my favorite. When I wasn’t playing little league ball, I was organizing pick-up games on the nearest diamond or in the street

From 1955 to ’61 I attended High Point High School, a new junior/senior high school in Beltsville, Maryland. I took the bus for the six-mile drive to High Point from home in College Park. I was active in Spanish Club, the National Honor Society and helping out as a junior manager of the baseball team.

In the fall of senior year, I had my most memorable school bus ride. At the bus stop I met a special girl, just a sophomore. I was smitten by this girl of my dreams, Frances Andersen. Her family had moved recently to College Park from Baltimore. And she lived just a couple blocks from our house. We went steady through our high school years, and on and off as we attended the University of Maryland in College Park. We married in 1965.

In Spring of 1961 I applied for a summer job as an engineering aide with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in Beltsville, at the Agricultural Research Center. I was hired for the job with SCS’s Central Technical Unit, in a small, converted home in the woods near the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. It was an idyllic little place off the beaten track. It even had horseshoe pits out back and space for a net to snare birds for banding by one of my Hydrologist supervisors.

Initially, my job was to set up a library for the Unit. I worked in a room the size of a walk-in closet filled with technical publications; mostly orange-colored paperbacks piled everywhere. My job was to organize them topically to be readily accessible for the staff scientists working there. It was a GS-2 level job, paying the princely sum of $1,200 a year. I didn’t realize at the time how vital this job would become. Our little office had six professional hydrologists, one secretary and three college interns, including me. The unit collected, analyzed rainfall and water runoff data from watersheds all over the United States. From this mountain of data, projections were made for future use by federal and state governments planning for dams and other water management structures.

I began classes at the University of Maryland in the fall of 1961, enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences. And I was able to continue working for SCS beyond my temporary summer appointment. In fact, due to an administrative screwup between SCS and the university during my first year, SCS would keep me on throughout my college days, part-time during academic terms and fulltime in the summers! What kind of screwup? Unbeknownst to me, early in my freshman year USDA wrote a letter to the University of Maryland asking for confirmation that I was enrolled in engineering at the University. And Maryland dutifully wrote back that yes, indeed, I was. That was all SCS required for its records to continue my employment. In fact, I never took any engineering classes at Md. But I was able to do what SCS needed, i.e., operate a Friden desktop calculator to compute storm rainfall and runoff data and project likely future flows. While the job was not challenging and did not pay a lot, it was steady income I sorely needed since I left home when I enrolled at Maryland. Furthermore, all those years in the SCS civil service counted towards federal government service credit when I ultimately retired from AID!

Fran and I were married in 1965 while still attending Maryland. It was a modest ceremony and reception, family and friends, in a little neighborhood church. We rented an apartment for the princely sum of $87.50 a month, utilities included. Money was tight, but Fran also had a part time job and in those days tuition at our state university was affordable, especially with the help of my National Defense Education Act student loans.

In June 1967 Fran and I graduated from Maryland. The day was a complicated day for family because her older brother was getting married later the same day, in New Jersey! It was a special day for her dad, so special that he rented a small plane to fly the three of us from College Park Airport up to New Jersey for the wedding! Her dad was an old German American gentleman who won the Iron Cross fighting for the Kaiser in World War I. He held some old-fashioned views, one of which was that he certainly did not expect that his daughter to attend, much less graduate, from college! But when she did, he was so proud of her that he wasn't going to miss it. After the graduation ceremony, the three of us hustled to the nearby airport to catch the plane to New Jersey

Now I was out of college. The Vietnam War was in high gear. My college deferments were done, and I was draft eligible. I was probably fortunate that I lived in an area where there was a large pool of non-college attendee young black men to fill the draft complement. Newlywed with our lives before us, I was not anxious to sign up for the war, but recognized I had a commitment to do some form of service or get a job with a deferment.

I majored in international relations, with a Latin America concentration, and was interested in the Foreign Service. I had taken and passed the Foreign Service written exam but was less successful in the subsequent oral exam. The lead examiner for State, Ambassador Outerbridge Horsey, took a liking to me and personally accompanied me over to meet someone he knew at U.S.A.I.D. and recommended me. The AID staff I met seemed interested, but non-committal when I expressed special interest in Latin America posts. Long story short, I applied. They told me that, because of a rigorous security clearance process, it could take months to finalize the hiring decision.

Meanwhile, I proceeded to seek a service alternative. I applied to and was promptly enlisted in the D.C. National Guard's military police battalion. Guard service would cover my military requirement! But, just five days after my enlistment I got a letter informing me that my enlistment was null and void! It turned out that the DC National Guard unit was over their authorized complement. I later saw in the press that the DC Guard had enlisted several Washington Redskins and were full up. Beaten by a pro football player I was! I guess a husky football player would make a better military policeman than me.

I then applied to the US Navy to be an Air Intelligence Officer. They also took a liking to me but said that their decision process was also a lengthy one. So, I waited. Finally, I came home from work one day and received calls from the Navy, then AID within minutes of each other. Accepted by both!

It didn't take Fran and I long to decide we would go with AID. There was just one catch; AID was assigning me to Vietnam. Married not quite two years. I was going to the Vietnam war zone for a two-year tour. AID insisted I'd be a "direct ship", leaving in just a few weeks because it was a "national emergency". However, I was assured that after my tour in Vietnam, the world would be my oyster from which to pick my pearl. Two years and we would no doubt likely be headed to Latin America!?

I'd be off to the war zone after basic AID orientation and Vietnam history plus a few weeks of minimal language training, not enough to attain even a one-level rating in Vietnamese. Yet, it would have to be enough because I was to arrive in July 1967.

I had doubts about U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but at the same time I was curious about it. I knew that Vietnam was a French colony occupied by the Japanese in World War II, and that we'd helped the French reclaim their colony after the war. Then the Vietnamese decisively defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in May of '54, effectively ending their colonial role. Negotiations ending French presence called for partition of the North and South, to be followed by free elections in the south. The elections didn't happen. The U.S. supported the South Vietnamese with economic and military aid, then military advisors. By the time JFK was assassinated in 1963, there were 16,000 of them. Combat forces followed. When I arrived in Saigon in July 1967, President Johnson had just authorized an increase to 540,000 U.S. troops. There were also about 2,000 AID officers in country and about two hundred State FSOs, half of them working in the joint civilian-military Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program along with AID.

First impressions of Vietnam. My Pan Am Boeing 707 seemed to plunge straight down out of the sky onto Tan Son Nhut Airport's runway. To avoid possible ground fire, there was no standard steady glide path to landing. Gun emplacements ringed the perimeter of the airport. Aircraft on the ground were in concrete walled enclosures. There were no non-Vietnamese international carrier aircraft on the ground. When Pan Am or other

commercial airlines flew into Saigon they dropped down, let people off the plane, took some on, and took off again. No overnighting for valuable aircraft.

Saigon's population was about 1.8 million in 1967. Its streets were bustling with aging, smoke-belching Vespas, motorbikes, tiny, 2-door 1950s vintage Renault taxis as well as mini-trucks and buses crammed with people plus teetering piles of everything imaginable. U.S. and ARVN jeeps, trucks and armored vehicles angrily honked and tried to push them through the civilian traffic. Amidst the choking smoky air and unsightly traffic, Vietnamese women in their lovely, flowing white and pastel colored ao dais (pronounced Ow yais) added a discordant, but magical touch of beauty.
[When we visited about seven years ago, Ho Chi Minh City (still referred to as Saigon by most Vietnamese) had grown to nine million people. The streets, even more densely packed with traffic, lacked the choking smoke thanks to a new generation of vehicles.]

Howard Lockwood, my new supervisor in USAID/Personnel, met me at the airport and escorted me to the Park Hotel, my temporary quarters in walking distance to the main USAID office building. Howard was 60ish, an experienced personnel officer and a nice person. But, to my surprise, it was clear I was not urgently needed. The 15 or so older USAID personnel officers and a couple of other recently arrived trainees were not short-handed. Howard suggested I get myself settled in, then read personnel manuals, greet newcomers at the airport, and draft cables to AID/W announcing their arrivals.

My hotel roommate was one Gerry Bowers, on temporary duty from Washington. He was working with a task force preparing official job descriptions for hundreds of new, non-traditional FSR positions in the CORDS organization.

Q: Gerard Bowers. Oh, my gosh! Gerry Bowers was my boss many years later in LAC/DR (Bureau for Latin America, the Caribbean and the Dominican Republic). I didn't know he was in Vietnam. Great sense of humor. Sorry. Couldn't resist. What a surprise.

LOVAAS: Five or six years ago Gerry sent me and a few hundred other former AID colleagues an email asking us to contribute to his campaign. He ran for state delegate somewhere in New Jersey. Unfortunately, he was defeated by the incumbent, I believe.

Q: Yes, yes, I got the same.

In any case, there I was, pretty much bored silly in the USAID Personnel Office. In the evening Gerry would fill me in on the Task Force's work surveying the CORDS operations and drafting descriptions of their positions filled by AID or State officers. There were three on the Task Force headed by another Personnel old-timer, Ruth Rossiter. We'd have dinner together in the U.S. military mess near the hotel and share newcomers' experiences in Vietnam. They were becoming concerned there was more to their mission than expected, and they might have to extend their TDY in Vietnam, something none of them wanted to do. Knowing that I was feeling underutilized in my job, Ruth asked me if I'd be interested in helping them survey and write descriptions of

AID positions in CORDS. We'd discussed their work and, while I felt I could do what was needed, I was reluctant to bail out on my very new job and supervisor. Ruth, who seemed to know most of the Personnel officers, including Howard, said she could fix that and would reach out to him. She did, and to my surprise, Howard agreed to let me go for the two-three months Ruth requested!

I found myself immersed in what proved to be interesting work. I visited CORDS offices both in Saigon and in a few provinces. I spoke with mostly men and some women doing the jobs on site, and their immediate supervisors. After reviewing their work on the ground, I wrote up my findings for the various position descriptions in the standard AID formats used by the Task Force. It was an opportunity to get to know the workings of the CORDS organization, the cutting edge of "pacification"!

One day while I was working with the Task Force, the Personnel Office asked me if I'd like a free two-day visit to Manila! What? Vice President Humphrey was visiting Saigon and while there his airplane, Air Force Two, would fly to Manila and then return for him two days later. Empty seats on the plane were made available to US personnel for a quick R & R. So, I got a free trip to Manila, a chance to scout it out as a possible safe haven for Fran. Not only did Ruth give me a thumbs up to go, but Sam Taylor, a Health Officer friend of mine offered me free lodging with his family safe havened in Manila during the short visit. It worked out nicely, once Sam's wife Jan got over the surprise of my late-night arrival at their Manila home! Sam had forgotten to alert her of his kind invitation for lodging for a couple nights! Jan indeed made me feel welcome and introduced me to Embassy and USAID folks with the safe haven info I needed.

The Task Force completed its work in December, in time for its members to return to the States for the Christmas holidays….as planned. I, too, was delighted to be going home in time for the Christmas holidays with Fran and our families.

I returned to Vietnam in early January on a memorable Pan Am flight from Hong Kong to Saigon. The flight was nearly empty. In fact, stewardesses joined passengers in the economy section and brought us champagne from the first-class section! Two of the returning US mission passengers were putting golf balls up and down the aisle. In a few weeks I'd be seeing a couple of these guys in the news. I next saw one of the golfers on the cover of a *Time* magazine featuring the Tet Offensive. He would be throwing a pistol up to a fellow embassy officer in a building in the U.S. Embassy compound. There was also a Viet Cong inside. A younger passenger on the flight would also make the post-Tet news. He was a bag man for the Phoenix program (to eliminate Viet Cong) according to the news and lost his life during the Offensive.

Since the Washington Personnel task force work was completed and the team was back in Washington, I rejoined the USAID Personnel Office upon my return to Saigon. Shortly thereafter, Bill Meeks, an AID Officer in the CORDS Personnel Office reached out to me. I had met Bill while surveying the CORDS jobs. He said they needed help in compiling a list of AID and State officers in CORDS offices in Vietnam's 44 provinces and creating an official roster of all US Foreign Service staff assigned to CORDS. There was in fact

no such organized roster of State and AID FS staff in the CORDS organization. CORDS management and the US Mission desperately needed one. My experience writing job descriptions for AID officers in CORDS made me an obvious candidate for the job. Indeed, I was interested but concerned that my USAID supervisors might not be thrilled with my jumping ship again, possibly permanently this time. Bill noted that my prospects for advancement were greater on his team. He also assured me the CORDS manpower planning job was top priority for the US Mission and that, if I agreed, CORDS Personnel Director Ted Morris would arrange a smooth transfer. I had met Mr. Morse and seen the CORDS Personnel operation, a busy joint civilian-military office of 20 or so people. I had little doubt this could be a challenging job; so, I agreed.

Bill was as good as his word. Morris had made a call or two and, within hours it seemed, USAID had agreed to my reassignment. I was now a Manpower Planning Specialist in the CORDS compound across town. I was also closer to my permanent living quarters, an apartment on the 7th floor of a new building exclusively for U.S. Mission personnel, on the road to the airport.

Bill Meeks became my immediate supervisor in the small Manpower Planning Branch consisting of three AID officers-Bill Meeks (Chief), Bill Busch and myself; and an Army Major and a Vietnamese FSN Secretary. I was the junior guy again. My job was to identify all CORDS U.S. civilian AID, State, and other PASA personnel, i.e., technical specialists (e.g., USDA agronomists), from other executive branch agencies detailed to AID in the forty-four provinces, and to prepare organizational staffing charts for the teams. The teams included some 900 AID officers and about 100 State officers.

Ultimately, the plan was to issue staffing charts for use by CORDS, USAID, U.S. Embassy, AID/Washington, and other agencies. Imagine: these organizations literally had no overall picture where their personnel were serving in the war zone because the U.S. effort in Vietnam had grown so large so fast that their bureaucracies couldn't keep track! My job was to paint the picture for them. It was quite a job—interesting and educational. The work would introduce me to people from all over, with a great variety of skills. I would learn a great deal about the workings of CORDS, a unique animal indeed, and its constituent organizations—AID, State and the U.S. Army. I'd wanted meaningful work, and I'd found it, along with a group of capable, dedicated co-workers.

I was living in a sparsely furnished apartment with a balcony facing east towards the city limits and the airport. There was lots of activity out that way most nights. From my balcony, I watched mortars exploding around the airport, gatling machine guns in helicopters firing streams of bullets with tracers making pretty wavy lines toward the ground and wavy lines of tracers being fired back up from the ground at the choppers. And there were frequent, thundering explosions of bombs. Occasionally, I also heard gunfire in the streets not too far away, and I'd slip quickly back inside.

Our office was in the CORDS compound. The war seemed to slow somewhat in late January as both sides appeared to prepare for an anticipated, traditional Tet holiday truce. The US Mission at least expected that fighting would cool down. But the war in Vietnam

was a little harder to read. It was a guerrilla war with no clear, easily visible lines of battle. Fighting could occur anywhere and even, as it turned out, everywhere.

There was a rec room complete with pool tables on the ground floor of my apartment building. One evening I went down to watch some pool players. I noticed one young GI in fatigues playing pool with some civilians. All seemed to have beers either in hand or on a nearby table. The young GI had left his M-16 and a couple of hand grenades also on a table nearby. Noticing this, I decided to return to my apartment, perhaps to write to Fran or fill in some more province personnel tables for our CORDS roster.

January 31, 1968-despite the announced Tet holidays ceasefire, the Viet Cong and NVA (North Vietnam Army) launched a major, countrywide offensive early in the AM. Heading out to work that morning, I almost walked right into it. For some reason, I had not listened to my usual AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam) radio broadcast. I was unaware that the huge Tet offensive was underway! I walked out of the apartment compound to catch a cab, unaware there was fighting in the street just outside the gate. Fortunately, a U.S. Army Military Policeman stopped me at the gate and asked me what the bleep I thought I was doing. About a block away, I could see a VietCong guerilla had just been shot off his motorcycle onto the street. Embarrassed and scared, I hustled back inside and called Bill. He told me to just stay at home until further notice. AFVN radio did a pretty good job keeping listeners up to date on the fighting in and around Saigon and elsewhere. Fortunately, I also had radio contact with the office.

Within a couple of days, we were back at work, courtesy of shuttles to and from the office. For security reasons, in each vehicle with female staff passengers a male rider was assigned to ride shotgun carrying an M-1 rifle. For a couple days, I was that guy in my shuttle vehicle. I carried the M-1 after about five minutes of instruction—e.g., not much more than instruction where the bullets went in and which end they came out of the weapon. I only had to do this for a week. Thankfully, we were never challenged by armed people. Except for constant security advisories and a tighter curfew, life returned pretty much to wartime normal in a few weeks. During that time, the U.S. mission focused a lot of energy crafting a narrative of the Tet offensive for Vietnamese and U.S. domestic consumption. Official reporting stressed that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese fighters inside South Vietnam suffered tremendous losses (60,000 KIA), far greater than the 2,600 the good guys lost. Clearly a defeat for the enemy. My eyes and ears doubted this.

Our work assembling rosters for the four regions and 44 province teams continued, although communications were more difficult for a while. Also, there were a few CORDS personnel losses in provincial teams, especially in the I Corps region in northern-most South Vietnam. We depended on radio communications with a lot of the provinces, telephones with some. Sometimes both were difficult. In some areas it took US forces and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces days, even weeks, to retake the towns and places where CORDS had staff. But it came back together quickly in most places. I know we lost more Vietnamese personnel than USAID and State FS personnel. But I didn’t know the numbers lost.

I did know a couple of those lost personally. Bob Brown, the young man I met on the plane, was one. As I mentioned, he had a dangerous job with the Phoenix program, a dark side of CORDS, specializing in identifying Viet Cong sympathizers and "neutralizing" them. He was killed in the fighting during Tet. The other was an acquaintance from my days with USDA, Tom Ragsdale, an Agriculture Advisor. We had even played basketball in an evening pickup league. I only saw Tom once in Vietnam, as he was getting into a taxi in Saigon. He was taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese in the holy city of Hue in I Corps where he worked. They found his body a year later in a shallow grave near the frontier with North Vietnam. He apparently died in captivity not long after the offensive. Another fellow known to me only as a name on our staffing pattern died hours before the attack in Hue but was not a casualty of the fighting.

In addition to gathering information through radio communications officers in offices down the hall from me and by old fashioned telephoning, I made site visits to regional headquarters in Nha Trang (II Corps) and Bien Hoa (III Corps), and to several province team offices. Ground truthing is critical to preparing an accurate description especially for such non-traditional jobs unfamiliar to AID. Field visits were particularly interesting and gave me a better grasp of this exotic country and its people. From swampy lowland places to the beauty of the central highlands and beaches of Nha Trang, I was impressed with the diversity of Vietnam, and often with the difficult and dangerous isolation of living there. I was also constantly impressed with the durable, hardworking Vietnamese.

On occasion when I traveled, USAID/Personnel asked me to do a little work for them in a remote site. For example, while I visited the province team in Binh Dinh Province, I held briefings for AID officers, State officers and military officers instructing them on the rules and art of preparing personnel evaluation reports for AID officers they supervised. This made it necessary to learn what I had to teach, and the briefings thus proved useful to me as well… responding to questions and issues raised by evaluators.

However, most information gathering to populate CORDS staffing lists and create organization charts was done in the office. There was no way, or need for that matter, to visit all the field locations. My experience with the personnel task force came in handy, e.g., in assigning official job titles developed by the Task Force. My focus was on 1,000 USAID positions, occupied by up to 900 AID FS officers, and approximately100 filled by State FSOs assigned to CORDS. Our rosters did not include the more than 1,000 U.S. Military personnel formally listed as billets in CORDS. Also, there were in fact a large number of third-country nationals serving under personal services and institutional contracts with the military. For example, our vast network of radio communications equipment was managed by Filipino personnel under these contracts. I never knew how many third-country contractors there were, or where they all were. Remember, there were over 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam while I was there. The CORDS program seemed large, but really wasn't so big in the greater scheme of things.

By the spring of 1968, we had a largely complete staffing list by organizational and geographic location. We were able to begin distributing our +/- 50-page product to the various USAID and CORDS consumers as well as to the Embassy, MACV (the US

Military Command Vietnam), and AID/Washington. The initial distribution generated useful feedback, e.g., on official personnel data for manpower planning and staffing. Overall, the report was very well received. Once the word was out, demand for it grew. It had the effect of taking some of the mystery out of the pacification program, once you saw what the organization really was.

As it turned out, my report was a bit too complete. I inadvertently rattled some cages in another agency or two. Ted Morris got a few angry calls about exposing other agency men inadvertently revealed on the roster. I disappeared them as quickly as possible.

My job had grown. In fact, I had two assistants. This made it possible for me to focus on improvements to the report, and to take a bit of leave. In May 1968, I made a second trip home to see Fran. She and I even traveled to Florida, hit the beach, and saw our first jai alai game. Back in Washington, we arranged for her to safe haven in Manila a few months later and for the remainder of my tour. We didn't know that she would be pregnant when she came to Manila.

When she arrived in Manila I was there to meet her. A couple of days after her arrival, we were jolted awake in her temporary apartment by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake. It brought a window over our heads crashing down, shattered tile off bathroom walls, and cracked ceilings. As we hugged each other in a quaking bed, she asked in a quavering voice, "Does this happen often?" There was little damage on the outside of the building, but its foundation had shifted about a couple of inches. Other than a spectacular collapse of an apartment tower downtown, there was not widespread major damage in Manila.

Support from the mission in Manila was helpful and Fran's sponsor was wonderful. For a first-time arrival overseas, she settled in smoothly. She was particularly pleased with the obstetrician recommended by the mission. He happened to be Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos' doctor, the same one who delivered the current President of the Philippines, Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, the son of Ferdinand, Sr. and Imelda.

A few months later, a now very pregnant Fran visited me in Saigon. I had trouble sleeping in my single bed for fear that I'd roll over and bump her off the bed! Security had improved markedly, so we could visit the office, dine out and see some sights in Saigon. While the fortifications and armed troops all around still certified Saigon as a war zone, the visit helped alleviate her concerns for me. She saw that life in Saigon appeared less dangerous than newspapers might lead her to believe. However, she did see another dimension of the war from my apartment balcony at night.

About the time Fran visited, a new job prospect surfaced. I was offered a job in Nha Trang, north of Saigon on the central coast. The assistant personnel officer CORDS Region II HQ was leaving. A replacement was needed. By this time, we'd been so successful creating complete staffing charts for CORDS, that my job was largely bookkeeping and updating them. Also, I had trained an AID officer and a talented Philippine assistant in working with my contacts and managing the roster. I liked the work and my team. I had even served recently as best man for Bill's marriage to another

co-worker, Dora Veith. However, the job in Nha Trang offered a new, interesting challenge. Furthermore, it was offered to me by a friend, Phil Levine, the CORDS Personnel Officer in Region IV HQ. I would be his assistant and join him in revitalizing the personnel office serving Region II. Bill and Ted were supportive of the change, even guaranteeing me a right to return if the situation in Nha Trang did not work out! CORDS Personnel in II Corps was AID personnel work in a most non-traditional AID setting, i.e., a joint military-civilian organization in a war zone! And Phil, a sharp, quick-witted guy who'd been an Army enlisted man before switching over to AID in Vietnam had the experience I needed to develop. One day soon, he also would be the godfather of my son. Phil had been in Nha Trang just a few weeks, transferred there to revitalize a weak office needing strengthening in the eyes of CORDS management. It was a challenging learning opportunity for me, a guy just completing his first year with AID.

The office had a staff of six clerical staff responsible for supporting 200 AID and State FS officers in the region, encompassing the regional office in Nha Trang and ten provincial teams. We facilitated actions involving transfers and travel in and out of the region as well as administering personnel evaluation, recognition and disciplinary paperwork. Phil and I promptly focused on getting the word out to employees in provincial posts that there was a new team in town ready and able to assist as needed. It was gratifying to see the response. Office traffic surged, with more drop-ins, phone calls and radio messages asking for assistance. Phil was the master of such outreach. It came naturally to him. It turned out that I had a knack for it, too. A surprise indicator of our progress came in public recognition for our office from our curmudgeonly overseer, the Army non-commissioned officer serving as Executive Officer for II Corps. Not one given to praising staff, his recognition stemmed from a decline in complaints to him from employees about the Personnel shop. The downside was that he found more things to send our way, and off his desk. We had more to do, but it proved interesting getting involved in tasks beyond the narrower Personnel mandate.

Vietnam was front and center for the bitter 1968 U.S. election won by Richard Nixon. Negotiations were underway, in fits and starts, with the North Vietnamese in Paris, and it seemed to me that our mission was on edge as the holidays loomed again and the war intensified. Business for our office also picked up as the end-of-year holiday season approached. We were helping larger numbers of travelers to arrange travel and also arranging interim coverage for lengthy absences. I would travel around Christmas myself to see Fran, one last time before her due date.

After my return to work in early January 1969, she and I were in frequent contact. We tried to schedule my travel to Manila for the birth. I wanted to be on time, but not too early--so that I'd have more days with her and baby Deron before returning to Nha Trang. When her doctor assured her the time was near, I was ready to fly. We had a final conversation on February 9. I flew to Saigon on the 10th to hop a plane to Manila the morning of February 11. I arrived in Manila midday. As I walked to the terminal building, I saw the usual crowd waiting on top of the terminal building. From the crowd, I heard a shout, "It's a boy!" I couldn't see who was shouting, but I knew it was meant for me. I ran into the terminal as fast as I could...damn if I wasn't late! Sure enough,

Deron Walter Lovaas, all 5 ½ pounds of him, had arrived on the 10th, but all was well with the proud new Mom and the little guy. We had a wonderful visit, got Fran and Deron established at her residence in Magallanes Village. Between Connie, her maid, and her sponsor Fran was comfortable and happily focused on our little one. I returned to work, a proud new Dad with a supply of Philippine cigars for all.

Things were in good shape in Nha Trang when I returned. In fact, Phil was able to take a well- deserved vacation back home. I enjoyed being in charge and, with the help of our capable local staff, we managed the workload and provided the support employees and superiors had come to expect. Part of the job was to be available after hours as needed to handle emergencies, such as medical evacuations, which luckily were rare.

Fran was fortunate to have Connie, her maid who also was taken by Deron. She had become a trusted friend, helping with Deron and the house. The trust was so high in fact, that in the spring Fran came for a visit in lovely Nha Trang on the South China Sea. I met her in Saigon. We then flew via Air America to Nha Trang. The small plane's pilot had the cockpit door open so
we could see him writing letters as we flew. In fact, we flew past Nha Trang…how far north I never knew. Ground control finally alerted him to our location. He then turned us around and we landed safely in Nha Trang.

Fran got to meet Phil. Together we invited him to be Deron's godfather. While neither of us belonged to a church, at the time, we both felt that a new child needed to be baptized…presumably to put him on good terms with his maker?! Phil happily accepted and we set a target date for baptism at a church TBD. This would require some thought and work. Growing up, Fran had attended both Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, while I'd been raised Catholic by my Mom, but had left the Church before I was 20. Phil was nominally Jewish, but also non-practicing. We'd figure it out. Meantime, I showed Fran around Nha Trang, including its white sand beaches complete with a lot of barbed wire presumably to slow enemy forces attempting to attack from the sea. We had an especially memorable lobster dinner with Phil at a well-known French restaurant on a hill overlooking the city. This would be Fran's last visit to Vietnam, but she already knew some of the country better than most.

Things ran smoothly in CORDS Personnel in Nha Trang. In fact, we even built a creditable notebook of policies and procedures for CORDS II Corps Personnel for new employees and those who would follow us. As I look back on this exercise, minor institution building in the Personnel Office in 1969, I wonder if that was really essential. By then, I think we knew American time in Vietnam was running out.

In the early summer of 1969, I visited Fran and Deron for what would be the final time. Phil would join us during this visit after we made final arrangements for Deron's baptism. She had identified an Episcopalian Minister. We met with him in his office. Initially bewildered by our request for a baptism involving parents with Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Catholic affiliations and a non-practicing Jewish godfather, the kind minister graciously agreed to baptize Deron a couple days hence. Phil and the appointed day

arrived preceded just a few hours by torrential rains accompanying a major typhoon striking Manila! With considerable difficulty for ourselves and the taxi driver in water filled streets, we all got to the church and Deron was safely baptized. Somewhere I think I even have a certificate saying so.

My tour in Vietnam would end in September 1969. We had planned to travel by ship back to the United States for home leave and transfer to our next post, hopefully in Latin America. Back in those days you could do that! Yes, we could have gone home in the fall of 1969 leisurely by ship. We had it planned. But it wasn't to be. AID staffing levels had been reduced by non-Vietnam appropriations cuts globally from 1967 to 1969. As a result, there was no way to accommodate elsewhere people lacking seniority coming out of Vietnam. So, as one of those finishing a tour in 1969, I had but one choice—home leave and return to post, or home leave and return to post!

Fran and I had spent two years of our four years married separated. There was no way we'd agree to the former or the latter. Thus, I opted to leave Vietnam on termination orders, by jet airplane. We were allowed only a few days in Hawaii and Los Angeles (with a place called Disneyland) on the way home. My orders then called for a couple of weeks TDY in AID/Washington to be mustered out. That short time would change everything.

Comment on the Vietnam experience. It's hard for me to see the war in Vietnam as anything but tragic for all concerned. The human losses and fissures in our society we still feel today, 50 years later. My time there left me with a deep respect for the Vietnamese. They are an especially resilient people with great regard for family, education and for hard work inculcated from birth. And yes, I would respect the people on the other side who gave it their all to take back what was theirs. Ten of thousands of Vietnamese who came to the U.S. after the war constitute a huge plus for this country. And I'd like to believe that the relief and development work done with AID's help left much of value for those folks. Some physical works—e.g., roads, buildings, airports, a great port at Cam Ranh Bay, schools--likely served for a considerable time. Let's also hope that the human skills we brought in agriculture, engineering, medicine and basic health care, education, family planning, etc. have made a difference over generations.

What about the approximately 2.5 million Vietnamese people who have migrated to the United States since the war ended in 1975? I'm pretty certain their lives and those of their descendants are better here and absolutely certain that the United States is a better place because they are part of us.

Personally, I believe my time spent in Vietnam was a useful life experience. I saw a piece of history up close, saw what war can do to people and a whole country. My biggest regret is the two years I lost with my wife.

When I arrived for my termination TDY from AID, I had the good fortune to have contacts in Washington made on my behalf from former managers and supervisors in Vietnam. Doors opened to me for interviews despite it being a time of worldwide

reductions in AID missions. But there were not a lot of posts available in late 1969, and none for a newcomer in Latin America. Among the few openings, there was a promising Assistant Personnel Officer (Local Personnel) position in USAID/Nigeria, a large mission in a country just emerging from a bitter civil war with separatist Biafra region. English-speaking Nigeria so no language required! At the time, Nigeria was a well-regarded post, at least among those on my limited range of contacts. While it wasn't Latin America, we would be together in a genuine development mission. So, Fran and I agreed to take one more step on our foreign service journey.

LOVAAS: We were able to use some home leave accumulated by my Vietnam service after all. That combined with an extension of the TDY in Washington to get basic orientation on Nigeria and arrange for the move delayed our departure for Lagos until early January 1970.

The USAID/Nigeria Mission was located in busy downtown Lagos, about 15 minutes from our assigned townhouse in a compound on recently developed Ikoyi Island. The mission occupied most of an eight-story building. It was some distance from our General Services Office and from the U.S. Embassy. The Personnel Office, just a fraction of the size of the one in Saigon, consisted of three USDH officers and five FSNs. Mary Grace Read was the Chief, and Pat Waalewyn, her deputy, was my supervisor. Both were quite senior to me both in service and age. Nigeria, in fact, would likely be Mary Grace's last post. While perhaps a majority of the mission's US staff were also seniors age-wise, there were eight younger officers, in our age range.

In 1970, Nigeria was Africa's most populous country, 56 million diverse people with 280 distinct linguistic groups. It had gained its independence from England only nine years before our arrival. Two and one-half of those years were spent in a bitter civil war with the separatist eastern region calling itself Biafra. That war ended only days before our arrival.

The war had left chilled relations with the United States which was formally neutral, thus refraining from supporting the government militarily. However, American public opinion was seen as favoring the Biafrans. In fact, several US NGOs provided humanitarian support to the people of Biafra. Meanwhile, our cold war foe, the Soviet Union was giving substantial military assistance to the central GON. The Government of Nigeria, while diplomatically cozy with the Russians, maintained more of an officially distant, cool relationship with the U.S.

While USAID remained a fairly large program and presence built up in earlier years, our project portfolio was spending down old development loans with accompanying grant technical assistance, with almost no new commitments. The slow-disbursing loans included funds for roads, water systems, schools and even telecommunications. Technical assistance, including U.S. universities and other contractors worked in agriculture, public health and education.

The Mission was still large manpower-wise, with upwards of 50 USDH and PASA (mostly USDA) employees, PSCs and about 200 FSNs. There was a regional AID Audit Office in the USAID building and a separate regional (REDSO/West Africa) logistical support operation outside Lagos supporting several bilateral missions. A large, awkward presence. Michael Adler was the USAID/Nigeria Mission Director, and Vernon Johnson was the Deputy Director when Fran, Deron and I arrived.

My job was personnel administration for the Mission's Nigerian Foreign Service National staff, who were governed by different rules and procedures. My role involved day-to-day management, from hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and grievances to reductions-in-force RIF. The latter would be a big item late in my first year. I was fortunate to have two competent, experienced FSNs working for me. They handled a lot of the routine paperwork of which there was a great deal in AID personnel administration. They were critical in helping me learn the Mission's operational ropes and to get to know our Nigerian staff.

While I thought that morale in the mission was generally good, in the relationships among US and FSN staff I would find aspects that differed substantially from what I would see in future missions. For example, we had very few senior professional Nigerian employees. I think there were few (if any) Nigerians who had direct relations with host country counterparts. Nor was there much socializing between U. S. and Nigerian personnel outside the office. I wondered about these matters and they were subjects of conversation among younger US staff, but like myself they had little or no other AID overseas service and nothing to compare to Nigeria. Among the younger staff were Terry Liercke, an intern in the Program Office, and Tom Stukel, a junior auditor in the Regional AG's office. Tom and I were friends for many years, and Terry Liercke remains a close friend to this day!

The frequency of complaints from some US staff about Nigerian employees was more than I might have expected. Complaints sometimes came with requests for disciplinary action. Among them, complaints about tardiness or rudeness were most frequent, some accompanied with suggestions for punishment ranging from formal reprimand to suspension or even termination. It seemed that complaints tended to come mostly from older personnel. On occasion, I thought the suggested punishment was beyond what was reasonable. Some complaints attracted the interest of my supervisors and others in the mission, including the Regional Legal Advisor. The latter was an African American man with considerable AID experience knowledgeable about personnel regulations. He would turn out to be an ally, whose advice and/or support I would seek.

At times, I'd find myself caught in a difficult situation between a complainant and an FSN, with one or both of my supervisors weighing in and the RLA taking an interest. At times, I sensed race was a factor, and I concluded that our written policies governing complaints were woefully inadequate, lacking in specificity criteria and procedures for resolution. It seemed to me that the mission needed new, improved mission policy. On that at least, there was agreement among all involved.

Drawing on A.I.D. policies and some samples I was able to round up from other missions, as well as policies set forth in AID and State personnel manuals, I drafted a new USAID/Nigeria Mission Order. My supervisors and two FSN assistants provided inputs as I worked on it. The initiative took longer than I'd anticipated, including circulating the draft for comments from the RLA, the Executive Officer and my personnel colleagues. Then, I cleared around them, adding the Deputy Mission Director for good measure. In the end we had a new, detailed policy and procedure in place. I thought it was a fairer process for FSNs. For example, it included a solid appeal process. Also, the new, detailed policy took the guesswork out of the process. By the time I left Nigeria a year later, I felt the new policy had made a difference.

As spring 1970 arrived, Fran announced that she was pregnant for our second child. Being in Nigeria, we had to consider if it would be better to deliver the baby in country or, to do as some expatriates did, evacuate Fran to have the baby in Europe or perhaps back home. We were able to identify a highly recommended ObGyn from the Mayo Clinic who was at the Baptist Mission Hospital in Ogbomosho, an hour from Lagos. We went to Ogbomosho to visit the hospital and meet with Dr. Gilliland. Fran was impressed and comfortable with her. So, we decided that, assuming the pregnancy proceeded normally, Lovaas child number two would be born in Ogbomosho. The baby was due around Thanksgiving.

There was a new dimension of official life in USAID/Nigeria, something we'd not seen in Vietnam, or the Philippines for that matter. One morning in our staff meeting with the Executive Officer, he informed me the Mission Director had told him that Fran had not been helping his wife with official functions held at their residence! For some reason this came as a total surprise to me. I thought I was the only one working for a salary. Why, I wondered, had neither of us been told about this policy… sort of casually glancing at my two supervisors seated nearby! In any case, the EXO and my supervisors then explained that, oh yes, spouses are to assist the Director's wife with the tasks involved in preparing for and participating in representational events as needed. Furthermore, Mary Grace subsequently told me that in addition to my annual Performance Evaluation Report, there was a second report, a Development Appraisal Report (DAR) prepared annually on all State and AID FS personnel. The DAR was a classified (L.O.U.) report to assess the employee's AND spouse's fitness to represent the United States. This report had a direct bearing on appropriate future assignments and promotions.

Neither Fran nor I was pleased with Fran's work requirement, nor the fact we'd not been advised of this earlier. We also realized we could not simply ignore it. We did feel that the Director and his wife needed to understand that we also had an infant and were expecting our second in November. In fact, my supervisors did understand the situation, and Fran worked it into a conversation with Mrs. Adler. Things did work out, and the representational duties proved to be rare and not terribly onerous. By the way, times were changing as the '70s began. Spouses' representational duties eased and the DAR requirement disappeared in the Foreign Service not long after the Nigeria experience.

We did in fact make several lasting friendships, especially among our age cohort, in Nigeria. There were nice days on beaches around Lagos, weekend volleyball games and picnics with younger families, and an active social life otherwise with Mission families.

Volleyball outings provided some special memories of the Nigeria time. It turned out that young people serving with the Russian Embassy in Lagos also liked to play volleyball. At some point one of our USAID guys met an official Russian and the two got to talking volleyball. However, at the time, contacts with Russians were not encouraged, and had to be reported to our Embassy. The cold war was still on.
Furthermore, our guy challenged their guy, or vice versa, to a game of volleyball, East vs West I guess! This came as a surprise to us beer-sipping amateurs. In any case, after duly reporting the challenge match, game day was upon us. We arrived with some paunches and our beer to take on a group of younger, all athletically fit-looking young Russians. OMG, did they clean our clocks! Afterwards we all shook hands and went home with tails between our legs. At one of our routine volleyball family games, we watched a couple of Nigerian-flown MIGs flyovers practicing daring maneuvers for the upcoming 10th Nigerian Independence Day. They passed over, and seconds later we heard an explosion and saw smoke in the direction of their flight. Two of the MIGs had collided and crashed just out of our sight.

As the time drew near for the birth, Fran and I made frequent trips to Ogbomosho to see the Doctor and check on Fran's condition. Meanwhile, work in the Personnel Office was keeping me busy, especially one particularly ill-timed project. AID/W cabled the USAID that, due to ever-tighter foreign assistance budgets, the Mission would lose some US positions and would have to undertake a major reduction in force (RIF) of our FSN staff. My recollection is that the RIF would affect 10-15% of our 200 employees. To add insult to injury, Washington decreed that the terminations were to be effective right at Christmas time! It was my job to prepare the policy for the RIF based on principles from AID/W and to prepare the rank-ordered lists for the reductions, based largely on seniority in occupational categories.

I wrote the reply for the Mission responding to the AID/W RIF notice. We appealed the Christmas timing of the reduction, but not the reduction itself. Lo and behold, the Washington response agreed and postponed the effective dates into January. Meanwhile, I prepared the Mission RIF policy and the corresponding rankings for termination to follow.

About the time the RIF was formally announced, our second son, Terry Scott, was born in Ogbomosho. He was born November 25th and both he and Fran were doing OK when I arrived about an hour later. Closer this time than I was for the first son, but still missed the magical moment. He was slightly jaundiced but well enough to leave his incubator orange crate with the light bulb to go home to Lagos with his family in a couple of days.

Just after Christmas, we woke to find Terry having tremors. We took him to a well-known Nigerian Doctor, a graduate of the University of Chicago. He examined him, gave us his diagnosis, but said he did not have the facilities to do the tests, including a spinal tap,

necessary to go any further. He recommended we take him to a US military hospital in Germany or a medical facility in the U.S.

Thanks to remarkable assistance from our Embassy, Fran and Terry were on a Swiss Air flight the next morning, with Terry added into Fran's passport, to Frankfurt, Germany and the 97th General Air Force Field Hospital.

While his tremors had ceased and his condition improved, he would need continued care and our medical clearance for him was canceled. We would have to return promptly to the US. and presumably assignment in AID/W.

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Q: Today is Tuesday, May 30, 2023 and this is the second oral history interview with John Lovaas. John, we'll be focusing on your time as an IDI (International Development Intern) starting in 1971 and possibly beyond. So, welcome, John. We look forward to hearing the continuation of your story.

LOVAAS: I wound up leaving USAID/Nigeria before completing my tour--for reasons beyond my control. Although I had been offered, and was ready to accept, a direct transfer to USAID/Liberia to be the Personnel Officer, fate intervened. Son Terrence Scott (Terry) was born at the Baptist Mission Hospital in Ogbomosho. Five weeks later the little guy woke us with tremors. A young University of Chicago trained Nigerian doctor diagnosed his condition as viral encephalitis, an illness he could not adequately treat in Lagos. Terry, accompanied by Fran, was immediately evacuated to a US military hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. Although the tremors stopped shortly after their arrival, Fran and he remained there a couple of weeks for additional tests. Doctors were challenged by his illness, and uncertain about its treatment. Finally, they recommended he be given the prescription phenobarbital for one to three years, subject to consultations with physicians back in the US. Happily, Terry was doing fine, and there was no recurrence of the tremors. However, due to Terry's condition, medical clearance for overseas service was canceled, along with my transfer to Liberia.

Without medical clearance we were promptly transferred to the U.S, and a Washington rotation. Not having invested in networking in Washington, I did not know what to expect. My record with AID up to then consisted of completing one tour in Vietnam, leaving there on termination orders, now leaving Nigeria without completing my tour, and with no onward assignment. Somehow, at this critical juncture a guardian angel appeared in the least likely of places, AID/W Personnel. As we were preparing to pack out and leave Lagos, a cable came for me announcing my selection for the Agency's 1971 International Development Intern (IDI) class. Yes, like starting all over. But, I would be in the program officer career field, finally in the Latin America Bureau, and on a fast track for annual promotions from FSR-7 to FSR-5! Things were looking up.

We were back near our roots with an apartment in New Carrollton, Maryland within easy drive of Fran's family and my own. And we were just down the block from Fran's

brother's family with children roughly Deron's and Terry's ages—perfect for a mini shared babysitting arrangement. It was a longish commute to the State Department, but I quickly found and joined an amicable carpool group of GAO civil servants!

My IDI class was an interesting group, some of whom remained friends for many years. One of them, Hank Bassford, would be my boss in El Salvador one day and we are close friends to this day. We had two weeks of orientation, a systematic look at the Agency, its organization and operations. This gave us some time to get to know each other, some of us already AID employees and the rest new recruits.

Next came our individual rotational assignments in a variety of offices to fill out our two-year internships. My first rotation was in the Office of Brazilian Affairs, a joint State-AID remnant of the Alliance for Progress days. Of four AID people, as an intern I was, of course, the junior person. Phil Schwab, the deputy chief of the joint office, was my supervisor. The Mission Director in Brazil at the time was Bill Ellis.

The role of the geographic office, or desk, was to speak for, and be supportive of, our mission in Brazil. The flip side of the coin was our being the eyes and ears for the mission and interpreting emerging priorities, policies and expectations of Washington for them. The Mission's program portfolio had more of macroeconomic slant than the new priorities of the Democrats in Congress who revised the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) to give our programs a stronger focus on basic human needs and poverty reduction than macro-economic growth.

What made life difficult for the program in Brazil, I would say, was the combination of prosperity in Brazil, i.e., less justification for U.S. economic assistance especially with the BHN/anti-poverty focused Foreign Assistance Act, and a military government. Furthermore, there was tension with the military government exacerbated by reports of human rights violations. The mission had a reduced public safety activity which had been tinged by the controversy. A former USAID/ Brazil public safety officer (Dan Mitrione) subsequently went to Venezuela where he was captured and killed by guerillas there. This news piqued interest enough on the Hill to lead to grilling USAID officials about public safety and Mitrione's role in Brazil years earlier.

The AID program in Brazil was deemed a phase-down operation with little prospect of new starts. The portfolio was mostly a loan pipeline, with little by way of grant projects. There were, however, some centrally funded contracts with activity in Brazil. For example, land-grant U.S. universities working with Brazilian university counterparts in agricultural research in particular. Ironically there were also remnants of the PL-480 Title II school feeding program which at one time reached 10 million kids. That's more children than there were in most AID recipient countries at the time.
The struggle for the Mission and our office was over the pace of reduction of program and staff in Brazil. This issue was central in the annual budget reviews and the Congressional Presentation. As a junior desk officer, I prepared materials for reviews and duels with Bureau project and program staff on behalf of the Mission. I felt a bit conflicted. Brazil's time as an AID priority was behind us. Beyond the program review

process, my job as a junior desk officer largely involved facilitating day-to-day Mission operations. I was a point of contact for AID-Washington or mission-based folks communicating with or traveling back and forth to the mission. I coordinated travel, monitored the portfolio and kept others informed of program progress.

Q: When you came onto the Brazil desk in '71, it was primarily a loan program. Was that true in most of the other countries in Latin America? I believe there was a period of phasing from primarily loans to grants.

LOVAAS: My recollection is that there was an overall preference, even assumption, that loans were the rule rather than the exception. Some people called LA/DR the "loan office" and I recall that preference held sway in the Assistant Administrator's office, certainly in the days of Herman Kleine and Buster Brown. However, the new FAA focus on basic human needs led some in the Bureau, including LA/Development Planning staff and myself, were speaking up for grant assistance to the poorest countries in particular,

Q: Okay. Good response. And what was the size of the program? Was it one of our largest programs at that point in Latin America?

LOVAAS: At this point it was a modest program. My recollection is that the loan money was all pipeline. No new loans coming in. There was modest technical assistance, a fair amount of participant training, and a still sizable, but declining PL 480 program. I don't remember the precise amounts, but if the DA was more than $5, $10 million a year in new obligations I'd be surprised?

Q: And so, this was a time in which AID and State were meshed together in one sort of desk operation. What were your experiences, what were the pros and cons of this kind of relationship?

LOVAAS: That's a good question, too. Frankly, I hadn't thought of that because at my level relationships in the Office of Brazilian Affairs were almost exclusively with AID colleagues. To the extent there were staff meetings, AID personnel met in sessions chaired by Phil Schwab, the senior AID officer and Deputy Chief of the joint office. Phil attended the Office (State staff plus Phil) meetings chaired by the Office Director and would pass on highlights to AID staff. The Mitrione/public safety matter was one subject of genuinely shared interest, especially when it involved hearings on the Hill. During such episodes, our proximity to the State side was quite beneficial. Otherwise, I felt I was witnessing the Alliance final days.

At the time, Herman Kleine was the Assistant Administrator for Latin America and he was in that job for a good period of time. I got a kick out of Herman Kleine whom I saw when I attended program, and budget decision meetings chaired by the AA. In those meetings, he would more often than not begin the questions by asking if there were outstanding audit recommendations in the area being reviewed and, if so, how they were being resolved. After that question was answered to his satisfaction, he'd turn the

question over to others. I wondered what past experience left him so concerned about audit issues.

A personal highlight of my time on the Brazil desk was a three-week TDY to Brazil, both to assist the Mission and see the country for myself. I spent several days with the mission in Rio de Janeiro, a week in the northeast state of Pernambuco and a few days in the new capital in Brasilia which would soon be the Mission's new home. Neither the AID staff nor many of their Brazilian counterparts were thrilled at the prospect of having to uproot from the charm of Rio and replace it with the stark newly developing Brasilia, the city of the future. I was impressed with the talented Mission staff, both U.S. Foreign Service and the Brazilian employees.

I got to see a lot of the state of Pernambuco thanks to Donor Lion, who wore two prestigious hats: Associate USAID Mission Director and Consul General of the U.S. Embassy in Recife, a major city in northeast Brazil. Mr. Lion was on leave in the U.S. His car and driver were assigned to me to tour Pernambuco state, including an overnight visit with a Peace Corps volunteer along the way working on a village potable water project funded by USAID.

Q: What was Donor Lyon's position at that time?

LOVAAS: His position was another vestige of the Alliance for Progress. That is, he was the Embassy Consul General in Recife, and the Associate Director of the AID mission for Northeast Brazil at the same time. As you know, he subsequently served as an office director in the LA Bureau.

Pernambuco is the essence of northeast Brazil-hot, dry and arid, yet with a lot of sugar cane in its wetter areas. I remember seeing people alongside rugged roads holding armadillos by their tails, for sale to passersby presumably for consumption at home. In western Pernambuco, I stopped to visit the PCV working with villagers to put in a well providing potable water. Together we visited the new potable water faucets and a new, very modest, one-room school that the community was building also with a couple thousand dollars from the USAID special projects fund. It was a poor community indeed. It was obvious to me that the two modest projects would have a major impact for the people who lived there. It was also obvious how much the people appreciated the catalytic efforts of the young PCV living with them. I only wish that I'd had a camera to record the project activity, the people and the PCV in that setting!

There's something about serving in a country where the program is phasing down. Having to uproot yourself from Rio de Janeiro to move to sterile Brasilia added insult to injury. I did briefly visit Brasilia. Having never seen a new planned capital city in an emerging regional power like Brazil, I found it a fascinating case study. One example of the cold, functional atmosphere was the housing for USAID FS staff. It was in a planned residential district, blocks of scores of new, identical apartments. AID staff would live in one block and apartments and townhomes nearby were reserved for officials of Brazilian government agencies, including project counterparts for some AID staff. The units

appeared to be adequate housing, but there were almost no trees or amenities yet, and no historical or cultural dimensions. And there was definitely no Ipanema or Atlantic Ocean for that matter. I wonder what it looks like today, over 50 years later.

At home, my family was doing well. Terry's health was fine, except he had one troubling after-effect. His baby teeth were damaged by the medication (phenobarbital), worn down in normal use almost to nubs. Fortunately, his adult teeth came in fairly rapidly and to this day his adult teeth have been normal..

Q: And you make an important point here, which is the risks that families take overseas.

LOVAAS: That was very important. We took him immediately to a very fine Nigerian doctor, a University of Chicago graduate. Although his diagnosis turned out to be correct, just didn't have the facilities to do a complete analysis (e.g., a spinal tap) or provide the care Terry needed. So, Fran was medically evacuated with baby Terry, flying with him to Germany the very next morning, thanks to the U.S. embassy. I've never seen an embassy move so fast. They had her passport fixed with Terry on it and all logistical arrangements made within a matter of hours.

After the Brazil desk, I moved on to Latin America Development Programs (LA/DP), the principal program planning and budgeting operation for the Bureau. This would be my last IDI rotational assignment. A central responsibility of the Office was assuring the shift of our program priority to meeting basic human needs. Once again, I was the junior guy in the office. I was assigned initially to overseeing the Latin America regional projects portfolio and as well as filling in for reviews of country programs as needed.

Regional projects were used to fund contracts with U.S.-based organizations, largely nonprofits, with activities in several countries in the region. For example, AIFLD (the American Institute for Free Labor Development), an outfit with political muscle which worked to strengthen the role of free labor unions in countries with an AID presence. Their program supported development and growth of union movements. AIFLD in-country specialists advised trade union leaders and arranged training both in-country and at the George Meany training center in Northern Virginia. Our annual budget review process at times featured challenging dialogue with AIFLD and occasionally labor supporters on the Hill. Usually, the conversations involved questions about program outcomes being less than what one might expect from the funds allocated. The Assistant Administrator would get a call, usually from Congressional staff, stressing the importance the Congressperson attached to AIFLD's work and the need to fund it well.

Q: Tell me more about being creatures of the Congress. This was the AFL-CIO or all of your programs? What was Congress's role?

LOVAAS: I don't know if I'd call them "creatures of the Congress", but certainly some of the organizations receiving regional funds had influence on the Hill. A big dog among them was AIFLD, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO and they got about $6 or 7 million a year to support the operations of the Meany training facility in Front Royal for participant

training there, and the costs of in-country union advisors. Because of their AFL-CIO link they had influence, but there were others that did as well, such as a few large U.S. universities with advisers and activities in more than one country in the region.

DP was a strong office, with very capable leadership. Jack Heller was the Office Director when I began my rotation. He was followed by Larry Harrison. The Deputy was Glen Patterson, and together they were a formidable pair. Bob Simpson and George Hill were my supervisors during most of my time in DP. I think I profited by working for both of them—Bob, a brilliant, deep thinker and George, the absolute master of the intricacies of the budgetary processes.

Q: He (Larry Harrison) was our mission director in Nicaragua from '80 to '81.

LOVAAS: The third person I worked with in DP was Allison Herrick. She organized and managed preparation of the annual congressional presentation for LA. She was also THE key support staffer for Hill testimonies of senior AID officers, including the Assistant Administrator. She was the absolute master of her bailiwick.

I was detailed to Allison to assist her in preparing the FY 1973 congressional presentation. That started with writing the excruciatingly detailed instructions to field missions and Bureau offices for presentation of narratives and supporting data. Then, we pulled together their respective programs with strategic frameworks, the rationale and inputs for proposed new activities, and the budgetary detail in a form responsive to the ever-evolving congressional directives.

Allison and I put it all together. We drafted the overall summary document outlining the strategic framework for LA programs with justification tailored to the new FAA priorities. Then there were the backup briefing materials for the top testifiers including the Administrator, Assistant Administrator, and Mission Directors. I felt fortunate to be learning from the best in the business, someone who knew both the Bureau players and the Hill recipients exceptionally well. She was awfully good at it. Finally, the presentation package was cleared by the AA and Agency Congressional Relations staff and submitted to the Congress. When the hearings came, Allison usually accompanied the testifier/s. I joined her on several occasions. All in all, this was an interesting training module for me.

Q: What kind of interest was there on the Hill in these congressional presentations? Did they take them seriously?

LOVAAS: From what I saw and heard; the appropriation committees' staffs showed evidence of actually reading the materials. Some raised questions about new projects, extensions of projects—often focusing on rationale for them or the amounts requested. Otherwise, questions from principals often reflected more political concerns, e.g., concerns about public safety activities in Brazil. Most often it seemed they were issues which arose because of a long-held view of a congressman, e.g., Otto Passman or because something had gotten attention in the media. From my experience it seemed there were

few issues that arose from particularly close reading of the materials our personnel spent so much time preparing. Perhaps it was that our staff knew the audience!

As noted earlier, my direct supervisors Bob Simpson and George Hill were also exceptionally capable people.. George was the absolute master of the nuts and bolts of the appropriations and budget processes. Bob was a strategic thinker focused on likely impacts on real lives and the importance of achieving equitable outcomes. Amazing guy. Just a quick example about Bob. When I knew him, Bob was taking graduate classes at George Washington at night. On one occasion I remember Bob running out to get to a final exam at GW. I subsequently learned that he went to the wrong room, took the wrong exam, for a course he had not actually taken. He only got a B on the exam!

Q: Impressive.

LOVAAS: I marveled to myself what varied experiences I'd had in my short AID career 1967-73: Vietnam Personnel trainee and manpower planner, Nigerian personnel officer in Nigeria, and now program planning for Latin America!

During my time in the LA Bureau, central program policy issues revolved around the priorities in the FAA-mandated basic human needs framework. One major area of priority was small farmer agriculture to include access to land and markets, improved technologies and yields as well as more nutritious foods (e.g., high lysine corn). In education, new priorities included basic education and non-formal rural education.

One broad issue which was surfacing in the LA Bureau perhaps more than other bureaus concerned whether loan-financed assistance should continue as the norm in aid recipient countries regardless of their relative financial situation (e.g., income or debt service burden) or the nature of projects being financed (e.g., basic human needs vs. income generating focus).

Buster Brown, a project development officer who moved up to Deputy AA/LA, argued that loan-financing should indeed continue to be the rule. He argued that if the money had to be repaid, albeit on soft terms, there would be a greater probability of host country buy-in to a program. Others in LA/DP (including myself), for example, wondered if it didn't make more sense to base the determination on a recipient's capacity to pay? Did it make sense to loan money for non-income generating activities like basic human needs focused activities? It seemed that the agency began moving to more grant financing.

On one occasion, I was invited to join a new project design team. The LA/DR Agriculture Office chief invited me. We'd worked well together on some things, and perhaps he thought I might be more helpful with LA/DP buy-in to the project proposal at review time!? Along the way, I enjoyed the challenge of learning project design. Our discussions about what goes into getting farmers to adopt a new way of growing something their family had grown for generations and what an effective set of inputs to bring about change looked like were fascinating. My final contribution was taking the

concepts we'd researched and discussed and writing them up in the requisite AID logical framework. Another good experience that would serve me in days to come.

Population at the time was a major, well-funded AID focus. Population specialists had a whole bureau all their own, and a few hundred million dollars for use around the world. The population of the world was still growing fast, and many were convinced that it was a major limiting factor in addressing poverty. Here's my small anecdote about population's importance in those days. One evening I was sitting on an airplane at Dulles International Airport, headed for a TDY in Costa Rica for a conference concerning an LA regional project with the Interamerican Institute for Agricultural Science. The plane was set to take off, but departure was delayed. We were waiting for a VIP who had demanded the aircraft be held for him. It turned out to be none other than Ray Ravenholt, the head of AID's Population Bureau, a force to be reckoned with. That Boeing 707 sat there waiting for half an hour. Otherwise, that trip went well. I was impressed with the representatives of IICA, their modest training and research facilities and the project's contribution to bringing practical agricultural research to Central American farmers.

As my time to graduate from the IDI program approached, I had an opportunity for a TDY to assist the USAID/Honduras program office. While working in LA/DP, I had occasionally been involved in conversations with the Mission and had participated in reviews of the Honduras program in Washington. Now, the mission needed help preparing their annual budget submission. I liked the idea and didn't know a lot about Honduras except that it was indeed a low-income country and a growing priority for the agency's basic human needs focus.

I flew to Tegucigalpa and spent a couple of weeks working for Program Officer Bob Maushammer putting together the coming year's budget. Bob was an especially interesting guy to work with and the little backwater town of Tegucigalpa had a special dusty charm about it. Bob not only knew the country and the program business well but was also a punster and stamp collector with a delightful non-stop wit about him. Try as I might, I could not keep up with this master punster.

Unlike the two USAID programs besides Vietnam that I was familiar with, Nigeria and Brazil, both of which were headed towards phase out, the Honduras program was on the cusp of expansion. The prospect of a growing program tends to lift the spirits of AID employees, and I could feel the difference in USAID/Honduras. At any rate, before I headed back home Bob and Ed Marasciulo, the Mission Director, asked me if I'd be interested in joining the Mission to work as Bob's assistant. I told them I was interested but would have to check with HQ (Fran) before giving them a final decision.

Back home, Fran and I discussed the prospect of a move to Honduras. I gave Tegucigalpa and the AID mission good reviews. I told her it was an interesting Mission with an active program and interesting people, including more professional Honduran staff, US PSCs, and AID FS officers of different age groups. The climate was pleasant, gentler than Vietnam or Nigeria, and Teguc was a charming, humble little town surrounded by hills.

Terry was doing fine and was medically cleared. We'd learned the schools for our would-be three- and five-year olds were well regarded. And Honduras was a heck of a lot closer to home than Nigeria or Vietnam, a factor as our parents were getting along in years. And I think we were both excited about finally going to Latin America! So, I accepted the Mission's offer, and the agency approved my assignment to Honduras with a late June 1974 ETA. For the first time, we'd all be going together to a new home.

My IDI time in Washington had been beneficial to me and the family, but it was time to move on. The work I wanted to do was overseas. In my case, the sense of urgency to get overseas the frontlines of development was stronger than most. Why stronger? Because I was coming up on seven years with the Agency, and had worked neither in my chosen career field, i.e., development planning and management nor my preferred region—Latin America.

The IDI program had revitalized my slow-in-lift off AID career. Remember, I started with AID at the very bottom, an FSR-8 (step1!) Personnel Assistant, in the Vietnam war zone. In two years there, I'd sort of shaped my own little career field in Manpower Planning for the interagency CORDS program. Next, I hit a restart in Nigeria in local personnel management under challenging circumstances. Then fate intervened as newborn son Terry's illness resulted in losing medical clearance to serve overseas. A silver lining burst from Washington in the form of nomination to the IDI in the program officer backstop. The Internship fast tracked me from FSR-7 to 5, over two years.

The IDI experience in Washington overall was a solid way to redirect me to my new career path. I was fortunate to have worked for Phil Schwab, who took time to school me in the legends of Brazil, its politics, history and idiosyncrasies as well as dealing with the Washington bureaucracies impacting our Brazil program. Still, the day- to-day work as a junior of three AID officers seemed like table scraps of the substance of our assistance to Brazil. If I were to streamline future IDI assignments, I would perhaps reduce time on a geographic desk to 3 or 4 weeks maximum and add several months in a major technical office or, better yet, in the Bureau's project design shop.

The LA/DP rotation was a richer experience. I had the opportunity to work with an excellent group of co-workers and managers. It was also my good fortune to be there as AID was changing direction in response to the new BHN-focused FAA. LA/DP had an important role in shaping policy and monitoring its implementation through the budgetary and program development processes. Bob Simpson and George Hill took care to involve me in the policy formulation as well as the program monitoring dimensions of DP's work. They were leaders and mentors of the first order, as was Allison Herrick, mastermind/captain of the Congressional Presentation process from start to finish. The Presentation was a large, complex piece of work containing not only the nuts-and- bolts details of AID programs, but it is also the Agency's public story of what it has accomplished and will accomplish in response to congressional mandates.

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Q: Today is Wednesday, June 7, 2023 and I am continuing my interview with John Lovaas. John you will be focusing on your assignment to Honduras I believe.

LOVAAS: Indeed.

We assured our families that this time we'd be right around the corner, not halfway around the world as we'd been in Nigeria and Vietnam. Still, we'd been with them in our hometown for over three years. They'd gotten used to us and, more importantly, used to having grandsons/nephews Deron (5) and Terry (3) nearby. There were some tears shed on departure day.

We arrived in Tegucigalpa in early July. Bob and Jeanie Maushammer and family left on home leave and were kind enough to let us use their house for temporary lodging while we looked for a place of our own. One evening Fran and I were relaxing after dinner when suddenly Deron and Terry came running into the living room shouting, " you've got to see what's in the bathroom." There in their bathroom shower stall was a scorpion! I'm not sure, but maybe it likely crept in via the drain. There was construction in process nearby where workmen were tearing up wooded areas. They may have rousted Mr. Scorpion in the process. It was an introduction, a not-so-subtle reminder that we weren't in Hyattsville, Maryland anymore.

The family settled in nicely. We moved into a pleasant house within easy walking distance of the office and the U.S. Embassy. We enrolled Deron in kindergarten and Terry in pre-school at the Binational Center in downtown Comayaguela, Tegucigalpa's sister city on the other side of the Choluteca River. The schools were only about 15 minutes from our house. We understood they would both be attending the American School in Tegucigalpa the following year.

Having visited Honduras just a few months earlier, I was comfortable in the Mission. Ed Marasciuolo was still the Director. The Program Office was just down the hall from the Director's suite. Next to us on the other side was the Project Development Office where Charlie Connolly was senior PDO, and Bob Mathia, on his first AID tour, the Assistant. Mission technical offices (Agriculture, Multisector, Public Administration, Housing, Health/Population) and the Controller were in a building a couple of blocks up the hill from the Embassy. Ambassador Felipe Sanchez's suite was on the second floor of the Embassy.

The US mission had good working relationships with the Government of Honduras headed by General Oswaldo López Arellano when we got there. The general was on his second tour as president. He first came to power in a *coup d'etat* in 1963, was ousted in a coup in 1970, and returned in a coup in 1972. He would remain president until 1975 when he was ousted in the next coup.

The AID program was in sync with both the GOH goals and the agency's basic human needs framework. There was one topic of chronic political controversy—agrarian reform. The agrarian reform to break up large parcels of land for redistribution to landless

campesinos was initiated by López Arellano in his first administration, halted when he was ousted, and resumed after he returned. There was occasional violence among large landowners, campesinos and reform beneficiaries. USAID tried to avoid the sharp edges of the reform, e.g., identifying properties to be taken and their actual redistribution. However, we did support technical aspects. For example, AID funded a cadaster project to modernize property records and titling. And, once small farmers were settled on lands, USAID supported projects to assist them to become more efficient, profitable producers.

The Mission's portfolio was project-focused, largely grant-funded development assistance in addition to PL-480 Title II, mostly supplemental feeding for maternal-child health and school feeding activities carried out by CARE and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). In addition, there was a small housing staff providing modest technical assistance and looking into possible housing guarantee funding. Honduras had a population of about three million and was largely rural, apart from its two modest urban centers of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

The USAID annual budget had been submitted and it was vacation season. While there was plenty to do for the two of us (our Honduran Secretary and myself), it was a good time for me to learn the ropes. Maria, the secretary and office manager was terrific--competent and having a good idea of what needed to be done and keeping me on track. I got to know my USAID and embassy colleagues and, through the former, got invited to travel to project sites, something I've always loved to do. I was able to visit several projects, including a couple in rural areas served by AID-funded farm-to-market roads and non-roads! We saw schools, health clinics, small farms and more. I was able to meet project managers' counterparts and project beneficiaries. It was a great way to start to get a feel for the country and its people.

I also joined the Honduran softball league, along with a few other younger folks in the USAID mission. For the record, I must report that in my first game I hit a home run over the left field fence. I was promptly given a nickname by a local radio announcer of "el lobo". The wolf! I think he gave me that name because it was easier to spell than Lovaas. Full disclosure—that was the only home run I hit in the dozen or so games I played before my softball season and career ended when I broke my little finger.

Meanwhile, our two boys were doing well in school and learning Spanish like little sponges. They had some friends and playmates. I'd had a lot of Spanish in high school and college and, with use every day, my fluency was building nicely. Fran had not taken the language in school but had some Spanish training and worked with FSI tapes before we arrived. She was doing OK, but still beginning. We were both amazed how fast the boys were learning and using it. She hired a lady to help with the house and the kids, enabling her to get out and see things and meet people. One day, she was stopped by a police officer in Comayaguela for going the wrong way on a one-way street. She wasn't certain if he was going to give her a ticket or seek a bribe. So, she solved the problem by doing the I-no-speak-the-Spanish routine. She held out long enough that he simply gave up and let her go.

Three months after our arrival Honduras was struck by the worst natural disaster in its history. On September 17, 1974, Hurricane Fifi roared into northern Honduras from the Caribbean. The storm had moved rapidly across the Caribbean mostly over open water, increasing in intensity until it slammed into Honduras with 110 mile per-hour winds. It came inland, then moved very slowly east to west towards Guatemala, dropping over twenty inches of rain in northern Honduras. The winds did their damage. But the floodwaters which followed leveled whole communities. They washed away the entire town of Choloma, near San Pedro Sula, which became front page news in the U.S. press. You couldn't see any remnants of the place. Floodwaters did horrible damage and cost an estimated eight to ten thousand people their lives. Over 100,000 people were displaced and left homeless. Roads, railways, electrical infrastructure, business and office buildings, and, yes, schools were washed away along with untold numbers of homes.

The GOH was overwhelmed. The United States immediately announced it would help as needed as part of a massive international response. AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) sent an assessment team coordinated with U.S. local governments' fire and rescue experts, who helped in the search and rescue phase in the days immediately after the hurricane. Private voluntary organizations had a good foothold in Honduras and were a big help, Catholic Relief Services and CARE come to mind, and many others followed. Donations in-kind poured in from all over because of the stories of people who had lost their homes and lost everything they owned. Unfortunately—and here's one of the lessons I learned early on about disaster assistance—contributions in-kind are often a logistical nightmare. Along with useful items like canned food, water, kitchen and cooking supplies came winter coats, high heels, tons of expired foods, etc. Word went out from the Honduran government, U.S. government, UN relief agencies as well as from private voluntary agencies: please send money to enable relief workers to purchase the supplies most critically needed.

USAID/Honduras took the lead in the US response. Director Marasciulo designated Tony Cauterucci our Multi-Sector office chief, to manage the USAID effort and coordinate with the GOH and other relief agencies. Tony was the obvious and an excellent choice. He was a skilled manager and his office had projects all over, including some in the northern area hardest hit. For many weeks, however, Fifi disaster search and rescue, relief and recovery were virtually a 24/7 operation for the entire mission. Normal program operations continued, but the Fifi humanitarian response effort had top priority for all. We had 24/7 Fifi response duty officers for example. I was one. This continued for months. A branch office was established in San Pedro Sula as the base for operations in the north.

The enormity of the disaster and the human suffering was hard to comprehend--to see essentially a whole way of life destroyed for untold thousands. At first, relief workers searched for people, rescuing and taking them to medical care as needed.

The U.S. military delivered and set up two completely equipped field hospitals. Tents as emergency shelter were next. Tent villages sprung up and rudimentary feeding operations began thanks to efforts by Honduran health workers, CRS and CARE and other voluntary

organizations. Shelter, food and urgent health care are the essential basics before beginning to restore basic services and thinking of reconstruction.

The Fifi disaster sort of swallowed everything else in the mission. I should note that our State Department colleagues pitched in too. They not only reported on the devastation and amazing relief efforts, but also helped out on occasion. And, the US Ambassador, Felipe Sanchez, in my opinion did a whale of a job with public relations, both in-country and with the international press. He was also generous with his time supporting our work and praising the work of those doing the work.

The emergency attracted high-level U.S. officials, senators, congressmen. And even celebrities from the Hollywood end of the country. Everybody wanted to be seen having a part in Honduras's recovery. They flew in at all hours, sometimes with plane loads of emergency supplies or relief workers. And, of course, the official ones required special care and feeding and precious staff time to provide it. Occasionally there were social events with celebrities, stage and screen folks for example. At one of them, I even got an autograph from Tippie Hedron, the star of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*? We met her at a Marine House reception in her honor and she signed a personal remembrance on a cast on my right wrist (covering a finger broken during my brief softball career). I carry that awkwardly bent finger with me to this day.

The first days and weeks were the worst. The enormity of the disaster, the human suffering, deaths, and a whole way of life destroyed for thousands of people are hard to imagine. I'd never seen anything like it, and I had served in Vietnam. The first order of business, of course, was assessing the extent of damage and loss, searching for and rescuing people, taking people to medical care as needed, and then offering relief. Relief means feeding, sheltering and giving people basic essentials for survival.

Emergency relief operations morphed into recovery, i.e., people returning to their home areas, putting up minimal shelters and planting crops. Supplementary PL 480 Title II food for work and school feeding programs through CARE, CRS and others were crucial as families tried to return to normal lives. AID and other donors funded modest school and health clinics reconstruction as communities took shape again. Reconstruction of infrastructure would take time, but international assistance accelerated the process.

One effect of the Fifi disaster and the major role of the US mission in response to it was to bring us closer together. AID staff exhibited good team spirit even before the storm. In my opinion that is not unusual for missions because of the work we do. But the impact of witnessing the immense human tragedy of Fifi, and then working double duty side by side, often 6-7 days a week, to save lives and restore communities I think strengthened the bonds. We needed and appreciated each other's efforts. The quality leadership of Ed Marasciulo and Ambassador Sanchez provided should not be overlooked either.

The Mission's program absorbed Fifi recovery and reconstruction activities and grew in the post-disaster years. People change, too. Frank Kimball joined us from Washington to replace Ed Marasciulo in 1975 and hard-charging Marty Dagata joined him as the Deputy

Director. Bob Maushammer completed his second tour and left in 1976. Frank Kimball asked me to be Bob's successor as chief Program Officer! Fortunately, I was soon joined by Ken Schofield, a top-notch IDI who would be my Assistant Program Officer.

There was a period of political ferment in Honduras. López Arellano was ousted by General Juan Alberto Melgar Castro and military control continued. Agrarian reform, land redistribution halted for a time following the ouster of Lopez Arellano. There was growing tension between campesinos and large land holders which occasionally resulted in bloodshed. AID assistance to the reform had impact that continued during the sporadic periods of actual land distribution from the earlier days, The Cadaster project assisted in setting up property registries and a modern land titling system that gave reform beneficiary farmers the security of title to their land, confidence to invest in what they owned. AID project assistance to reform co-ops continued, including extension assistance, improved inputs, credit, and farm to market roads. During the Lopez Arellano years land was distributed to about 35,000 landless campesino families significantly increasing the potential beneficiaries of assistance available due to AID-assisted services. And that's no small task in a country of three million people. The future of agrarian reform land redistributions was in doubt after the departure of Lopez Arellano.

In addition to the ferment surrounding the agrarian reform, there was a major scandal involving the United Fruit Company and allegations of bribery to get the GOH to reduce the export tax on bananas. The disclosures and resulting publicity contributed to the downfall of Lopez Arellano. I don't know if you remember this, but a United Fruit Company executive linked to the scandal killed himself by jumping out of his skyscraper office window in New York City. I bet you can guess the name given the scandal in the popular press? Banana Gate!

The Mission also provided technical assistance to the National Autonomous Municipal Development Bank, trying to build them as an institution capable of providing meaningful assistance to strengthen municipalities. I'd been following the project very closely. It was a very small project but I just happened to Google it the other day—BANMA, Autonomous Municipal Development Bank. Lo and behold, it continues to exist. It apparently put down roots, and a few years after our initial assistance received major capital assistance from the World Bank. The best news is that it remains active today as a totally private entity. The project manager and principal advisor to BANMA was none other than Eric Zallman, a PSC with the Mission, who would later convert to the Foreign Service, ultimately becoming a Mission Director.

Maternal/Child health assistance was also a continuing part of our portfolio. It would turn out to be one of the more successful parts. The MCH project which supported basic health and family planning services through rural clinics was managed by Barbara Sandoval, another excellent manager. We amended and increased the scope of the project over time as coverage expanded to most of the country. It had particular success in getting basic care, including, e.g., oral rehydration kits to help infants survive diarrheal diseases, as well as family planning services.

Not only were periodic evaluations generally positive in terms of their achieving their targets over the years, but we were also seeing data indicating genuine impact. UN statistical reports began to show that during the period of our MCH assistance, life expectancy was increasing for Honduran women AND birth rates were falling. The data earned the Mission praise from AID/W, including a particular message from a frequent critic, congratulating the Mission for outstanding program impact on women's health.

New initiatives in the Honduras program included a Non-Formal Rural Education project (NFRE) intended to support development and delivery of educational content to underserved rural areas through alternative vehicles, such as agricultural extension, health clinics, and farmer co-ops, for example. If I remember correctly, the basic concept was the brainchild of creative Education Officer, Henry Reynolds, another former PCV and the best volleyball player in the mission! This concept would prove more complicated than we realized. We were fortunate to identify and recruit John Kelly, another bright, young man as a PSC to help design and hopefully manage the NFRE project. Kelly proved useful to the mission not only in his work with Henry, but also as the point person on the introduction of desktop computers (remember Wang?) in USAID/Honduras, making us one of the first missions to adopt computers throughout a mission, I believe.

We just kept finding talented new PSCs, typically with Peace Corps service in their backgrounds. We hired Aaron Williams, a former PCV in the Dominican Republic, out of General Mills. He came first as a PSC and was converted to Foreign Service while still serving in Honduras, I believe. Initially he helped design an agricultural marketing project, one of a new generation of projects focused on non-traditional exports, i.e., cucumbers, lettuce, and other fresh vegetables grown by local farmers. Historically Honduras had exported tropical fruits, principally bananas and pineapples, grown on plantations owned and operated by foreign corporations such as United Fruit.

Once the project paper for the Agricultural Marketing Project was approved, Aaron continued as the project manager, working initially for Jim Bleidner, then Bill Jansen in the Agriculture Office. The initial phase of the project was a pilot test in the Comayagua Valley, an area ideal for vegetable production. Technical assistance was provided to local farmers in production of improved varieties appropriate for U.S. export markets in conjunction with expertise from U.S. wholesalers. Wholesalers trained farmers and packinghouse workers in quality control essential to sell the products to markets in the United States.

They initially had some impressive success selling the locally grown vegetables to U.S. buyers. Subsequently, however, there were production issues and the farmers and packing house had trouble maintaining consistent quality acceptable to the U.S. market. At the same time there was increasing competition from the region for the U.S. markets, making it more difficult for the Honduran producers to sell their products. Growers in other countries, including apparently some receiving external assistance, were catching on and catching up with the Hondurans. It's ironic I suppose that I've spent 26 of my retirement years managing a farmers' market I founded in order to promote (and buy) local

vegetable products from individual small, family farms. One of the occasional shoppers at my Reston Farmers Market to this day is Aaron Williams!

I have a very different kind of memory of something that happened not far from Comayagua gardens and the packing house of the agricultural marketing project. It occurred at Lake Yojoa, a picturesque seventy-nine square mile lake famous for its beauty and bass fishing. In fact, at the time, Yojoa claimed the world record for a largemouth bass—28 pounds! Several people from the mission went fishing there. Just once my family and I went there with three other families for a weekend. It was almost my final family excursion.

Early one morning three of us went fishing. For the first time ever, I fished from a kayak. Fortunately, I was fishing along with Clem Weber, who was in a separate kayak nearby. We were fishing not too far from the shore in a weedy area where I assumed the water was quite shallow. There I was in my kayak. Somehow I made an awkward move and the kayak flipped over. I found myself upside down among the weeds and the water turned out to be maybe fifteen feet deep. I could not right the kayak and I panicked. I certainly would have drowned but for Clem, a young agriculture officer in the mission. I didn't know what to do. Suddenly, Clem was beside me, kicking away, tugging me upwards with one strong arm. He calmed me a bit and somehow hauled me to the dock, maybe fifty feet away. I was never a very good swimmer and in a state of panic I would not have made it. He saved my life. Clem is my all-time hero.

A few months later, Fran, Deron, Terry and I took a special trip, a very special trip up to San Pedro Sula for a national level spelling bee for kids from English language private schools and international schools in Honduras. The boys were nine and eight and were there representing the American School in Tegucigalpa. They did well, and I think Terry came in first for his grade level! I should have taped the final words! I do remember we were very proud. We stayed in a nice hotel for a couple of days following the bee and basically let the kids eat and do whatever they wanted.

By 1978 Frank Kimball was gone. John "Jack" Robinson, a bit older than Frank and likely at his final post, replaced him. While not an experienced Latin America hand, he proved to be a fine director IMHO. Marty Dagata also left, in late 1978. I believe. Jimmy Stone, another fine officer and friend to this day, had already replaced Tony Cauterucci in 1977. Around the same time a crop of IDIs and junior officers brought energetic new blood. Besides Ken Schofield, there were Cindy Gallup in the Program Office and Peter Orr in the Project Development Office along with Barry Burnett who had replaced Charley Connolly. Excellent officers everyone. Jimmie and Ken would be future USAID Mission Directors.

As it turned out, I would be the Acting Deputy Mission Director working for Jack for about six months, and acting Director after Jack's retirement, during my last month in Tegucigalpa! The portfolio had grown quite a bit, and the Mission had moved into its own new building right across the street from the Embassy in 1978. It was a busy, but

productive year. A high point for 1978 was that Jimmie Stone and I were both pleasantly surprised by promotions for our efforts!

The agriculture sector would be the mission focus for new initiatives in 1979, my last year. Part of the reason for that was an aging portfolio in a still predominantly rural country. Those investments had helped provide a foundation for more development, and there was an up-and-coming Minister of Agriculture, Rafael Leonardo Callejas, with whom we had an excellent working relationship. The centerpiece of our plan was an Agriculture Sector Loan, our first sector program. Bill Jansen, and one of our senior consultants, Len Kornfeld, led the project design effort along with Barry Burnett, our very capable PDO.

The Agriculture Sector loan at $25 million would be by far the mission's largest program activity ever. The sector approach enabled us to address a broad range of constraints to development and improve agricultural production and incomes for a large portion of the country's population. In addition to financing agricultural research and technical training through the Center for Agricultural Research at El Zamorano and agricultural credit, the program would enable us to strengthen a weak institutional framework with targeted technical assistance and large-scale manpower training at various levels.

I went to Washington along with Bill Jansen and Len Kornfeld, and successfully presented the Agriculture Sector loan package to the Bureau. My last and most important task as Acting Mission Director was to lead the negotiations with the GOH of the $25 million program loan package and sign it for the United States along with Minister Rafael Leonardo Callejas. A few years later, Callejas would become Honduras's elected President, the first one in a very long time.

I had been selected for a year of academic training at Michigan State University. We were excited about this opportunity. Fran was also looking forward to taking classes at MSU and we thought it would be a good US experience for the boys as well. More good news—we would get home leave with the family before moving to Lansing, Michigan.

I left Honduras in July 1979. My replacement as Program Officer, Julio Schlotthauer, arrived a couple of weeks before my departure date. I heard later that he not only proved to be a top-notch Program chief, but he also married my Secretary and they lived happily ever after!

Lessons and Memories of Honduras, 1974-79**:** Hurricane Fifi; Building for the long-term; People

Professionally and personally for me, and I would say for our family, Honduras was about the best of our many overseas adventures during 27 years with AID.

As a rule, the lessons learned closing paras deal with the progress and highlights of the longer-term development mission of AID. In Honduras, the magnitude of the Hurricane

Fifi natural disaster, its devastating impact on the country, and the central role that USAID played in Honduran recovery require that it deserves mention as well.

When Fifi hit in September 1974, it was called the second most devastating and deadly hurricane in history in the region. It sneaked up. No forecast warned the Honduran people of this threat. The physical, economic, and human toll were at first hard to comprehend. As I've outlined, the response of the U.S. Mission (AID and State)) was to totally dedicate our efforts to providing all that was necessary to save lives and help our neighbors recover. Support and resources from Washington were substantial and prompt. I was proud to be a part of this team.

My own role was a modest one---I did a few six-day weeks but not the seven-day ones some of my colleagues did, and I didn't have to relocate to the disaster zone for weeks. Thousands of lives were lost, but I am confident that thousands more were saved thanks to the combined response of the U.S. Our assistance was crucial to recovery in northern Honduras. When we visited the area months after the storm, it was gratifying to see the results of the efforts--a return to something a bit better than the status quo before Fifi.

In terms of other development achievements, our long, steady work with basic maternal and child health care likely deserves top marks. As I noted, in my latter days, UN data confirmed our MCH assistance had contributed to notable improvement in maternal life expectancy and reduction in birth rates—major achievements indeed!

I'd like to believe that the modest investments made in basic rural education in particular have impacted skills, possibly even literacy among coming generations of rural youth. I have not had the opportunity to examine agricultural data to learn if our earlier investments in areas like extension and farm-to-market roads began to impact production and incomes. And regrettably, I don't have a clue what our major Agriculture Sector loan program, signed up just as I was leaving Honduras, might have accomplished.

Lastly, when I look back at Honduras I see the extensive loss of tree cover that was underway before we departed and has continued since, particularly in the south and east. And there are the not-unrelated, sharply warmer temperatures. I wonder why we couldn't have seen it coming and raised alarms. Perhaps we could have helped the Hondurans to design responses to help mitigate climate disaster. Woulda coulda shoulda!?

No discussion of our five years in Honduras would be complete without mentioning the AID staff that made it a special place to work and to accomplish amazing things. I fear that 50 years after the fact I'll undoubtedly miss some deserving people. Let's begin with the contractors who do so much and often don't get mentioned. Here are some of the talented PSCs, integral parts of the team, several of whom would become AID Foreign Service Officers: Len Kornfeld, Henry Reynolds, Bastiaan Schouten, Priscilla del Bosque Schouten, and Eric Zallman. Also, we were fortunate to be joined by an exceptional group of new, young AID officers in the Program Office and Project Development Offices who rapidly grew into their new roles—Ken Schofield, Lars Klassen, Cindy Gallup, and Peter Orr. Two other officers in the Agriculture Office, Ron Curtis, our

Agricultural Economist and Clem Weber, the Agronomist (and superb swimmer) combined with Jim Bleidner, our Agriculture chief to give us real strength for our major program sector. Also, I want to especially recognize and thank more senior officers who impressed me with their work in managing mission operations and who were kind enough to share their wisdom with me so that I too could grow: Jim Bleidner, Agriculture Chief when I arrived-; Martin Dagata, hard hitting Deputy Director; Jim Leo, our can-do EXO; Tony Cauterucci who led the mission response to the Hurricane Fifi disaster; Don Anderson, special assistant to the Director; and Jack Robinson, my last Director.

How talented were these USAID/Honduras personnel? Eight of them went on to become AID Mission Directors: Aaron Williams, who went on to become AID Director in South Africa and then Director of the Peace Corps; Tony Cauterucci; Marty Dagata; Henry Reynolds; Ken Schofield; Priscilla del Bosque Schouten; Jimmie Stone; and Eric Zallman.

We are still friends with Aaron and Rosa Williams who live nearby in Reston. Jimmie Stone is just one county away and the internet keeps me in touch with Priscilla Schouten.

P.S.

My next visit to Honduras would be in connection with the congressionally mandated assistance to the Nicaraguan Contras after Congress decided to reassign responsibility for Contra aid from State and CIA to AID. AID assistance was limited to food, clothing and nonlethal training and technical assistance to help them to fit back into a peaceful society. I was named Deputy Director of this Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance (TFHA). TFHA had established an office in the Embassy in Tegucigalpa to coordinate assistance with the Contras operating in camps along Honduras's border with Nicaragua. But, in this new capacity, neither I nor any member of TFHA was allowed even to enter the AID office building right across the street from the Embassy.

Q: Today is Tuesday, August 8, 202. John, I believe you will be focusing your time on long-term training followed by your assignment to Niger.

LOVAAS: As my second tour in Honduras came to end, I was offered a year of academic training at Michigan State University. I thought graduate study in AID-related subject matter would be useful in the years ahead and add to my resume's thin education section. Fran and I thought a year of school in Michigan would be an interesting life experience for all of us. I was interested in economics and public administration. MSU was strong in both areas, so I closed the deal. Michigan State, led by Ervin "Magic" Johnson, had won the NCAA national basketball championship in 1979. Sadly, that was the final year for Magic and a couple other first-team MSU players

We finished up in Tegucigalpa in the summer of 1979 and headed back home. After a nice home leave, we drove to Lansing, Michigan where we'd rented a duplex that would be home during our academic year at MSU. We went through Buffalo and Avon, Ontario. Avon is across the river from Detroit and it's a small version of the original Avon. They

had a Shakespearian theater, so we stayed a couple of days and saw a performance of one of the Bard's great works. If I hadn't just had a birthday, a very large one, I might remember which of his works it was!

Q: Happy birthday and happy anniversary, by the way. Fifty-eight years! That's a long time!

LOVAAS: Thanks! Fran is definitely on my good side and marrying her was clearly as good a decision as I would ever make.!

AID, as you know, had many contracts with land grant colleges, including Michigan State. We also had an AID Administrator from Michigan State, John Hannah. Shortly after we arrived in East Lansing, I went to campus to meet with my academic adviser, Agricultural Economics Chair. Professor William Riley, to develop my plan of study for the year. He and an Assistant Professor both had worked with AID projects overseas.

Professor Riley assumed that I would be taking courses leading to a master's degree at the end of my year. I was more inclined to pursue coursework I thought likely to be more relevant to my work in AID. The MSU course catalog offered a large variety of interesting courses; and when would I get another chance to avail myself of those possibilities? Together Professor Riley and I selected a list of promising courses and my schedule for fall classes. The plan for the year included graduate courses in economics, agricultural economics and marketing, management, public administration, and education (technical and non-formal). Meanwhile, Fran was signing up for a couple of courses that interested her.

Michigan State proved to be a welcoming place. Not only did I have an informed, attentive academic adviser, but we were also assigned a family sponsor who made us feel welcome in the campus community. They introduced us around campus, and we became friends. We lived in a pleasant duplex with a large yard, on a pleasant street. School for the boys was within walking distance, and the MSU campus was a short drive from our rented duplex. The MSU campus was a large, but pleasant place which came complete with a 100,000-seat football stadium, and large arenas for both basketball and ice hockey. We got one interesting surprise when we met our landlords, the duplex owners. They instructed us where we should go in the event of tornado warnings---an area in the basement naturally. They said such warnings were not rare. In fact, we did hunker down in the basement 4 or 5 times in response to warnings in the coming year.

It had been twelve years since I'd been to undergraduate classes at Maryland. This would be quite a change. Most of my classes were graduate seminars. My classmates were all substantially younger than I was, and they all had four or more years of recent experience under their belts. I was a rookie, learning a new system. Frankly, I was initially intimidated, surrounded by all these pros. I discovered in the first term that I in fact had some real-world work experience that many younger ones were interested in learning about. Several were interested in working in development overseas and were anxious to

talk with me about work in developing countries. The seminar framework for classes facilitated talking directly with classmates.

Classes were very different from what I recalled from my undergrad days at Maryland which consisted of lectures to groups of 30 or more, sometimes 100 or more in auditoriums or on television. There were two or three sessions each week, occasional papers required and the dreaded blue book exams. At MSU, the seminar format was occasional lectures, and a lot of discussion group time among five to ten or fifteen, tops. The balance was individual research papers. As long as I kept up with my reading, I found that I actually looked forward to the seminar group meetings, particularly in the agriculture courses. I found that I often was able to relate to the discussion from my AID work. Classmates would frequently seek inputs from this old guy with actual experience.

I think my first term courses were economics and agricultural economics and marketing. Professor Riley was one of my instructors. In my economics class, I found my old friends, supply and demand curves, for example, from my undergraduate days. I also remember being surprised by what I thought was a brand-new factor in the study of economics—expectations. This new factor was believed to have a substantial impact on behaviors of producers and consumers of goods and services and, hence impact on an economy's macroeconomic performance. Conceptually that made sense to me. As a farmer decides what to grow in a coming season, he/she logically considers the cost of inputs to produce okra, cabbage or whatever and then compares the costs with market prices not yet known but expected! The farmer then presumably will decide to grow the product that will yield the best profit. I don't recall learning enough to calculate expectations to maximize my profits, however.

One of my early courses dealt with the relations between Congress and the executive branch of the USG in formulating legislation and implementing it. Having worked in the foreign aid agency, my point of reference was the Foreign Assistance Act. My work in AID/W preparing the Latin America portion of AID's annual funding request presentation to the Congress made me sort of an expert. I found the readings and discussions during this course especially interesting. At times, I felt like an assistant instructor as I was asked to present my experiences and observations about the relationships, and yes, the tensions between AID and the Hill in the process. In doing so I found myself stepping back, looking more closely at the relations and taking time to think about the views of Hill staffers and how they saw our interactions. In fact, this course gave me a better appreciation for the relationship. At least I learned to better understand the Hill side of it! This course was special among all the ones I took at MSU.

My time at Michigan State also gave Fran an opportunity to take courses as well. She took a couple of courses each term, mainly in the College of Education. She found them useful, catching up a bit since she graduated in Education and taught just one year in elementary school before going to the Philippines 12 years earlier. One course she took dealt with teaching English as a second language and focusing on how to do so while recognizing the value of staying in touch with a child's native language. It opened her eyes to a dimension of ESL often overlooked.

I can recall taking just one education course. The course I took was a survey of changing approaches to K-12 curricula in the U.S. I vaguely recalled from my middle school years the first approach--a two-track system of college preparatory and vocational ed. That was followed later by a broader, general academic curriculum dropping the notion of a separate vocational track. At the time, this was contrasted with a different system operating in places like Germany and elsewhere in Europe. That system, which I think still exists, separates the vocational from the general academic later in secondary school. The vocational course is partly business and vocational training, but includes a general academic component, ultimately leading to paid apprenticeships in specialized trades. Upon completing an apprenticeship, a graduate is recognized as a master of the trade which in Europe means both status and financial benefit. Looking back now, I still wonder if the Europeans haven't got a better, more egalitarian model for the U.S. and developing countries to seriously consider. But I digress.

All in all, I felt good about the combination of courses I had taken, about 15 credit hours for each semester, was worthwhile, contributing to my own growth and hopefully giving AID some return on its investment. The course load kept me busy, but somehow it was more easily managed as a rational package which also allowed me valuable time with my family, something which had proven difficult to do during the years in Honduras. By the way, my GPA at MSU was a notable improvement over my undergraduate performance.

Lansing also proved to be a nice place for the whole family. Fran got to avail herself of MSU's offerings. The boys' schooling worked out well and they made friends with kids in the neighborhood. There were things to do being near a huge university and there was a whole new state with a lot to see. There were always things going on at the huge MSU campus. Big Ten sports were a big deal. We took in one football game—with 100,000 of our closest MSU friends, and an occasional basketball game. The Spartans still had a good b-ball team, but not one that could be compared with the 1979 national champion-ship squad with Magic Johnson. A special sports memory is the one ice hockey game the four of us attended. Ice hockey is a big deal in the middle west. We found ourselves seated among avid, screaming fans. I even got my hand on an errant puck which was belted up into the seats. But my favorite memory of that hockey game is the cheer we could not help but join in: "Two-four-six-eight, we want blood on every skate!!"

There were some interesting places to go, all within an easy drive. On one occasion we drove up to maple syrup country, maybe an hour or so away. We saw the sap-tapping farming of the raw syrup and the cabin with the furnace where they boil the raw sap down to the rich, sweep maple syrup. And we bought some of this delicious nectar from the woods. Over the Christmas holidays, we drove to Frankenmuth, less than two hours north of Lansing. It's a little town with a lot of Bavarian architecture famous for its Oktoberfest and Christmas festivals. It was fun for the whole family, meant to be a one-day trip but we ended up staying over-night it was so much fun. Something I felt I had to do as a nearly lifelong Detroit Tiger baseball fan was to visit Tiger Stadium and see a ballgame. And I did.

Snow. We all looked forward to seeing snow, a lot of it, up in freezing Michigan. This was the one disappointment of our time in Michigan. We got the cold weather we anticipated with temps down around zero degrees Fahrenheit. But Lansing had less snow in the winter of 1979-80 than it had had in 15 or 20 years! We saw the white stuff just twice—once it barely covered the ground, the other time I guess we had 3-4 inches. We were not impressed. The other natural phenomenon we were told we might expect was a tornado. Thankfully, we experienced none. We did spend time in the basement shelter area following official tornado warnings on four or five occasions. Grand Rapids, an hour west of us, was hit by one during our year in Lansing.

As our time in Michigan was ending, I got word that I was being considered for an executive level assignment, but that the prospects in Latin America appeared to be in the slim-to-none range. There might be something in Africa, possibly Niger, but nothing definite. By the time we finished our travel back home and we discussed the onward assignment, the potential list had narrowed pretty much down to Niger, although I would explore options when I got back in touch with HQ.

Shortly before we left Michigan for our long trip home, Fran had a special surprise for us. She was expecting our third child, with a due date in mid-December. We had a pleasant trip back home, via northern Minnesota and as far west as Yellowstone National Park. Our stop in Minnesota was the little town of Battle Lake, in the northwest corner of the state. It was my father's birthplace. After a short stay there, we continued west to Yellowstone and then turned around and headed back to Maryland. We all loved Yellowstone, which I had visited when I was about Deron's age!

Q: When you think back, are there two or three things about your training that really benefited you as you moved on in your career?

LOVAAS: Certainly. First, I believe I benefitted not only from the coursework but also from the university experience for myself and Fran. I spent time with several people on the faculty of Agriculture, Agricultural Economics and Marketing with interest and some experience in developing countries as well as some grad students with Peace Corps experience and a great interest in possible futures in overseas development work. I feel I learned things from them and that our interactions stimulated my curiosity to learn more. Along the way I'd like to think I stimulated more interest in the work we do among those younger people with a possible future in development.

The classes I took and the papers I wrote no doubt left me with new knowledge that was useful to me and to the Agency in the years ahead. The management, public administration and even the economics courses (especially agricultural economics and marketing) undoubtedly factored into my work sometimes. And it was a good experience, including growth, for my family as well as myself. That is important to me.

Q: Would you recommend long-term training to others?

LOVAAS: In general, absolutely. Perhaps it would be better for some to earn a degree along the way, depending on the package of courses that is required and how helpful having a degree might be for their base resumes. Maybe I should have gotten the degree. On the other hand, I felt perfectly justified in taking coursework relevant to the kinds of things that I expected would be more relatable to overseas development work. Obviously, it also depends on where one is on one's career path. For example, if a person is changing career tracks, from the technical side to program planning or senior management, training relevant to the new direction would be indicated. I do think that more preparation in terms of selecting the training institution most appropriate for the officer's direction is important. Looking back, in my case, it might well have been better to have enrolled me at Syracuse or Cornell, for example. And the trainee should give it a lot more advanced thought than yours truly.

I would definitely come down on the side of building a year of academic training, or very specialized training like the War College, into the career plan of every AID Foreign Service Officer

Q: Before we go into Niger, could you set the context. What was happening? What were the key challenges in Niger, what did the mission look like in terms of size, portfolio, relationship with the embassy?

LOVAAS: Niger, the context: Let's begin with the geographic setting. Niger takes its name from the major river running through it. It is one of a group of eight countries along the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. The region is collectively referred to as the Sahel. The region suffered nearly continual drought from the mid-1970s onward. International donors, including the UN, the EU, African development agencies, and the United States designated the region for major assistance to monitor and mitigate effects of the drought conditions, to increase agricultural production and food security, and to provide basic health care and education. AID was the 6th largest donor, coordinating closely with other donors in the Sahel.

Niger, a former French colony, gained its independence in 1960. Their ties with France remained close, if mostly in the background. Its currency, the CFA (West African franc), was backed by the French. Niger was a civilian, single-party state ruled by Hamani Diori from independence until he was overthrown in a coup by General Seyni Kountche in 1974. Kountche ruled until his death in 1987. I don't remember the embassy pressing for a return to civilian rule.

If not the world's poorest country in 1981, Niger was close to it. Niger is larger in area than Nigeria and is about three times the size of the state of California. Hot, dry and resource scarce, Niger was sparsely populated (just over 6 million mostly Hausa inhabitants) but growing at 3.7% per year, among the highest rates in the world. Relations with the GON were good, but their capacity was very limited.

To finish my transition from Michigan to Niger.

When we got back to Washington from Lansing, I did some checking around to explore possibilities both in Latin America as well as Africa. The well was still dry for an assistant or deputy mission director post in LA. So, I decided to introduce myself in the Africa Bureau front office and see what options might be there. I was fortunate to meet with Ray Love, an experienced senior officer who happened to be acting AA at the time. We had an excellent meeting as he gave me a tour d'horizon of the outlook in African missions. He was both up on everything and very forthcoming. Niger was not the only possibility, but in his opinion, it was the best. Afterwards I dropped by the Niger Desk to introduce myself and check on current events. Myron Golden, USAID/Niger's Program Officer, was in town and we got a chance to get acquainted.

Since Niger was a French-speaking country, I would have to take French language training to get operational proficiency in it before going to post, so AID enrolled me in a full-time, intensive French training program. The best FSI would do for Fran's French training was to lend her all their French tapes for practice at home. Since she was well along in her pregnancy, studying at our temporary residence in her mother's home was not all bad. For me, learning French, my third language, at age 38 was a definite challenge. I missed my days learning Spanish, so straightforward and phonetic. What you heard was what you saw! I wrestled my way through, passed with the minimum required 2-plus which I hoped to build upon in Niger. Fran expected our new baby girl about the time I was completing French training. Jenni was born in a very crowded maternity ward in Silver Spring, our first US-born baby, the week before Christmas.

The Mission wanted me out there in January. There was no way we wanted to bring our newborn to Niger just a few weeks old. Nor did we want to take the boys out of school in the middle of the year, especially in light of the fact that the school in Niger would be an all-French lycee. We understood that if the lycee didn't work out, we'd have the option of sending them to an American overseas school in "nearby" Spain or schooling them stateside…which didn't appeal to us. With this difficult menu of options, we decided I would leave in January. Fran and THREE children would follow when the school year ended. I planned to fly back from Niger to accompany them on the flights to Niamey.
I flew into Niamey in mid-January and was met by Jay Johnson, the Mission Director. I remembered Jay from seeing him around Saigon where he was an AID Public Administration Adviser. We just knew each other by sight, just enough to say hello. The U.S. Ambassador was Jim Bishop, a solid career professional. The USAID Director and Assistant Director's offices were across the hall from the Ambassador's suite. Other USAID offices, staff and technical offices were at the Embassy compound, while the Joint Administrative Office (JAO) serving the whole US mission was a few miles away. To my surprise, the JAO was headed by none other than Bill Meeks, my former supervisor in Saigon! As I recall the whole USAID staff consisted of about 25-30 USDH personnel, including two American secretaries, and almost as many US PSCs. Most of the PSCs were associated with projects. We had very few FSNs, none beyond the clerical level that I recall, a dramatic difference from my experience in Vietnam and Honduras.

Here I was in Niamey, learning the real meaning of "hot and dry". So hot one could literally fry an egg on the hood of a dark-colored automobile! The temperature got up to

130 degrees Fahrenheit, with relative humidities as low as 15 percent! Rain was rare. Yet, it has a major river, the Niger, which flows from its northwest corner down to down south-central Niger then directly south through Nigeria to empty into the Atlantic. Along the narrow strip of land by the river vegetables and rice were grown. Beyond that narrow strip beside the Niger nearly all that was produced was millet and sorghum, the basic grains of the bare subsistence agriculture that fed about 75% of the population!

We had a dozen projects in the active bilateral portfolio. We called them AID projects, but in fact, several involved UN agencies (often UNDP-United Nations Development Program), EU countries or the Canadians. I don't recall any directly with the French but they were present, too. The framework was the regional Sahel development program which included extensive relationships with the World Meteorological Organization to monitor the Sahel weather.

One Sahelian regional project called AGRHYMET had its headquarters in Niamey. In collaboration with the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva—they had established an extensive array of metering stations to monitor the weather, to develop and publish a variety of reports on the weather and keep historical records. A primary objective was to predict the outlook for rainfall or lack thereof, a bit of an early warning system. The chronic drought conditions had left a psychological imprint of major proportions on the region and its people.

We had good working relationships with our GON counterparts. Project managers and office chiefs in the mission frequently met with their technical ministry counterparts. The director and I met as needed with the Ministers of Planning and Finance to talk about issues of concern within existing activities as well as talking about planning for future cooperation. There were occasional, mostly formal and official, get-togethers. Small social groups were less frequent than in Honduras, for example. The government often said the right things and wanted to head in the right direction, but at times the capacity wasn't there to back the words.

Because of the program's multi-donor Sahel context, we spent a great deal of time on donor coordination, both at the project level and at the program level. In fact, as Assistant Director, I spent some time on what you could call PL-480 Title II activities. There were a lot of PL-480 Title II commodities in Niger, but they came through the World Food Program out of Rome, not the bilateral AID mission. So, while not part of the Mission's program, they were part of my duties, largely meetings with WFP (World Food Program) and UNDP officials.

All our projects were grant funded. One project, a serious research activity, focused on developing new varieties for not only the basic grains sorghum and millet, but also the vegetable crops and rice grown along the banks of the Niger River. The search for drought-resistance varieties was a priority. It was a relatively new project, as were several of our projects.

Our Rural human resources and production support project was building a fledgling extension capacity in agriculture to package and deliver technical information to thousands of farmers. I should have mentioned a key statistic and obstacle to success in development endeavors, namely, a low literacy rate: about 10 percent!

Forestry and land use. That project involved reforestation in urban areas and other areas reachable with water from nearby Niger River sources. It supported service provided by minimally trained para-technical people who traveled to target areas to advise people on planting and caring for newly planted trees.

A Range and Herd Management project was led by a very capable animal husbandry expert from Texas as I recall, to target existing livestock herders—with cows, camels, even some sheep with training in improved animal management techniques appropriate to sub-Saharan ranges. Again, it involved training minimally skilled technicians available in the areas targeted to instruct herds in animal disease testing, accessing inoculations when certain symptoms were observed to locate sources of water and drilling shallow wells. One thing I was amazed to learn was that there were in fact major desert-like areas with relatively shallow, accessible aquifers! Fran and I and my sons even spent a day and night on the desert visiting with a group of camel herders, their livestock and the project manager to see for ourselves some of what was possible. In the morning, they invited me to sample fresh camel milk to go with breakfast. The project manager and I took them up on the offer. I found the milk a bit warm and salty for me, but otherwise OK.

The National Literacy Training Project. This an effort to train trainers of literacy who made frequent visits to rural communities to provide materials for and to train local para-technicians to become area trainers. We aimed to reach some 30,000 beneficiaries with this basic literacy instruction.

Rural Basic Health improvement. This was mostly training paramedical-type people who were available to travel out to the rural areas, providing very minimal basic health instruction such as identifying common disease symptoms. Once identified, they could instruct how to treat them in some cases with basic supplies made available in the community under the control of a community para-technician. A second phase project was planned, I believe in conjunction with WHO, to construct and staff a series of rural health clinics with a somewhat more advanced nurse technician and medical supplies, plus the ability to refer more serious cases to a higher-level medical facility….in the future?

Did you notice that I never once mentioned participant training or any training in the United States, often components found in projects in Latin America AID programs. None in Niger. The reasons for this are twofold, I think. 1) For Nigeriens, academic training is done in French, something that occurs only in France. 2) The minimal basic education capacity and pre-requisite preparation offer few candidates for long-term higher education. While the USIA back then did occasionally offer short-term cultural opportunities for Nigeriens, there weren't many. This is something that will change and may already have done so, now that 42 years have passed since I served in Niger!

It's hard to describe Niger. We had served in neighboring Nigeria to the south. Just the pair of Niger and Nigeria next door put in sharp relief just how different neighbors can be. Sadly, many parts of Nigeria are violent, unhappy places. Although endowed with a gentler climate and more natural resources, with 250 tribal groups forced together by the English as the colonial power, discord is Nigeria's "national" norm. The English did leave Nigeria with more of an education tradition than the French seem to have left in Niger. Yet, we did find the Nigeriens to be gentler, friendlier, in their quiet way, than what we had experienced in Nigeria.

Let me just leave you with a small personal anecdote. One day Fran went to shop in the Grande Marche, central market. She was in the market for a while when she realized she'd left her purse in the car in the parking lot outside. As she walked back to the car, here came a young man running in with her purse, which he promptly returned to her intact. But it was—how to describe Niger? A gentler people, a different place.

My own existence in Niger improved greatly when in June 1981, I flew home to pick up my bride and my THREE children and returned with them to Niamey. I remember older son Deron's comment as he looked out of our Boeing 707 Air France jet as it made a turn descending into the airport. "Oh my God, Dad! Where have you brought us now?!"
It was amazing enough to see the hot, dry, treeless reddish laterite from the air. It was even more striking as we drove from the airport through the city and we left the paved road onto the laterite for the last mile out to our new house, very near the desert. It was a big house with a big front porch with a mother-in-law room on one end. Out in the back was a swimming pool covered with plywood because we weren't allowed to have pools. There were a few small eucalyptus trees in the front yard. All was protected by a Tuareg guard wearing a typical blue robe with a machete hanging from his waist.

The lycee the boys would attend was in Niamey. They went to school in a carpool with a couple of neighbor kids, including Yuri Lowenthal who was the son of AID's Jim Lowenthal who lived down the road from us. Yuri (today the video game voice of Spiderman!) and my sons are still in frequent contact! I believe the lycee turned out to be an enriching experience for the boys. Fran and I did okay in French, but the boys got right into it and absorbed it like sponges. The lycee, of course, had a very different curriculum, but they did well. As a matter of fact, Deron had a leading role in a play they did at Christmas time. They had a good group of friends, mostly from the international community and some from the AID community.

Fran got involved in USAID/Niger, briefly assisting the Niger Range and Livestock Project Manager, Dan Stillman, as a statistical assistant, compiling data for the project's livestock records. She kept data on how many animals there were, what they were fed, how their weights changed over time, etc. She enjoyed learning about the project's activities and progress. That was the same project we visited on our overnight in the desert.

After Fran had been in country for about a year, new Ambassador Bill Casey (a political appointee member of the Coors Beer family) asked her if she would organize and manage a curriculum supplement program for children of U.S. mission families. This would help (elementary thru grade 12) children attending the lycee help fill in the gaps between the curriculum in the lycee and curriculums back in the States so that they would be able to catch up back home. Fran accepted the challenge and set up a successful program that served fifteen to twenty kids from mission families, including the Caseys. The program not only helped the kids, but also made it easier for the mission to recruit candidates considering service in Niger who had school-age kids.

While we might complain about the generally poor state in which the French left Niger, they did leave a tradition of fine cuisine. We had three favorite restaurants. One was a favorite of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers… and the Lovaas family. I don't remember its name, but we called it the Peace Corps restaurant. Its feature dish was capitan, a nice-tasting white fish, vaguely reminiscent of haddock, from the Niger River. And you could eat all of it, including its cheeks. It was eminently affordable and came with rice and fresh veggies. Another place we liked was a bit more expensive, featuring frog legs, for example. We had to park in its lot down by the river under stanchions with bright lights. The lights attracted swarms of bugs, which in turn attracted lots of toads dining under the lights. Toads not frogs, but I tried to convince Fran and the kids that's what we'd be having for dinner inside. The third restaurant was our Sunday brunch favorite at the Les Ronier Motel outside Niamey. The motel itself had small, thatch-roofed rooms. We went out there for scrumptious omelets and fresh mussels. It was a modest place back then. I recently googled Les Roniers, now the Ronier Doum, and found it now a four-star hotel and conference center!

While we were in Niger, we got a surprise visit from Fran's mother and my father. It was a surprise because while they lived just a couple miles from each, they never socialized. Furthermore, my father and I had rarely spoken for years. Fran and I didn't know what to make of it but were pleased that our children's grandparents were coming for a visit. We showed them around the small city of Niamey and, of course, the U.S. mission. The highlight of their visit was a road trip to the market town of Ayorou about a 4-hour drive north up the Niger River, near the border of what is now Burkina Faso. We stayed there overnight in a small, primitive cinder block hotel. The large market did not disappoint. It had an amazing array of regional handicrafts, local food products, and something my father would never forget: the traditional "dentist"! He was a large man seated on a plush chair with a huge bronze tureen, over three feet in diameter and nearly as deep in front of him. It was filled with teeth and pieces of teeth he'd apparently extracted over the years.

We saw a local fisherman with a pirogue who offered to take us out for a ride on the Niger River. Fran's mom was thrilled with the idea. She and Fran accepted the offer. So, he paddled the boat with the two of them aboard out into the river. The river was probably half a mile, across and flowing gently. But they didn't get very far out, when suddenly there was a hippopotamus coming towards them. I've never seen a guy paddle so fast, heading back towards that shore. It wasn't a terribly close encounter, but it was something they would not forget!

On the road back home the next day, we saw some little boys on the side of the road, waving at us. They shouted, “giraffes this way”, pointing off to the flat and brushy area to the east. We followed them and, indeed, we soon saw three magnificent giraffes feeding off some trees on the edge of the desert. We got within 20 or 30 feet of them and took some beautiful pictures. Another special memory for our folks, and our kids. Back home, after our adventure we noticed that Fran’s mother’s pure white hair had turned uniformly laterite red, from the long dusty road trip!

The highlight of the 1981 Embassy Christmas party on the ambassador’s lawn was a camel striding in with Santa Claus on its back. And Santa Claus was an AID IDI who had the build of Santa Claus and a hearty laugh to go with it. Seeing Santa was a high point of the party for all the kids.

The highlight of the following Thanksgiving was a mission-wide touch football game on the same lawn. We called it the Millet Bowl. Families watched the men of all ages play ball. It was fun for some young PCVs and some of us older guys, too. The man who originally was supposed to be our referee didn’t show up. That was the same AID intern who had played Santa on the camel at Christmas. He was a reliable fellow, so we were surprised he was a no show. We learned later that he was found dead in his quarters, apparently from a heroin overdose, with a needle still in his hand! He had just returned from a trip to France. In his suitcase they found sausages stuffed with heroin. The Ambassador subsequently told me that investigators had traced the heroin found with our IDI to a network involving some staff of the U.S. Embassy in France.

I’d been fortunate in avoiding the illnesses that many colleagues in AID missions had suffered over the years. My number came up in Niger. I caught hepatitis type A. It turned me yellow and put me down for two or three weeks. I felt totally weak and nothing tasted good, including cigarettes that I smoked heavily. My sons took advantage of that and insisted on throwing away all that I had in the house. I was too weak to fight them.

I found out that the Peace Corps doctor was quite good, and I recovered fully in a relatively short time. Fran and I debated where I caught it. She thought I caught it by eating freshly cooked lamb I bought from a roadside vendor. She may have been right, but there were other possibilities because I wasn’t as careful as I should have been on many occasions. I liked to sample things and did so. Some said it could have been the camel’s milk, but I don’t think so. I was fortunate. About the same time Hepatitis got me, the young commander of the marine security guard contingent caught malaria and hepatitis simultaneously and nearly died.

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In general, it wasn’t that dangerous a place in terms of disease, nor in terms of crime such as we saw in Nigeria. As I noted earlier, I found Nigeriens to be lovely people. We were fortunate to visit several interesting places during our tour—overnight in the livestock project site, Agadez and the uranium mine, and the fabulous market of Ayorou. In fact, I’d be happy to go back to Niger; I’d like to go back and see how they’re doing. The work we were doing there was just the beginning.

The Niger experience. Niger was different in many ways from my prior overseas experience. One must start with the fact that Niger in 1981 was seen as likely the least developed country on the planet. Their people were the poorest in per capita income and the least educated. Yet, their birth rate was among the highest. The country had few natural resources (apart from some uranium) and a hostile climate for growing their food.

In Latin America, the United States was a major presence both in terms of our political influence and our leadership role in providing foreign assistance. In Niger, the U.S. was a newer arrival compared to the colonial power France and other European countries. As a provider of economic assistance, we trailed both the Europeans and UN agencies. We were newer at development assistance and still learning how things worked in Niger. To the extent we continue in Niger and grow our development assistance, both our influence and program impact should increase. Now is probably a good time for it.

I've mentioned several times the human resources constraint in Niger and our disadvantage in addressing that constraint, especially in higher education. For Niger to grow economically and socially, this constraint must be addressed as a priority at every level. The primitive, low-level para-technical training in our portfolio in the early 1980s was a beginning. I hope it continues and grows. For me, I think it essential to follow that by building training and formal education into all AID-assisted projects and investing in them as a separate sector as well. For sustainable growth, Niger must develop its capacity to build education institutions going forward.

As the human resource base expands, I trust and hope that Nigeriens become more genuine counterparts in planning and managing AID-assisted project investments. I'd like to bring myself up to date with Niger today to see how far they've come.

In closing, I want to recognize additional special people who contributed much to what successes we had during my time in Niger. Terry Barker, Myron Golden's deputy, in the program office was clearly ready to become a chief program officer somewhere. Harry Shropshire, Controller when I got there, was the best controller I had seen in AID. Once again I was impressed with Bill Meeks, my boss and mentor in Vietnam. He proved to be an excellent manager of the challenging Niger JAO operation. And then there was Jay Johnson, the Mission Director when I arrived. I only had six months with him, but I thought he was a good man and a capable Director, and a man with an important, higher-level goal. I came to believe that he came to Niger with a personal goal to make USAID/Niger not only a successful mission but also a model for its diversity and success led by African American managers. He may have succeeded to some extent, but I'm sure it was not all he had hoped for, in part because AID didn't provide all the quality personnel he sought. I shared his frustration and admired him for having what I perceived to be his goal.

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Q: Today is Wednesday, August 16, 2023 and I'm continuing my interview with John Lovaas. And John, today you are going to be sharing with us your experience in Panama.

LOVAAS: All right. I had stayed behind to pack us out of Niger while Fran and the kids departed when the boys' lycee school year ended. I knew that my next post would be Panama. I had asked for a change of venue and felt fortunate to find the LA Bureau receptive, offering me the Deputy Director position in Panama. We enjoyed home leave with family and friends before going on to Panama in July 1983.

Panama is a tiny country linking South and North America with a canal linking the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean Sea. A true crossroads of the world!

When we arrived in July 1983, General Rubén Dario Paredes was the Commander of the National Guard and the chief of state. He was elevated to the top in 1981 following the mysterious plane crash death of charismatic General Omar Torrijos. Torrijos came to power in the Guard's *coup d'etat* that overthrew Panama's last democratically elected president in 1970. Shortly after we arrived in Panama, I attended the huge ceremony celebrating the change of commanders of the Guard. I'll never forget incoming Commander Manuel Noriega saying to the retiring General Paredes, "Don't worry, Ruben. It is safe to put on your parachute and step out of the plane. We are with you. You will have a wonderful landing and you have a terrific future ahead of you!" Two weeks later, Noriega put him in jail.

In 1977 Torrijos and President Jimmy Carter completed negotiations of what the Panamanians called the Torrijos-Carter Canal Treaty. The Treaty laid out the process for the United States to transfer the Panama Canal to Panama. The gradual process would conclude with Panama taking over control after December 31, 1999. In the meantime, the Panamanians began to share management responsibility and, crucially, were getting a growing share of the substantial canal revenues. Military rule was a source of tension with the U.S. during the process.

Note: Role of the Panama Defense Force, formerly National Guard. The PDF served both as the instrument of national defense and police. They also had the political power, morphing into the final arbiter, either ruling directly or deciding who rules. In a country with a population that was about two-thirds black or mixed race, the PDF was an alternative route to upward mobility for diverse, low-income youth to achieve both income and status.

Manuel **A**ntonio **N**oriega, the PDF chief of intelligence and suspected by some to be responsible for Torrijos's death, took over from Paredes. In a typically Panamanian play on Spanglish words, Noriega referred to himself as the MAN. And he meant it.

U.S. Ambassador at the time was Ted Briggs, a career diplomat and a competent, demanding chief. The USAID Mission Director was Robin Gomez. I knew Robin only by his reputation as a topnotch project development pro and then director. The USAID offices were in the old, five-story Cementos Panama building downtown.

When I arrived, USAID there were about 20 USDH, down from twenty-six a couple of years earlier, with forty-three FSNs and a couple of US PSCs. Here's one notable contrast I want to mention. Unlike USAID/Niger, the Panama mission had professional-level FSNs in just about every office, including a top-grade Senior Engineer with an encyclopedic understanding of his country and our program. The mission had extraordinary depth, making it pretty much the equal of a mission with a substantially larger USDH presence.

Panama, the country, was light years ahead of Niger and had a tougher time justifying a mission our size, but it had the Panama Canal.

The population was about two million with an 85-percent literacy rate. The economy was growing at about 2.3 percent, showing signs of stagnation. The gross domestic product per capita, $2,800, was one of the highest in Latin America. The country was endowed with excellent agricultural and fisheries potential for a wide range of tropical and subtropical fruits, veggies, plus two oceans to fish. Yet this sector accounted for only 7.5 percent of GDP, despite its potential.

The Canal made Panama a natural center for international banking and trade, largely in the urban corridor with Panama the city in the south, Colon in the north. Colon, in fact, had the second-largest free trade zone in the world, after only Hong Kong. This accounts in part for agriculture and fisheries being such a small share of GDP.

USAID development assistance levels, in the $25 million range in the 1970s were coming down because of relatively high-income levels, the meddlesome military, and strangely enough because of the Treaty which called for Panama to get a greatly increased share of canal revenues. But military assistance levels, military sales and military assistance grants, increased and by fiscal '84 exceeded development assistance. Presumably this was to improve relations with the PDF and encourage better behavior!!

A centerpiece of the Mission's program was macroeconomic policy dialogue, aimed at increasing the efficiency of the public sector and the performance of the economy. Our role was to encourage public-private sector dialog assisted initially by AID-funded studies and advisory assistance. Gradually, we intended to support building capacity in the Ministries of Planning and Finance to identify studies and support them.

The dialog included addressing our major focus sectors, especially Agriculture in order to increase agricultural production and non-traditional exports; and employment-generating export and small business development. Unemployment was a serious problem, with open unemployment in the twenty percent range. Thus, you'd see unemployment as a focal area across the Mission's project portfolio. In fact, the policy dialogue part of encouraging job creation was more pressing as the 1980s drop off in world trade negatively affected Panama. We were successful in helping to create APEDE, a private sector nonprofit dedicated to small business creation and workforce training. Indication of its success could be seen in the strong support from the private sector's heavy hitters.

The AID Mission had generally excellent relations with the GOP and with the private sector when I got there and through 1983 and ’84, due in part, I believe, to Robin Gomez’s collegial style. In spite of a bit of distrust of Americans inherent in Panamanians’ long-term relationship with the US, we always had people with whom we could sit down socially or otherwise to work our way through a disagreement. I learned some of this from Robin’s example. One of my go-to people was Ricaurte Vasquez, the Minister of Planning, a counterpart and friend. On one occasion, he dropped in at our home while my parents happened to be visiting from Maryland, and my dad and I were watching a football game. The Minister knew I would likely be watching that game. We watched the game together and worked through a program issue that we needed to resolve. My recollection is that he stayed through the game, got to know my dad, and that we moved the issue towards resolution.

The Mission’s agriculture sector program included a Technology Development and Dissemination activity alongside our Food Processing and Agro-Industry project targeting export markets. The portfolio made good progress building Panamanian research capacity for exportable products such as melons and cucumbers. One area crucial to progress was the GOP meeting commitments to increase existing extension service capacity to deliver to farmers new varieties and practices developed in collaboration with Rutgers University. Export marketing also progressed, getting new products into regional markets and some into U.S. markets, a longer-range target. While output impacts were modest over the 1984-86 period, the future looked promising for the sector and for rural employment.

An area of new interest and a modest investment was occurring with NGOs working on environmental issues, such as reforestation, especially in watersheds affecting the Canal. USAID played an important role in encouraging local NGO startups, including providing grant funds and technical advice from experienced U.S. NGOs. Most encouraging was the public response to their work in the form of volunteer effort and local funds contributed to the activities.

A potential urban development concept was in the works, a plan for improved land use planning in the canal corridor, with Panama on one end, Colón on the other to encourage more sensible development. Part of the plan would get USAID into housing production. Before I left, USAID actually signed a $25 million housing investment guarantee project for “below medium income housing.” The land-use planning part of the project had another objective, i.e., to improve the quality of land use around the Panama Canal watershed. Deforestation was underway, a potentially serious problem for the canal’s source of water.

The period 1983 to ’86, was not a good time for international trade and Panama took a hit. That’s the nature of Panama with its canal. I arrived in the summer of 1983. Shortly after Thanksgiving, the Kissinger Commission, a bipartisan commission examining the crises in Central America toured the region and included Panama at the end of its itinerary. Although Kissinger himself was not among them, it was a high-level group that

spent a couple of days meeting with the country team and Panamanian leaders. The Reagan administration decided it was time for an in-depth examination of the political ferment and active conflicts in Central America, and a reboot of U.S. policy. Although Panama is not generally considered part of Central America, its proximity, internal political tension and the delicacy of the canal transfer process militated its inclusion. The Commission's mandate apparently included looking not only at political and diplomatic responses, but also at potential major foreign assistance as part of the package. It was a big deal for the US mission and the Panamanians.

The visit seemed to go well, but it wasn't clear how much Panama would be a part of their report or might receive as a result. The Commission's report and recommendations came out a couple of months after the visit. Panama indeed was a part of it. They proposed assistance for Panama, including ESF for the first time, something on the order of $50 million, optimistically projected to start in FY 1985.

A major part of what the Commission proposed for Panama was funding for what they called Central America Peace Scholarships (CAPS). Compared to existing USAID funds for training in the United States, CAPS would be a substantial increase. CAPS would be open to a great variety of training, technical and academic, for economic development goals as well as to promote democracy and, by its nature, close ties with the United States. In 1985 funding was presented to Congress with funds actually appropriated in 1986, about the time Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams publicly called on the PDF to overthrow Noriega. My tour ended in 1986.

Nicolás Ardito Barletta was elected President in 1984. Within eleven months Noriega and company ousted him, replacing him with Arturo Delvalle. Delvalle lasted as nominal President from 9/85 to 2/88, during Noriega's *de facto* rule. Noriega's PDF ousted Delvalle in 1988 and followed by Noriega's drug connection indictment. In December 1989 the United States invaded Panama and removed Noriega. I came back on TDY and was there for 2-3 weeks during Just Cause to help restart the AID program.

Q: What challenges did you face dealing with a military government in terms of the implementation of your program? Or were there challenges?

LOVAAS: Occasionally, there were delays in the policy dialogue, in the joint studies activity, and possibly in project implementation if a minister-level signature were required after the President changed. So, when a president got tossed, we once had to sort out who was the new minister of Finance or Agriculture perhaps. We were fortunate that our linchpin counterpart, the Minister of Planning (Vasquez), stayed the same. I remember a finance minister changing. In any case, it didn't get to the point where we closed down the program during my time. As I was leaving in 1986, the relationship was souring fast.

Q: When Reagan came in, the Caribbean Basin Initiative began to focus on business -- a major change in our approach to Central America. How did that impact?

LOVAAS: There was a benefit there, because the CBI eased access to the U.S. market for Panamanian goods. I believe it was introduced before I arrived. Remember the nature of Panama's economy because of the canal and being an international crossroad of business. That brings with it a variety of other development-related issues and opportunities not found in a typical country with an AID mission.

Q; Were there instances of corruption, issues with implementation of your program, or was that not an issue at that time?

LOVAAS: It would be hard for me to say that corruption wasn't an issue in Panama. However, I do not remember any that directly affected our program.

I do believe that we had an advantage by virtue of having several senior, experienced Panamanian employees with deep knowledge of their country, how things worked and how to solve problems. They gave the Mission a good range of vision, so much so that we often saw problems coming before damage was done. In Panama misinformation could be frequent. The ability to discern the real from the unreal was crucial.
I'll never forget one thing some Panamanians enjoyed doing for fun. They called it "Tirando bolas". That would translate literally to "getting balls rolling", but in fact meant "starting rumors". Panamanians loved to do it. I heard it most often in the context of Panama politics. It was great fun to start a rumor and see if it caught on, or how it might change as it circulated. A typical bola might be a rumor that the PDF was about to make so and so the next Minister of something. This could ridicule the PDF role in politics while at the same time poking fun at the person targeted. This was a particularly apt bola in a place where the PDF could switch people in power, up to and including the president! It was fun to watch IF you could tell fact from "bola".

I was fascinated by this sort of rascality I found in Panamanians. It added spice to life, contributing to Panama being an interesting place. I also learned to respect the Panamanians we worked with and the employees of USAID. For example, Jose Sanchez. He was our chief engineer and so much more. In a parallel universe, he would have made a first-class USAID Director or head of his own business. It will be interesting to see how far the country can go, with its own canal and assuming it succeeded in rationalizing its national security and police institutions.

Panama was a good experience for our family, with but one reservation. My sons, Deron and Terry, did well in their junior and senior high school years in their respective studies and extracurricular endeavors. Both starred in leading roles in annual school plays. Both boys had good friends, some living in our neighborhood. Also, I got to volunteer with them on camping trips with their Boy Scout Troop. Daughter Jenny did well in pre-school and kindergarten, and Fran got to join her as a volunteer for the Bluebirds and Daisy Scouts. Besides near full-time work with our young daughter, Fran was both active in, and President of, the American Embassy Wives group.

When we left Panama before the boys finished high school and returned to Virginia, they experienced separation anxiety from an abrupt breaking of important friendships in their

final years of high school.. They had friends among Panamanians and kids from U.S. military and USAID families. I did not realize how wrenching this move was for the family. The boys felt the effects of the separation anxiety pretty much through their final year of high school, and even beyond. I don't have many regrets, but this one is a big one that I wished I could have done over.

I would return briefly to Panama in January 1990, during the Just Cause operation to observe what was left and to report back to the LA Bureau as planning began for a possible return by AID. One thing was clear, neither Ambassador Hinton nor I were inclined to lean towards the pre-conflict mission model. I believe he saw it as a very minor presence, possibly managed out of the Embassy Economic section. I envisioned a small USAID presence, not within the Embassy, all contingent on what stood up as the new Government of Panama!

I was also there while the US military was playing loud music outside the Papal Nuncio's residence where Noriega was claiming sanctuary. I also observed up close the damage from the operation to put down PDF resistance and capture the general. I walked through the PDF compound in the city, an area about the size of a football field surrounded by barracks. All across this field there were bullet holes in the ground in perfect squares with about 30 inches between holes. The bullets were fired by computer-operated gatling guns in helicopters flying over the ground. It was hard for me to imagine how anyone crossing that field could have survived the precision of that gunfire. It was no wonder the battle for control did not last very long.

I thought back to pleasant memories of this beautiful little country. Fishing in Lake Gatun, the major body of water which forms part of the canal passage. It was a great place to fish, in water originally stocked with fish by one of the fruit companies. Yes, there is a fish story! Three USAID gringos fishing from a rowboat. Two of the three had lines in the water. The third person's job was to take fish off the hooks as they were pulled into the boat and promptly re-bait the hooks to get back in the water. We took turns fishing and baiting. We literally caught them that fast. The fish were peacock bass, called "sargentos" (sergeants) by Panamanians because of their prominent three stripes. In a couple hours we caught as many fish as we could fit in our large cooler. The last step was taking the fish right to the dock where there was always a young man available to take off the scales and filet the fish to take home. What fun!

Our family's favorite weekend retreat was Boquete, a small town in the mountains of westernmost Panama. We rented a nice log cabin on a lovely hillside. It was rustic but had the basic water and electricity and a large, stuffed mountain lion in the living room to guard us. On the way to Boquete and the cabin we'd stop in David to get a dozen or two of crabs, very much like our own Chesapeake blue crabs, to steam and eat at the cabin.

Q: Fascinating. Well, thank you.

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Q: Today is Wednesday, August 23, 2023 and I am interviewing John Lovaas. He will be focusing today on his last two assignments with the Contra task force in Washington from '86 to '90 and his final assignment as deputy mission director to USAID Salvador.

So, John, you're on.

LOVAAS: Upon returning to Washington from Panama, I became Deputy Director of the Office of Central American Affairs. Chuck Costello became the office director a few months later.

Central American Affairs was the biggest and busiest of the geographic offices in the bureau at the time, with substantial program levels and publicity resulting from the Kissinger Commission's report, continuing civil war in El Salvador, and the rule of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The work of the office was standard for geographic offices--backstopping our mission programs in the region, serving as the point of contact with the missions, and handling external inquiries about our programs from stateside. For the purposes of this history, I will focus on special assignments I had, including a lengthy detail to the Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance, or Contra Aid task force.

My first special assignment came through the Assistant Administrator's office in the LA Bureau. There was interest in the Reagan Administration, particularly in State and AID, in providing some assistance to the private sector in Nicaragua. There were some informal talks underway with the Sandinistas, but they weren't very promising. I was asked by the Assistant Administrator to travel to Nicaragua and quietly explore interest among private sector leaders. He wanted me to go down there, after touching base with our state colleagues to coordinate and get their guidance on how to approach a visit in an unfriendly setting. Having never been to Nicaragua, I wanted to do some background reading and meet with people who had served in Nicaragua, especially ones with recent experience. I spent a couple of weeks getting as much background as I could, including getting people to call and introduce me to some private sector Nicaraguans they knew whom I could contact there.

I spent a week or ten days there. I must admit that I felt a bit uncomfortable in a country where I really didn't know anyone and with a government which might not appreciate my presence. My embassy contacts and the Nicaraguans at the Chamber of Commerce where I had my first meeting put me more at ease. I explained to them that I wasn't there to offer major assistance, much less a new AID mission. I asked them to tell me what kind of technical help would be helpful to them, to strengthen the private sector—either nonprofit or for-profit organizations. Among the organizations represented at the meeting were producer and trade associations reps, including various retailers, livestock ranchers and cooperatives, builders, and the chamber itself.

It was difficult for me to gauge what kind of cross section I was meeting, but there seemed to be interest in talking, exploring ideas. There were some concerns about what risks might be entailed by getting involved and a desire to ascertain, frankly, what was in it for them. Access to U.S. technical expertise topped the list for useful assistance. We

talked about research or centers of excellence in sectors of interest, and organizational development practitioners. I was thinking of foundations and perhaps U.S. universities. "Access" presumably would take the form of technical specialists traveling to Nicaragua to work with interested private sector groups and/or the Nicaraguans attending conferences, technical fora, or even specialized courses of particular interest in the U.S. Over the several days I was there, we followed up with small group meetings and ultimately fleshed out the outline of a modest proposal for a pilot activity.
How, and by whom, would the activity be carried out? There would have to be a group of the private sector parties in Nicaragua to coordinate the activity and work through a contact in the AID organization, someone who might travel to Nicaragua as needed. Looking back, it was somewhat vague.

I brought back to Washington the outline of a very preliminary proposal, submitted it to the Assistant Administrator and the LAC/Cen Director, and briefed both on my experience in Nicaragua. While they appreciated my contribution and the fact that there were some Nicaraguans alive and well in the private sector with some interest, the interest in Washington seemed to have fizzled since our last conversations. My report and proposal outline would be run up the ladder…. but I shouldn't hold my breath. I was not very surprised, and my recollection is that that was pretty much the end of it.
From my point of view, it was not a waste of time, but I sometimes wonder what might have been possible. I'd had an interesting trip to Nicaragua and a chance to meet some good people in a most difficult situation. I was reminded that the AID business can be fickle if the political stars are not favorably aligned for such an endeavor. It didn't require a great deal of my time, and I was soon back in LAC/CEN among a team of good people with work to do.

Meanwhile conflicts continued in El Salvador with the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and in Nicaragua between the Sandinista Government and the U.S.-backed Contras operating out of Honduras. A regional peace process (Contadora) led by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias was gaining momentum. Democrats in Congress opposing Reagan administration's backing of the Contras got involved, partly in response to bad publicity for the CIA's covert military assistance and accusations that the State Department was not being transparent with Congress. The Democrats moved to end military assistance to the Contras and instead approved humanitarian assistance with a view to supporting a transition to peace. The Congress designated AID to provide humanitarian assistance in a transparent manner and report to the Congress in doing so. This effectively dealt with the Hill's concern about the lack of accountability by State.

One day I got a call from Mr. Ted Morse, an AID mission director somewhere in Africa. I had no idea who he was. He explained that he'd been called by Ray Love, AA/AFR a couple of days earlier and asked to get on a plane for Washington immediately to come and meet with Administrator Alan Woods. He'd met with Mr. Woods and said he was calling me on the Administrator's behalf. He assured me he knew all about me. He asked if I were aware that Congress had passed legislation cutting off military aid to the Contras and directing AID to take charge of providing strictly humanitarian assistance to them while a settlement of the conflict was negotiated. I told him I had heard about it, but did

not know the details. He then asked if I would come in the next morning (Saturday) to meet with him, learn more about it, and see if I were interested in playing a part in it! Curiosity had the best of me, and I agreed to do so.

The next morning, I walked into the Administrator's office and there was this man with a big smile wearing sweats. He apologized for the attire, and said his suitcase had gone astray. He'd flown in 2-3 days earlier from Zambia where he was the Director. Only then did he find out why he'd been called. Administrator Woods told him that he wanted him to head up a new task force to provide humanitarian assistance to the Contras; that is to feed, clothe, house and prepare them for a return to civilian life in Nicaragua once peace accords were in place. He told me a bit of his own history, e.g., managing major disaster response programs. Then, he got right to it and asked me if I'd join him as his Deputy Director for Operations on the Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance (TFHA). He argued it would be in my best interests, and "burnish my credentials" for the future. The assignment would start immediately, planning the effort for what he thought would be six months to a year.

I was frankly fascinated by the mission. I could taste the bait, but I was concerned by the "immediate" part of it. I wasn't sure how this would go over with my office. Ted assured me this was an emergency as well as the top priority of the Administrator and those above him, and it wasn't long term. The Congressional mandate in fact was six months… but renewable.

He wasn't kidding. Three days later I was on a plane to Miami with a State Department escort officer to meet with the Political Directorate of the Contras.

As I went to meet with the political level of the Contras, I reminded myself that the central mission was to maintain the Contras as a standing force, even though our assistance would be purely humanitarian. We would be supporting the negotiating process. That is, the Contras would maintain a presence in Nicaragua and outside Nicaragua during negotiations, presumably to keep the pressure on the Sandinistas for a settlement. Within AID, this was not something that was received with great joy. From an AID standpoint, including Administrator Alan Woods at the time, this was highly likely to give us a black eye as an agency, as it had to those who had gone before us.

And from the Contra standpoint, going from assistance needed by a military force being provided with arms and ammo all in secret to bright sunshine and transparency for nothing but food, clothing, shelter and literacy training was deeply puzzling…at best. Imagine for a moment that you were part of the political leadership of this force how well you would have received this news. Their first question might in fact have been—is there any way out of this?

For my state escort officer, this was the handoff to AID. Goodbye? The Directorate's office was located in a nondescript building in the cargo area of Miami International Airport. Meanwhile, Mr. Morse back in Washington, was meeting with congressional staff on the Hill to establish guidelines for the new and transparent assistance.

Q: Why did the Congress pass that, the lack of—no confidence vote?

LOVAAS: As I understood it, the Congress was not satisfied with the State Department's accounting for the funds it was responsible for making available to the Contras. I had been told that State was unable to account satisfactorily for more than half the funds they spent. AID was the indicated agency to manage humanitarian assistance, not State. So, it was not a vote of no confidence, per se.

My job was to meet with the Contra leadership, their high command, the civilian government as it were, government in exile if you will, and introduce myself and explain the new mandate from Congress for U.S, assistance and the transformation from a covert program to full transparency and a high standard of accountability.

The Directorate's office was listed on the wall in the elevator lobby as PAIS-Pan American International Services. There was another man in the lobby waiting for an elevator. My escort officer introduced him to me as Mr. Hammer. A few moments later three Latinos walked into the lobby, also headed for the elevator, and warmly greeted the fellow I'd just met. They obviously knew him, and they addressed him as Jorge. My escort officer promptly completed the introduction, adding the full name as Jorge Escona, the same man he had introduced as Mr. Hammer a couple of minutes earlier. I played along and shook Mr. Escona's hand. I was no longer in Kansas it seemed.

Upstairs, we met around a conference table with six members of the Directorate. They were the civilian authority to whom Comandante 380 (Contra military commander Enrique Bermudez) reported. Notre Dame graduate and businessman Adolfo Calero chaired our meeting. After mutual introductions and pleasantries, I explained that we were in the process of staffing a team to manage the program and would have people, including Director Morse and myself, in Washington and people in Honduras to manage the logistics and assistance flow to the main force there. I stressed that these would be people experienced in overseas programs delivering humanitarian assistance. I stressed that the new law mandated humanitarian assistance, i.e., to feed, clothe, shelter and provide some job-related training. The Congress also emphasized transparency and rigorous accountability and oversight. The discomfort in the room was palpable.

I sensed they were not thrilled with this Peace Corps-type who'd come to work with an armed military force and likely had no clue how to work with armed guerillas. I assured them that the USAID team was experienced in high-pressure, extraordinary emergencies around the world, and that we had experience in supplying all manner of relief and recovery assistance in disasters, natural and manmade. There were few questions, and those they did have dealt mainly with how soon we would be in business. In any case, we parted friends and the reality of it was they knew I wasn't there to negotiate. The Congress of the United States had changed the terms for the operation and there was no going back.

We'd grow to five or six people and, in a few weeks, to about a dozen. We had a hastily carved out corner of the Main State third floor for our offices. Ted had identified a couple of key people even while I was in Miami, including his deputy for legal affairs, Bob Meegan, a capable, pragmatic guy and fine lawyer at the same time. He'd also located and signed up Phil Bucheler to be our field chief in Honduras to run the logistics operation there. I knew Phil from our days in Honduras. I remembered a natural action officer with excellent problem-solving skills and a can-do attitude, and little patience with bureaucracy. He would be a perfect counterpart for the Contras.

Standing up our team in Honduras was top priority. Space was limited but the Embassy squeezed us in. We soon filled the space with TFHA staff and some for auditors, of whom we'd have many. The AID mission in Honduras, in the building across the street from the embassy, would have nothing to do with the task force. In fact, Director John Sanbrailo declared the entire AID building off limits to TFHA staff. If I'd been the AID Director, I probably would have taken similar action to disassociate the mission from us.

Meanwhile, Ted worked assiduously to build intricate working relationships with all our overseers on the Hill. I had seen congressional oversight up close when I worked on congressional presentations in the LA Bureau, so I knew something about dealing with the Hill. But I'd never seen anything like this. Ted Morse clearly knew that turf. Administrator Woods had it right. We had to report to no less than seven congressional committees: House and Senate Appropriations, House and Senate Foreign Affairs, House and Senate Intelligence, and, somehow, also a committee for hunger!? It was chaired then by Leon Panetta. Ted was the conductor of this extraordinary orchestra.

As for the great congressional interest in accountability, Ted came up with the most marvelous, multi-layered assurance policy for accountability that would bury potential critics. With the backing of the AID Inspector General, we arranged to have auditors from both the inspector general's office and ultimately the General Accounting Office assigned to work with us and have oversight responsibilities simultaneously. In addition, Ted demanded that we have money to contract line auditors to see every TFHA transaction. Price Waterhouse Cooper won the contract and was on site with our team.

In the Honduras office, Price Waterhouse Cooper auditors watched transactions as they occurred. The AID IG auditors would do periodic summary audits, and the GAO had staff in Honduras as well monitoring the concurrent audit process and overall operations. AID personnel never stayed overnight in the Contra camps, except Ted or me if necessary. GAO auditors would make brief visits for spot checks on occasion. They would see all our receipts. During eighteen months of operations, we had 121 sub audits performed. There were no outstanding recommendations at the end. As I look back on it, it is still hard to believe. There were of course downsides to all this overlapping audit activity, which I'm sure you can appreciate.

Q: Impressive.

LOVAAS: Impressive from one point of view. Perhaps less so if you're trying to manage the program or if you are an intended beneficiary. And I should note that not all Hill staff approved of the multi-layered audit coverage. It also drew the occasional ire from the Contras, from their mostly Republican sympathizers, and assorted others.

One big reserve tool that Ted, with Bob Meegan's recommendation, insisted that we have was the famed "notwithstanding" clause of the Foreign Assistance Act. He insisted we have guaranteed ability to use it if essential. What that clause says is that notwithstanding all the provisions of law including, e.g., provisions governing things like procurement can be waived at the level of the administrator, depending on emergency needs and the national security of the United States. If we wanted to directly procure from one particular source, one form or another, we had authority to do so, citing the notwithstanding clause, with A/AID's OK. We did use it on more than one occasion.

One of the things Ted tried to do early on was to get counts or estimates of actual Contras and families in the Yamales area of Honduras, including Contras rotating into Nicaragua receiving cash support. We had actual counts of some beneficiaries and varying estimates of others. We finally settled on 30,000 in total. Some accused us of exaggerating, others thought we understated it. Not an easy task when a good number of your troops are inside Nicaragua. In theory, Contras went into and rotated out of Nicaragua every six months.

Q: *We had 30,000 military based in Honduras and then they're going in and out of Nicaragua. Is that correct?*

LOVAAS: The military were rotating in and out. There was also a large group of people, possibly even a majority in families living in the Yamales area. There was something on the order of twelve to fifteen thousand, I think, actual fighting personnel.

Q: So, all of the assistance that was provided went to this location in Honduras. There wasn't any of this provided within the borders of Nicaragua, is that correct?

LOVAAS: In fact, as mentioned earlier, we were providing Nicaraguan currency, Cordobas, to fighters inside Nicaragua to cover their sustenance. The money was carried in by returning infiltrators, with receipts then confirmed by hand receipt and/or radio messages specifying recipient and amount.

Q: Okay.

LOVAAS: There was also a small group contracted by the Contras and paid for by us when we took over to handle more serious medical problems of Contra personnel and families at the hospital in Olancho, north of Yamales.

Q: So, the assistance in the form of food, housing as well as the medical? All went to the Olancho location specifically in Honduras but not in Nicaragua?

LOVAAS: No, just to those getting treatment, including their families. The vast majority of the Contra force and families receiving food, shelter, etc. were in the Yamales area. But, as a practical matter for the Contra force inside Nicaragua, what we tried to do was support their living costs and the only way we could do that was by sending the Nicaraguan Cordobas referred to earlier. And we established this system whereby money went—taken and signed for by a Contra officer at the border and signed by a Contra officer inside Nicaragua and confirmed via radio message saying, "Received X thousand cordobas for ten guys in my unit or whatever on X date." And this also was approved by the auditors, approved by the congressional staff. Not everybody liked the idea, but nobody had another suggestion as a practical matter. And it appeared to work. We had some checking on it because guys did come back, out of Nicaragua, so we would be able to tell if they were receiving the cash support.

We bought surplus military property from civilian army surplus retailers and from DOD sources. DOD was allowed to fly some of their uniforms, clothing, and tents to Tegucigalpa. From there we flew it by helicopter, or we trucked it in using local truckers. The Hondurans knew this was going on. They watched the operation, and their economy profited from local food and services we bought. Needless to say, we bought lots and lots of food. One of the items we bought was beans in tremendous quantities because that was a staple of their diet. One Honduran bean crop failed, so we went to Guatemala to buy beans. Big mistake! The Hondurans and the Nicaraguans eat a red kidney bean, and Guatemalans eat a black bean. Upon receiving black beans, the Contras informed us that we were feeding them food for pigs, not for humans. They had very little choice, but somehow we did find some red beans locally and managed to get to the next crop cycle.

The technical people, trainers for example, we brought in, were largely Hondurans or other Central Americans, I will tell you one thing I'll never forget. On one occasion a young GAO auditor somehow got in a rowboat and went across the Coco River into Nicaragua. And for some reason, she couldn't immediately get back out. I don't know how they finally got her out of there the next day, and I guess it was embarrassing for all.

We've gotten questions like this a few times: did we do anything of development value or that helped prepare them for life after the fighting? In fact, we contracted with Creative Associates to provide training for the Contras. You may be familiar with Creative Associates? They were able to recruit native Spanish speakers, mostly Hondurans and other Central Americans for both an initial survey of the Contras and the actual training that resulted. The survey asked them a few basic questions and what kinds of work they wanted to do for a livelihood upon their return home. From the survey, Creative Associates designed training programs, including specialized skills and fundamentals like basic literacy and numeracy.

The training began and included mechanics, barbers, carpenters, basic health care and medical workers and livestock managers. Many of the trainees got the basic literacy and/numeracy training as well as the trades. There was constant training going on, and several thousand Contras were trained, short courses for the most part. This is one of

those things that I wish there had been some way of tracking a sample of the trainee population and somehow assessing what impact there might have been.

Cordobas for food. As I noted earlier, the only way we could assist the Contras operating in Nicaragua was by supplying them with local currency largely to buy their food. One of the high points of my time with TFHA was the trip I took by helicopter out to Yamales to deliver Cordobas to rebels infiltrating into Nicaragua. I sat in the seat next to the helicopter pilot leaning back with my feet up and legs on top of two huge Hefty bags filled to the top with cordobas, a currency with little value. We bought cordobas in Honduran banks and the rest in the streets on the black market. We bought them in huge physical volumes. And, of course, we had to count them and keep records of the purchases and distributions. We used electric counting machines to do so, and we literally burned out a few of them.

When we got to Yamales, I delivered the Cordobas and got my receipt. While I was at the camp, I met with Comandante 380, the *nom de guerre* of Enrique Bermudez, for what would be the last time. Bermudez, the man in charge, like most of the Contra officers, used the title Comandante with a fictitious name. Some exotic examples I still remember are Comandante Invisible, Magnifico, and Fantasma. One senior officer was called by the more mundane Comandante Douglas. Bermudez chose 380 for his *nom de guerre* because that was his ranking in his West Point graduating class.

So, Comandante 380 and I walked up the trail to his command tent where meetings were held. I don't think I knew at the time that would be our last opportunity to talk, but if he was available, I liked to check in with him. Sometimes it was because he wanted to raise an issue. No problems on this day--maybe because I'd delivered bags of cash for the troops? He did think the training was going well, although he was not as optimistic about the Contadora peace talks as I might have been and he didn't think they were going home real soon.

Comandante Douglas and I also talked briefly before I hopped in the chopper for Tegucigalpa. I think he may have been their quartermaster in charge of supplies. If so, he would have been sort of the counterpart of Sharon Isralow, TFHA's supplies chief. We called her Quartermaster! In any case, I had an interesting talk with Douglas. He had thought that this thing with USAID was never going to work, that we hadn't a clue how to run a military support operation. He assured me that, for the most part, he thought we were doing a good job. I took this to be a compliment for Sharon who was indeed a competent, hardworking person who had amazed all of us as she quickly mastered the quartermaster business. And he was getting the clothing and related support items the force needed.

At another level something we felt was really important, was that the war was relatively quiet in Nicaragua in this period. That's not to say that there were no clashes, but there weren't many getting a lot of attention. And, as far as we could tell, the Contras were not initiating armed clashes. And the cordobas for food activity was important not only to keep the rebels fed, but in so doing also obviated the need for these armed men to steal

food from their countrymen. I do not remember any negative publicity of this sort. Certainly, there were folks in the US media who would have picked up such news and run with it if it had surfaced. Meanwhile, the Contadora talks moved forward and ultimately succeeded. We got through it. TFHA did its job. And we thought TFHA did a pretty good job.

On February 16, 1991, I read in the newspaper that Enrique Bermudez had been assassinated in the parking lot of a hotel in Managua as he walked from his car. Personally, I think Nicaragua probably lost one of their better men from this period.

Q: So, by 1990, this food and other assistance was phased out? That was the end of it and the Contras—

LOVAAS: Yes, I believe so. Now, I don't have the details. I understood that most of the Contras, in fact, did end up returning to Nicaragua. The OAS and the special UN Office for Central America (ONUCA) played helpful intermediary roles in making sure that was done with the cooperation of the Honduran and Nicaraguan governments. It is my understanding that AID did not get involved in bringing the Contras back home. Not all the Contras and families left. As you might imagine, in the normal course of things people got married in Honduras or otherwise decided they liked living in Honduras. Surely some were uncertain about the situations they might face back in Nicaragua after several years of civil war.

Q: Can you clarify what the Contras did during '86 to '90 when they went back to Nicaragua? What were they up to?

LOVAAS: That's a fair question, one that I cannot fully answer. They were a guerilla force under the command of the Contras. They were supposed to be a presence, encouraged not to initiate combat. They were no longer receiving lethal assistance from the US, so major warfare was less of an option. They were supposed to stay in good physical condition, likely in small groups communicating with one another. They were a presence since it was known they were in Nicaragua. How they got away with that, I do not know precisely.

Q: So, they were there. What were they doing when they were there?

LOVAAS: They were exercising, taking care of themselves and I know they were eating. (Laughs)

Q: So, throughout this period you had full support of Congress? There was no animosity toward the program?

LOVAAS: Oh no, I would not say that. In fact, we got frequent sniping. We got it from Republicans for not doing enough for their guys, but probably more from the Democrats for doing too much or trying to hide something. But we never took any serious hits in terms of accountability. Ted Morse's multi-layered audit coverage was solid insurance.

We were dealing with armed guerillas in the mountains of eastern Honduras and making the best of it, with the best accountability possible. The country was divided over US policy. We were the instrument of the policy and naturally got whacked around a bit for being so. But, with triple iron plated layers of auditors, it was hard to really hurt us. And, just in case, we had the notwithstanding clause of the FAA in our back pocket.

As we move to ending the LAC/CEN, Contra chapter, I want to say a few words about people who contributed much to what I regard as a successful venture along my career path. Alan Woods, who died at age 43 in June 1989, absolutely knew what he was doing when he plucked Ted Morse out of Zambia in his sweats.

In fact, Ted's AID CV made it clear: post invasion Grenada recovery, drought emergencies in the Sahel and civil wars in two African countries. An easy choice. But the Contra TFHA was the ultimate test in the mastery of management. The active US stakeholders included the top political level of State and AID as well as the White House. Then there were the Congressional committees, seven to be precise, and their staffs who were actively engaged in this politically divisive program, not to mention the program beneficiaries being an armed guerilla force in the mountains of Honduras. The challenges seemed endless, yet he always seemed ready for them. In fact, what impressed me the most was his ability to foresee likely challenges and ward them off before they struck. Best political crisis manager in the business.

Sharon Isralow. Sharon was a relatively junior person, but one who loved climbing a steep learning curve. As I noted, she was the quartermaster, the person who managed the procurement, distribution of clothing, and related supplies for 15,000 guerillas. She was the one responsible for ordering the clothing and gear associated with it, for monitoring and assuring their timely delivery, and going down and inventorying stuff as it came out of the airplanes. And she was a skilled problem solver, e.g. when something suddenly wasn't available, she promptly identified the appropriate substitute and got it in the pipeline.

Bob Meegan, Deputy Director and Legal Officer. Bob was exactly the experienced, savvy lawyer needed at the center of the TFHA operation. As I've mentioned there were all kinds of problems with predecessor programs, many of them resulting from doing things beyond legal limits. Bob knew them all and was invaluable in keeping or establishing the necessary guardrails to keep us from revisiting the past. He was also the kind of person many of us would turn to in solving problems, and he was a natural mentor for junior staff. Perhaps our irreplaceable person.

Phil Bucheler, Head of the TFHA office in Tegucigalpa and master logistics officer. Phil did a superb job of bringing order and direction to an inherently complex and unpredictable operation. Mr. Can do. Not one for bureaucracy but knew when and how to make use of it.

I'm hesitant to mention this, but I think it may belong here to remind us that this kind of thing can happen and may be more likely in an unusually fluid and challenging situation

such as TFHA. One AID officer, serving with TFHA unfortunately, was accused of demanding money, a bribe it was alleged, from a contractor. I was informed that he was videotaped in a hotel room in Tegucigalpa making the demand. He was convicted and spent time in prison. The AID Inspector General's staff was involved in the investigation and ultimate resolution of the matter.

While not a part of my career plan, this assignment was one of my most interesting and educational. It was amazing to get the closeup look at the policy and political machinery at the highest level for the creation of TFHA and managing the program's relationship with such a variety of concerned stakeholders. This was a master's degree equivalent study in itself. It was interesting, even exciting work, as well as an education. I'm glad I was part of it and left with the satisfaction of feeling that we might have contributed to making a real difference in an important outcome for the region.

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Q: Today is Friday, September 8, 2023, and I have the honor of continuing my fascinating interviews with Mr. John Lovaas. And John, today you are going to focus on your time in El Salvador.

LOVAAS: I was back in the Office of Central American Affairs in the latter part of my Washington tour, looking forward to going overseas again. I was Chuck Costello's Deputy Director in what continued to be the bureau's busiest geographic office. Hank Bassford, the Mission Director in El Salvador, called one day to discuss his upcoming TDY in Washington. We had both served in Vietnam and knew each other from our days in the same IDI class. We ended the phone conversation by agreeing to have lunch together while he was in town.

In fact, I'd hoped to sound him out about my job search over lunch. Happily, it turned out that he had the same thing on his mind and asked me if I'd be interested in joining him in El Salvador as Deputy Director! He pitched it as an exciting time to be in a country with Latin America's largest program and said that peace negotiations between the GOES and the FMLN, while sporadic, were in fact progressing. I knew and admired Hank as someone I could learn from. I did, however, express concern about the security situation. Just a few months before our conversation the FMLN launched a major offensive in San Salvador resulting in some dependents being evacuated. I did not want to risk a repeat of that kind of situation. He assured me that the offensive was likely the FMLN's last gasp, that combat was way down and likely to stay that way. I think I said we would have to think about it, but he knew I had taken the bait.

Q: John, can you give us the years, the context of the years we're talking about?

LOVAAS: I would end up being in El Salvador from July 1990 until July 1994.

Setting: El Salvador was a country of five million people. There were peace talks in progress in Mexico, but the 12-year civil war had not ended. George H.W. Bush was U.S.

President, having succeeded Reagan in 1989. Alfredo Cristiani of ARENA was elected President of El Salvador in 1989. Although ARENA had long been the right-wing party of the traditional aristocracy backed by the military, Cristiani ran as a moderate whose focus was on peace and national reconciliation. U.S. Republicans strongly supported the GOES and military assistance in the civil war, seeing the FMLN as a tool of Castro's Cuba. Congressional Democrats distrusted ARENA, the party of discredited former military leader Roberto D'Aubisson, clearly an author of the killings of Archbishop Romero, Jesuit priests and others. While supporting the peace negotiations, Democrats did fully trust ARENA's Cristiani. Both U.S. parties monitored El Salvador and the US mission closely, and both had contacts with their favored side in the conflict. A most interesting situation. If you were the ambassador, or the AID director for that matter, you had to understand these dynamics.

The AID program was indeed the largest in Latin America, including Development Assistance, ESF for balance of payments support, and PL 480 as well. There was still residual funding to help with rebuilding from the 1986 earthquake which caused extensive infrastructure damage in and around San Salvador.

By the time Fran, nine-year old Jenni, and I arrived in El Salvador in July of 1990 the level of combat remained low, but twelve years of bitter war had taken a terrible toll on the country. Thousands were dead on both sides, families divided, and bitterness over lost loved ones very deep. Extensive damage to the infrastructure was exacerbated by a major earthquake three years earlier. But there had been no attacks for months on U.S. personnel anywhere in the country, which was encouraging.

Still, from our house in El Escalon, a large well-to-do area on the outskirts of San Salvador, at night we watched tracer bullets being fired from the ground, by the FMLN presumably, at helicopters flying overhead and vice versa. Occasionally, we'd hear a spent round ping off our tile roof. Peace talks were progressing, but it would be eighteen months before accords finally were signed by the parties at the Chapultepec castle in Mexico. But it was not resolved, so security was still an issue. For example, when Fran went with some other mission spouses to play golf, they went in an armored car with a guard. And the guard walked around the perimeter while they were on the course. Never any mishaps but it was something that took a while to get used to.

Our USAID offices occupied an eight-story building downtown. There were thirty-some U.S. direct hires, maybe 15 U.S. PSCs, various institutional contractors plus about 100 Salvadoran staff at various levels. Overall, it was my largest mission (except Viet Nam) and talent wise, as strong as any in which I had served.

San Salvador sits in the seismically active Valle de las Hamacas (Valley of the Hammocks). Because of the many tremors we frequently felt like we were swaying, especially on the eighth floor. Late in my tour we moved to a three-story building in a new, fortified embassy compound in Santa Tecla, a suburb of San Salvador. There were still lots of tremors, but they seemed fewer, with less sway action there.

Not surprisingly with all that was going on in El Salvador, the overall U.S. mission was a large one. In addition to State and AID, there was a large Mil Group and the full collection of other agencies—enough to fill two large three-story buildings in the Santa Tecla compound. I thought the relations among the various agencies were generally very good, partly due perhaps to the civil war around us? Also, I felt a noticeable improvement in overall morale as the peace negotiations progressed and definitely so after the Chapultepec Accords finally were signed.

USAID relations with Salvadoran counterparts, both the Cristiani administration and the private sector, were almost uniformly excellent. Both President Cristiani and Hank Bassford set an amicable, businesslike tone for the relationship. With the peace agreement in place, we could get on with the business of reconstruction and hopefully shared prosperity. The challenge was, of course, greater for Salvadorans to somehow unite the warring parties. Our challenge was to support their efforts to build frameworks for reconciliation.

The USAID budget was on the order of $100 million or more a year, including development assistance, ESF, PL-480 Title I and II, and residual funds for earthquake reconstruction. One year, I believe we had expenditures of nearly $300 million. And we had activities all over the country. In fact, we leased a helicopter, which enabled us to travel to anywhere in this country the size of Rhode Island in about an hour's time. This made us more efficient in visiting project sites remote by road and ferrying numerous CODELs to their remote destinations, too. I remember one occasion when I escorted a couple of Washington VIPs and a couple mission personnel on a flight to project sites. The small chopper was full, so I sat sideways with my feet outside the door as we flew. I did have a seatbelt on. We flew very low and pretty fast for security reasons. (The war wasn't over yet.) It was a funny feeling. I prefer riding in helicopters compared to fixed wing planes. It's a different sensation where I somehow felt safer because, after all, I was only 100 feet up and if we went down, I could probably simply jump up in the air as we hit the ground and I'd be fine!

A centerpiece of the portfolio, and the private sector portion especially was the industrial stabilization and recovery project, funding a very broad range of activities through FUSADES, the Salvadoran Economic and Social Development Foundation. FUSADES was an NGO established with USAID funding by a group of private sector leaders. The leaders included owners of major businesses, including beer magnate Bobby Murray Meza and Alfredo Cristiani and several others. FUSADES was founded with a primary objective of mobilizing the private sector to help formulate economic policy to energize a more efficient export-oriented economy. As peace approached and national reconstruction emerged as the goal, FUSADES moved on to identify inequities which led to the civil war and to advocate reforms to address them. In addition, FUSADES took on roles that the public sector seemed ill equipped to handle. FUSADES, built from the ground up to do this, was able to organize and manage things like promoting non-traditional exports, developing export-producing zones and even financing credit for small and medium enterprises. Over ten years USAID put $110 million into FUSADES activities through 1994. Its activities contributed significantly to the recovery of the

Salvadoran economy including modernizing agriculture, rebuilding national infrastructure damaged by the war, and expanding health services and education nationwide.

Q: Tell me about FEPADE.

LOVAAS: FEPADE was an associated private sector-driven entity, set up with USAID's support whose purpose, I believe, was to expand educational and training facilities. Frankly, I don't remember a great deal about FEPADE.

Q: I established FEPADE.

LOVAAS: You did?

Q: Yes.

LOVAAS: Well, you tell me about it.

Q: I am FEPADE's mother. I'd established a similar organization in Honduras, CADERH with a budget of around $600,000. I was in AID/W and was invited by USAID/El Salvador to help FEPADE prepare its proposal to USAID. FEPADE was patterned on the same lines. But I was told by USAID/El Salvador that the proposal could be nothing under $15 million. I said to myself, "Fifteen million!". How can they absorb all this money? Well, they did very well because as you know, they were a very competent group. And Bobby Murray Meza was part of that..

LOVAAS: He was a lead founder of FUSADES and his family owned the big brewery in San Salvador, making the country's two best, leading beers.

Q: Fascinating.

LOVAAS: Another dimension of FUSADES as it turned out was its role as an incubator for the economic leadership of the Cristiani administration. In fact, local legend has it that before I arrived, the newly inaugurated President Cristiani invited Hank Bassford to come and personally meet with his new economic cabinet. First, he introduced him to Mirna Liévano de Marques, a top manager of FUSADES and very well-known by Hank, who was Cristiani's new Minister of Planning, the leader of the economic cabinet. Then, he introduced the rest of the economic cabinet, i.e., the Central Bank President, the Minister of Trade, and the Treasurer of El Salvador… all from FUSADES. Cristiani himself, of course, was one of the original founders of FUSADES. All were known to Hank and the AID mission. They would be our principal interlocutors in a policy dialog going forward.

Another piece of the economic policy dialogue was one that got mixed reviews in Washington, but was well received in El Salvador, was technical assistance contracted with the University of Chicago. Chicago's Dr. Arnold Harberger of the University of Chicago and his team of "Chicago Boys" had gotten publicity for their work with the

rightwing Pinochet government in Chile overhauling the economic policies of the Allende administration after the coup d'etat in which he was killed. The Chicago Boys were well received by Cristiani's team. As I recall, they spent a few months with the Salvadorans but were credited with instigating new macroeconomic directions including privatization of state enterprises.

On a sort of parallel track, AID funded assistance from INCAE, the Central American Private Enterprise Institute with their economic research and training capability. INCAE, which had established credibility in the region, provided an acceptable institutional framework for FMLN leaders to sit down for an economic policy dialogue on reforms being recommended by FUSADES and the GOES. INCAE's work with the FMLN facilitated FMLN acceptance of some elements of reforms discussed in the context of the peace talks. A contribution to a framework for reconciliation?

Contribution of Remittances: Salvador was a small country of about five million, ravaged by a bloody civil war. Yet its economy was fairly stable. No doubt AID resources and other donor flows contributed to that. Another huge, widely dispersed resource that I realized and saw with my own eyes was remittances sent from the hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans who had fled north to the United State during the long conflict. Evidence of remittances could be seen everywhere, all over the country. I saw them in parts of San Salvador, in war-scarred areas of the north, strikingly in San Miguel, La Unión and the hot, desolate rural villages in eastern El Salvador. One day I flew in the helicopter to check on a project activity in La Union, the easternmost department of El Salvador along the Honduran border. I saw many villages in this very poor, hot, dry area. What was most striking were many new, mostly cinderblock and some brick homes complete with windows, televisions, refrigerators, and other appliances amidst otherwise staggering poverty. In the tiny villages of ten or twenty homes, most would have the impressive nice new homes and appliances. I spoke with several people in three villages and in places like San Miguel, inquiring how they'd fixed up their places so nicely. The answers were all similar: money sent from the United States from a son, a brother, a cousin, a father, and occasionally from a woman relative. I heard the same in urban areas of San Miguel and San Salvador. It struck me that the money made a real difference in the lives of very poor people, some of the very ones we strived to impact.

Q: This was throughout Central America. The remittances played such an important role.

LOVAAS: True, but I suspect El Salvador, with the war probably pushing more people northward, was getting more than its share.

As negotiations dragged on, Ambassador William Walker quietly played a role reaching out to the FMLN as well as to his GOES interlocutors and contacts in the business community. I didn't see it getting much public attention.

He was meeting with FMLN leaders in El Salvador to support the process. My sense is that he was a positive factor, likely facilitating communications with the Hill, possibly

assuring that the FMLN gained confidence that we would support a final agreement that included assistance to reintegrate their people in post-war El Salvador.

Meanwhile, the Chapultepec Accords finally were signed, in February 1992. They included demobilization of the FMLN forces and reform of the Salvadoran military, creation of a new national civilian police. The latter was to consist of one-third FMLN, one-third national guard and one-third new blood under the aegis of the United Nations. Sadly, the reconstitution of civilian police was not realized. I don't remember why it failed. The Accords also called for reform of the judicial system and defense of human rights, and a modified electoral system. I'm happy to report some success in the latter. In fact, a clean election of legislators took place in 1993. Fran and I even served as official, blue-vested UN observers of the voting which resulted in the election of a number of FMLN-backed candidates. Lastly, the Accords mandated the adoption of measures for more social and economic equity.

One of our newer projects which fit neatly into national reconstruction was the Municipalities in Action project. The project brought resources and public services to communities in response to needs identified by local democratic processes, namely through locally elected Mayors and Municipal Councils. This community building at the grass roots of El Salvador's 262 municipalities supported post-war reconciliation by bringing residents together in response to opportunities for help going forward. The project provided training and technical assistance to strengthen fledgling municipal councils' capacities to plan and implement their plans for community improvements. Much of the funding made available for the improvements flowed from local currency generated by ESF and PL 480 sales proceeds. Municipal improvements might include: road construction, garbage collection, cemetery, public water source, school or health center improvement, municipal office, etc. The project had become a centerpiece of the portfolio assisting a growing number of municipalities successfully before I left.

USAID assisted the GOES in its program to provide land for former combatants by providing some PL 480 Title I sales proceeds to finance land transfers as part of the reform program. There was one difference of opinion about land ownership that went on for a while. We emphasized the need for redistributed land to come with a land title, a private land title. Some in the FMLN wanted a cooperative-style ownership and management arrangement that would enable the FMLN to exercise some control over the co-ops. The GOES was having none of it, and neither were we, of course. What finally came out was a kind of a mix of the two in some cooperatives, but not the commune-style the FMLN had in mind. It was working.

USAID was able to make an important contribution to the farm's profitability.
We had a second-generation agricultural cooperative specialist named Stanley Kuehn. His dad was an agricultural cooperative advisor under an AID-supported project in the Dominican Republic. Stan was in high school in the Dominican Republic and one day; while surfing there, a shark took off the better part of his leg. He was fortunate not to have died from blood loss while awaiting medical assistance. He did survive and went to operate with a high-tech prosthetic leg. An amazing guy, he worked walking up and down

mountainsides where the best coffee grows in El Salvador. Stanley realized that Salvador had one potentially very profitable product as the result of its long civil war. El Salvador's coffee plantations had been occupied by the FMLN during the war. They'd driven the landowners off the properties. So, coffee continued to grow and, in some cases, even be harvested. However, the trees and the land had not been treated with any chemical additives—pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers. So, the coffee from the plantations could be certified as organic, a product that sells at a premium price in the U.S. and international markets! After about a year's work. Mr. Kuehn and CLUSA were able to get El Salvador's plantation-grown coffee certified as organic acceptable to the U.S. standards. El Salvador's plantations and new co-ops, including those farmed by former FMLN guerillas, produced premium priced organic coffee as the result of a civil war! By the time we left El Salvador, they were selling the coffee, some with the PIPIL brand name. The volume was small initially but was expected to grow.
Stanly Kuehn and his wife Gloria are still friends of ours. In fact, our families occasionally traveled together in caravans to places like Lake Atitlan, Antigua, and the Mayan ruins at Tikal in Guatemala.

We had a dynamic USAID democracy—Administration of Justice Office. They were key and they'd been working on it for some time, rewriting national penal codes assisting on other reforms to the judicial system. And then, with the advent of the peace accords we contributed to the financing of the National Electoral Tribunal to conduct elections, the first of which were held for the national legislative assembly seats in 1993. As mentioned above, we served as election observers.

I'm about to wrap up on El Salvador, but in closing I want to talk about a little bit of the personal, including some of the extraordinary people I worked with, and a few lessons learned from El Salvador.

For our family, El Salvador was a thoroughly satisfying experience. Of course, we missed sons Deron and Terry who were off to their respective colleges in Virginia. But we had daughter Jenni, who went from age nine to thirteen, and from grades four to seven at the American International School in San Salvador. She did well and enjoyed time spent with new friends there. And we enjoyed those important developmental years with her…just her.

It was a great experience for Fran, too. She was active in the official community and learned the game of golf with a circle of friends and a bodyguard in the days before peace. She served as the CLO (Community Liaison Officer) for a good part of our time and managed trips and other activities for the U.S. mission. And she got a kick out of doing it. One of her favorites was a group that she took to Tikal in Guatemala. The bus carrying the group got to the El Salvador-Guatemala border and learned that one woman had forgotten her passport but was able to talk her way through the border. Who do you think it was?

For me, it would turn out to be my last tour, which I learned in my final months in San Salvador. While I had thought of being a mission director and actually was offered the

equivalent of a director's position, I can say sincerely that wrapping up my career was OK. It was OK because it was a great mission, the work was satisfying in the extreme, and we left with many treasured memories of our time there.

Q: I have some questions. The first is that USAID was undoubtedly by far, at the time you were there, the largest donor. What was USAID's relationship with the other donors?

LOVAAS: After the Chapultepec Accords were signed, there was more donor interest and participation in El Salvador. In fact, with the help of the World Bank and the IMF, a major consultative group was formed both to help with the large official debt burden, reconstruction, and to encourage the same kinds of economic policy reforms which we already were pursuing in our policy dialogue with the GOES.

As I mentioned earlier, President Cristiani named Mirna Liévano, the Minister of Planning and head of his economic cabinet team. She'd been a FISADES leader and brought an impressive intellect, experience, and vision to her role. In our conversations with her there was agreement that a priority for the country was to expand international support in its postwar reconstruction. She became a world traveler well known in the international banks, IMF and the European Union. World Bank staff was impressed and worked with the GOES and the IMF, with our support and encouragement, to organize a Consultative Group for El Salvador. The Group attracted something on the order of $3 billion in commitments in about a year, 1993-94. So, the answer to your question is that we played an active role encouraging the GOES and the World Bank, in particular, to promote other donor support for reconstruction and economic reform efforts. But Mirna Lievano led the promotion process, with active assistance from President Cristiani who traveled to Washington several times and I think might have even made believers of a few critics on the Hill in the process.

When we left El Salvador and as I look back now, thirty years later, it occurred to me that there are some essential ingredients to our having success in a developing country. First, you've got to have a good, strong AID mission, and Hank Bassford, in my estimation, built as good a mission as I had seen, with strength in every office. Next IMHO one must have national counterparts, ideally in both the government and the private sector, with talent, and with motivation. (And if you don't, I suppose one could work on building capacity?). After a twelve-year civil war and what they'd gone through, most Salvadorans were ready for peace and anxious to make it work. And they were capable and hardworking people with enough well-trained among them to lead. I do believe the old AID adage that the people of the host country must want development programs more than we do, or they won't succeed. Lastly, the extent to which a mission succeeds is also dependent upon getting sufficient financial resources to plant enough seeds to grow and have impact. Our government came through for El Salvador at the critical time.

People: I was most fortunate to have Hank Bassford bring me to El Salvador. If there was a better mission director than Hank Bassford in AID at the time, I was not aware of him or her. He was a skilled manager of people and of relationships with the GOES. I think he

also brought out the best in his staff. John Sanbrailo, who followed Hank was quite a different person, but a capable, hardworking-in-the-extreme manager and an effective director in his own right.

Hank built a fine team with strength at all levels. John Heard joined us in the Director's Office and acted as team leader of the technical offices. He was bright and well-liked by the team. Ken Ellis was the Agriculture Chief for most of my time and he, too, was topnotch. I've already mentioned Stanley Kuehn, who led our coffee reinvigoration and non-traditional exports activities with Ken's support.

Debbie Kennedy was there when I got there and after I left. She also fits in the amazing category. She was new in the role of chief of the Project Development Office. It was a pleasure to work with her and watch her grow in that job and move on to take over direction of the Democracy/Administration of Justice portfolio as well. Debbie was an excellent conceptualizer and writer as well as a team manager. I knew she was headed for the top. John Anderson came on later and proved to be a most capable planner and implementer of Democracy projects.

Q: Debbie spent at least half of her AID career, if not more, in El Salvador. She has a long history and knowledge, an intimate knowledge of that country.And she came back as mission director later on.

LOVAAS: I knew she'd become a Director, but didn't realize that it was in El Salvador. The mission was most fortunate to acquire Juan Belt to fill the role of Mission Economist in our postwar policy dialogue and reform efforts. He was already recognized as an exceptional economist in AID. He was instrumental in supporting the reform program and helping guide the establishment of the El Salvador Consultative Group.
Carol Steele joined us as Program Officer in 1993, I believe. She came with the program planning and budgeting experience we needed and was superb at organizing our program submissions.

Special mention is due to the late David Kitson and an ex-Peace Corps volunteer PSC named Tom Hawk. They were energizers of the Municipalities in Action program. Both were natural field operators. They did a heck of a job promoting and pulling together all the pieces essential to encouraging participation among municipalities and the former FMLN in those areas.

I left El Salvador with a good feeling and I loved my AID career, Marcy, as you've probably detected from this—our conversations. But the feeling of accomplishment in El Salvador and being part of something of historical significance, namely a peace process and national reconciliation were special.

In 1994, after two tours in El Salvador I was thinking about what comes next. AID resolved that for me. I did not get promoted in 1994 and I was fifty-one years old. My time in class expired at Counselor. So, I would be ending my AID career after completion of my tour.

Then, Whoa! Then I got a phone call offering me an opportunity to continue in AID, in the former Yugoslavia. Peter Orr, who had worked for me in Honduras, organizing staffing for the former Yugoslavia, was offering me an opportunity to be the AID Representative in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He said they were for a high quality, experienced operations manager and a problem solver. Hit me right in the ego, he did! The deal was that I would be kept on roles, pretty much guaranteed at least two more years, maybe more, with AID if I accepted and went there. However, there was a catch or two, I would have an abbreviated home leave AND no dependents were allowed in Sarajevo. So, the best we could do would be for Fran and Jenni to reside in Vienna, Austria or at home in the U.S. Sarajevo to Vienna I calculated was about a 9-hour drive, or a two-hour flight. Fran and I actually discussed the offer. On the one hand, I would, in fact, liked to have continued working in AID; on the other hand, we had an understanding that there would be no more lengthy separations. I thanked Peter sincerely and profusely for thinking of me but told him the separation was an absolute deal breaker.

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Q: Today is Tuesday, September 19, 2023.And today John is going to wrap up by focusing on lessons learned and personal reflections, which I'm really eager to hear.

LOVAAS: Great, Marcy. Good to see you. This is going to be a sad day for me. We won't be seeing each other anymore.

Q: Don't worry, I'll continue pestering you

LOVAAS: (Laughs) Okay.

To begin I'll mention just a few things I might do differently the second time around. The first thing I would likely do and recommend to someone thinking of a career in overseas development work is to serve first in the Peace Corps. I've known or talked to many active and former PCVs over the years. I've come to think that service would have given me a better foundation for the AID foreign service. There are at least a couple of reasons. First, living a couple of years in a developing country setting offers the chance to appreciate the context and the people. Also, it must provide valuable insights into people's perceptions of their needs and of how development assistance might meet the needs…or not.

I surely should have made more systematic efforts to set career objectives and strategies for achieving them. Starting with a little more research on AID's mission and structure would have been a good start. Doing so would help in setting speculative goals, recognizing adjustments will be necessary along the career path. Over the years I have seen successful people with different approaches to shaping their paths ahead.

One is to sketch the path forward in an orderly, even mechanical, fashion, i.e., going from position A to B to C on the path to D. The other, one I swear I've seen, is to throw

traditional orderly out the window and use your imagination to draw up a more interesting path; or forget the path altogether and go for the first really challenging opening you see, perhaps even leapfrogging the more mundane. If I had it to do over, I would have spent real time plotting my direction, one way or the other.

This is not my way of expressing dissatisfaction with my AID career. Of course, I could perhaps have landed a director's job but, looking back, overall I see a whole bunch of positives and satisfaction that my years were well spent.

I might have been well advised to have invested more time in personal growth, that is, to deepen my knowledge of the history and experiences of foreign assistance. Here again I was fortunate. AID arranged a year of academic training at Michigan State University, giving me an intensive, organized personal growth experience which at least partially filled a lot of any void I'd left in that respect!

During our discussion on my experience in USAID/El Salvador, I dwelt a bit on the Lovaas formula for a successful AID mission. Because of an exceptional Director and many exceptional U.S. and Salvadoran staff there, I thought that was the appropriate place for me to set forth my whole formula. Otherwise, I have attempted to mention in the context of each assignment chapter of the history the people who stood out by contributing to our mission's goals or to my personal growth. I hope I've done them justice.

I have an additional category for leadership in AID missions—most effective relationships with host country leaders, public and private sector. Robin Gomez and Hank Bassford.

During tours in five non-Vietnam USAID Missions, I had the opportunity to observe a total of twelve Directors for varying periods of time. In my opinion, in all but two cases, the USG got a fine ROI and we made good progress. However, I thought we did better in a key respect under Hank Bassford and Robin Gomez. They had the most effective personal relationships, and likely influence, with leaders in both the public and private sectors in El Salvador and Panama respectively than other fine directors I knew.

For example, both would often meet to talk about program-related matters over breakfast or lunch, not just in the office. The relationships even extended to places like tennis courts or golf courses. The nature of the relationships translated into prompt access when needed and fora for moving forward efficiently. Less bureaucratic perhaps!

Those are a few lessons learned. Perhaps I should have learned more in twenty-some years with AID, but those are the things that I thought were key to making a good AID officer and a good mission team.

Q: Can I mention something? When I joined AID, I sought out people that would be my mentors. I didn't ask them, I just adopted them. One was Tony Cauterucci who was a very, very important mentor.

LOVAAS: Good point, Marcy. Right on! Did you work with Tony in Honduras?

Q: Oh, my goodness, no. We served together in Panama when I was an intern. We served together in Washington in human resources and then in Honduras, yeah. But each post—and that was so important was to find somebody that I could learn from.

And then, I was very dedicated to mentoring others. So, thank you for your mentoring. And an important mentor to my husband, Eric Zallman, was Robin Gomez.

LOVAAS: Thank you! I was fortunate to have talented, dedicated people work with me, including quite a few junior officers. I usually went out of my way to be available to talk with them, respond to concerns or offer suggestions if they seemed interested. Ken Schofield and Lars Klassen, interns in Honduras, come to mind. Karen Freeman also comes to mind. An extremely inquisitive administrative assistant who worked in the office with me in the LA Bureau in her very early days. And who grew up after I advocated for her for her first Foreign Service assignment. From there she took off! She has served as Mission Director in three posts in Africa, I think, and senior executive positions in Washington as well. If asked I will always claim to have discovered Karen Freeman!

Accomplishments: Special tasks I remember well.

Vietnam. It might have a mundane project, but it mattered in its context. My first AID assignment was Personnel Assistant (Trainee) in USAID/Vietnam at the peak of the war. The assigned job barely existed, but I was fortunate enough to be asked to do something interesting and useful instead. The newly created combined civilian/military CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) pacification program was supposed to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.

The USG threw billions of dollars and a few thousand military and civilian personnel stationed in all 44 provinces at this effort. People were assigned to it from AID, the military and the State Department. They came so fast that the system in fact lost track of who went where in this hodgepodge organization. My job was to bring a sense of order to this decentralized outfit in a war zone. It would require quite a few visits, a few by road, but mostly by chopper and uncountable radio messages to locate and identify them. As described earlier, in the Vietnam section of this history, I did in fact create an organization chart and personnel rosters showing all 44 subunits and their hierarchy of U.S. civilian staff complete with name, rank and newly approved position titles. It became the master personnel management record for the pacification program used at all levels of management in Washington, as well as Vietnam. Not too shabby for a rookie.

From Vietnam, I went to Nigeria. My assignment was local (Foreign Service National) personnel manager, the junior person in the office. The year was 1970. Race relations were still troubled domestically in the U.S and it turned out there were difficulties in some AID missions as well. My job was to manage hiring, movement, promotion and

disciplinary actions of our large Nigerian staff. The situation is described in more detail in the Nigeria section of this history. Suffice it to say, an area of frequent tension in Lagos was discipline. It was clear to me (and some others) that there were inconsistencies, even abuse in disciplinary actions. It was also clear that morale was not very good among Nigerian staff. I was able to achieve an understanding with my immediate supervisors and top management that we needed a policy defining more clearly the rights and responsibilities of Nigerian staff and the Mission in implementing the policies. Having agreement on the need and the support of a sharp regional legal advisor, I drafted and won approval of a new policy. Even in the short time before we left Nigeria, the new policy made a difference. There were still incidents requiring adjudication, but it seemed that issues were resolved more quickly, with less rancor by reference to a clear policy.

In Honduras, I had a mini career in Honduras it seemed. I was assigned to Honduras from Washington as an Assistant Program Officer a couple of years after graduating from the IDI program. I became the Program Officer replacing Bob Maushammer when Bob left two years later, in late 1976. The last six months before my tour ended, I was Acting Deputy Director and for the last few weeks Acting Director after Jack Robinson retired. The last task before I left, aside from managing the mission, was overseeing the final drafting of the USAID/Honduras' largest loan package, the $25 million Agriculture Sector loan, which is described in more detail in the Honduras section above. My last acts were to present the package successfully in Washington and to sign it with the GOH Minister of Agriculture, Rafael Callejas who would become President a few years later.

I retired in 1994. My time in class as Counselor in the Senior Foreign Service expired. At age fifty-one I could retire with a nice annuity, the calculation of which included six years with the U.S. Department of Agriculture during my college days. By the time retirement came home was Virginia. We had decided on Virginia in part because of the state's quality, affordable universities for Deron and Terry, and someday Jenni.

After retirement, I worked a couple of years as VP of a consulting firm and several years part time in management for the Connection Newspapers, a chain of community newspapers. I still write occasional editorials for them. I founded the Reston Farmers Market, regarded by area magazines as the best farmers market in Northern VA. I managed it for 26 years before passing it on to Fran to manage after only 20 years of experience.

Q: Where is that farmers market located?

LOVAAS: Right here in Lake Anne.

Q: And when?

LOVAAS: Saturday mornings 8:00 to Noon. Late April thru first Saturday in December!

Q: I will come, thank you.

LOVAAS: It's the best. You have to let me know to make sure I'm there that morning.

Robert Simon, the founder of Reston, was delighted to have the Market at Lake Anne, which was like a ghost town on Saturdays. He and our Virginia Delegate helped me make it a big deal by joining us for opening day, May 10,1998. Otherwise, I've been active in the Reston community (pop. 62,000) since retiring. I've served in the following volunteer capacities: President of neighborhood homeowners association; Vice President of Reston Association representing 25,000 homeowners; President of the Reston Citizens Association; and Chairman of the Hunter Mill District Democratic Party.

When we got off the plane home for retirement, we agreed it had been fun, even exciting traveling everywhere, but we never intended to get on another d--- airplane. That turned out to be the big lie. We still get on a lot of airplanes now that we can do so just for fun and, maybe even a little more personal growth at our advanced ages!

I'm going to wrap it up there.

Q: Well, I'm going to not let you wrap it up because I'm going to ask questions.

LOVAAS: Go ahead.

Q: One is, when you moved into working with the community, were there any skills or approaches from your USAID experience that helped you in doing your community work?

LOVAAS: Occasionally I suppose I've used my AID experience. Certainly, as the president or vice president of a homeowner's association I was a program planner, putting together community investment concepts and some budgets, for example. The Reston Association annual budget might run to $15 or 20 million, the equivalent of a good-sized mission back in my day. And, I've also been on the other side of the table, as a citizen unhappy with the way a homeowners' board wanted to spend my money. I'd catch them occasionally not accounting properly for funds approved by homeowners, but not spent and thus available to carry over to pay for some proposed new items. Just the kind of thing I might have argued for in LA/DP!

Also, while VP of the Reston Association Board of Directors, I found that a particularly poor area of the community had a swimming pool virtually no-one used. Yet, its operating costs were enormous IMHO. As a member of the Board, I arranged to sponsor open meetings with the residents of the neighborhood to hear their views on what would best serve the area. There was very little support for the pool, but lots of interest in a multi-purpose-use facility like a community center which could serve for a wide range of activities—classes for kids and adults, community meetings, indoor sports and more. I spoke with our Fairfax County Supervisor who assured me the county in fact had the resources to build a community center appropriate for the neighborhood...if they owned the site! It took nearly five years, but we finally got it done. The pool was demolished at our expense while the community center was built and operated by the County! Also, the

new community center was named for the now retired Supervisor who helped get it done. I want to say that with my AID experience, it was kind of a natural thing for me to do.

My last example here may not have been learned in AID *per se,* but I think my AID experience likely inspired me to create a farmers' market to serve the community and provide a profitable place for small family farms and food businesses to sell their products in our prosperous suburban community! Furthermore, a few years after we opened the Reston Farmers Market, I arranged for a local charity to collect unsold fresh produce from the farmers stands when the market closed. The charity used volunteers (gleaners) to come pick up the produce and deliver it to the nearby food pantry for low-income residents. Furthermore, we convinced the county to open a SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program…successor to food stamps) booth at the market. Residents of subsidized apartments and other approved beneficiaries receive a set monthly amount in tokens valid only in the farmer's market. There are ten farmers markets with the SNAP program now in Fairfax County. Which market among them do you suppose serves the most beneficiaries? Indeed, it is Reston!

Q: Well, thank you. This has been a fascinating series of interviews. I've learned so much. What you bring from your experience working in Vietnam was invaluable as well. You came in with some really important perspectives that very few others would have in USAID.

Thank you. Thank you so much. This has been delightful and very informative

LOVAAS: Well, thank you. You've made this a most agreeable process!

End of interview