

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

**MELVIN E. SIMS**

*Interviewed by: Allan Mustard*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: We are in the residence of Mr. Melvin Sims in Quincy, Illinois. Today is August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and this is an interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Oral History Project. So Mel, first let me say it's an honor to be here with you and to have an opportunity to interview you for this, project, so thank you very much for taking time.*

SIMS: Thank you.

*Q: We would like to start the interview with where you came from, your background and your educational history. So if you could talk a bit about that, please.*

SIMS: All right. I was born in a farm home on the family farm and that bungalow is still standing, so it's getting old as I'm 91 now (*laughs*). I was born there. I was the fourth generation in our family farm. My great-grandfather rode a horse from the East Coast looking for a place to settle in the Midwest. Then it went from there to my grandfather whom I knew quite well and, and respected and then onto my mother and father, who were great parents. Now my son and grandson are farming that same family farm and my grandson has a son who was four years old last December. Someone asked him, before that, if when he grew up if he planned to be a farmer. And he braced and looked him straight in the eye and said, "I am already a farmer," (*laughs*).

*Q: (laughs)*

SIMS: So there's a possibility the seventh generation may come to manage the farm. I was born in 1920 and lived on the farm during the Depression. But nobody came along and told us we were living in poverty, so we were quite happy and enjoyed life and went to a one-room school building, walked about a mile each way. And then came to Quincy for four years of high school, and then on to the University of Illinois where I received a degree in agricultural economics. I also took advanced military training while there. I graduated in 1941 but was not 21 years old yet, so had to wait until the end of July to receive my commission. After that they asked me how long it would take to get ready to go on active duty. I responded that it would take about 90 days. After all, I had to buy a toothbrush and well, I can't think of much else I had to do. They granted my request.

In August, the agriculture teacher in the nearby Payson, Illinois, high school, found another job and they came to me and asked if I would fill in. I said "I am going to be called to active in about three months. They said, "Never mind, come for as long as you can." Pearl Harbor occurred soon thereafter. I received a call to report for active duty in early January 1942. I can remember that I was grading semester exams the night before I had to leave.

I was on active duty in the military for a little over four years. I was in the Army, motorized field artillery, and stayed at the replacement training center, at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, for a while and then eventually got to go overseas with an eight-inch howitzer, field artillery battalion. We were first committed to battle at the Battle of the Bulge at Aachen, Germany, with the First Army and there were times that we had the enemy to our front, to our right and to our left. We moved forward, sometimes very slowly, and I can remember one day, near the end, that we advanced 90 miles. Of course we had pockets of the enemy scattered all around us but they did not give us much trouble because we had cut off their supply line. We met the Russians at the Elbe River, Our unit happened to participate in the capture of the Remagen Bridge, which was an interesting event.

After we met the Russians at the Elbe, we were directed south to the Third Army, General Patton's army. And we participated in liberating some cities in Czechoslovakia and ended up there, when the war was over. Well, when the European Theater War was over, but the Japanese War still continued. We immediately started retraining to be deployed to the South Pacific. And while we were out doing calisthenics one morning a runner came out and said, "The Japanese have surrendered." And it was hip-hip-hooray for everyone because that meant we could go home.

I spent a few months at Berchtesgaden, Germany, helping run a rest and rehabilitation center - a cushy job- before shipping out for home.

I had two bronze battle stars. I also happened to receive a Bronze Star award for meritorious service. When I came back from Europe, I was mustered out at Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. They gave me an offer, to be promoted from captain to major and go to staff and command school for nine months. But I said I just wanted to go home and be a farmer (*laughs*). My father was just hanging on because it was difficult to farm, at that time. He couldn't get help and couldn't get parts and new machinery and gasoline was scarce. He was worn out. He turned the farm over to my brother and me. My brother, Dean, had taught vocational agriculture at the local Liberty Community School, before going to the service. He was one year ahead of me in school.

It so happened that about a couple of months before the fall school session started, the ag teacher from Liberty found a different place, and the principal came and asked my brother to teach there again. He loved to teach, and was good at it.

So we had a farming partnership and then it become a farming-teaching partnership. When he wasn't needed at the school, he'd help on the farm, and when he needed a substitute, I substituted for him in the classroom. That was in April of 1946, when we returned from Europe. We still had some horses that pulled some of the farm machinery but we needed to get a new tractor. I went to the local John Deere dealer and asked if there was any chance of getting a new tractor. He looked at me and said, "You are a veteran, aren't you?" I nodded yes and he said, "You can have the very next tractor that comes in from the factory." I was astonished and delighted. We were able to get the new tractor in two months. We started out with roughly four or five hundred acres, which we

were able to rent and all the equipment and livestock he had and that was a huge advantage. Thanks to my parents, grandparents and my great-grandparents. To be a farmer you have to have some land, you know (*laughs*).

My wife and I had a boy and a girl and my brother and his wife had a boy and three girls. We lived close to each other and became a close and happy family and remain so today.

We raised hogs, beef cattle, sheep, chickens and had a dairy herd, for a few years. Dad had seven dairy cows when I arrived and I decided that wasn't big enough to do much, so I bought out another herd. We had milk, eggs, poultry, pork and a big garden. I eventually dispersed the entire dairy herd. We've added land since then. Today we're farming 1600 acres in row crops and all of it except about 400 acres belongs to the family. That's my brother and his children, my brother just died recently, and my children and some land, which I continue to own. And I'm still a partner in that farming operation with my son, daughter-in-law and grandson. At this moment, my son, Randy, is in the process of buying 148 of the 400 acres.

Soon after I came back from the service, I went to our local FS (Farm Services) Cooperative Annual Meeting and was surprised to hear the nominating committee nominate me for a member of the board of directors. That was in 1946, and I was a pretty young fella for that kind of responsibility. I served for 17 years on that board and during that time I was elected to the board of the state farm supply cooperative, called Illinois Farm Supply, in 1956.

In 1955, I was named the outstanding young farmer, in the state of Illinois, by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. It was a delightful recognition.

In '59, I was elected chairman of the board and president of the Illinois Farm Supply although my main duty was being chairman of the board. We merged with Iowa and then with Wisconsin and then with Illinois Grain Cooperative -- after I retired in 1980 they bought out a cooperative in Ontario, Canada. That organization has now grown and now serves farmers from the Rockies to the East Coast. I just attended their annual meeting on Friday of this week. They had sales of \$8.4 billion, I believe, and some \$180 million in profits, most of which will be returned to the patrons. And so that was a very interesting experience.

Several mentors come to mind -- Mr. Fred Herndon, who trained me for two years before he retired as President, Mr. Chet Becker, who served as CEO, and he was followed by Mr. Ernie Stevenson and also Mr. Glenn Webb, who followed me as president. They were all great people and I am indebted to all of them. Mr. Webb is the only one still living of that group.

During that time, I also had an experience with the farm credit system. I was appointed to the Farm Credit Board of Saint Louis and then after a few years was elected to the board by the cooperative members. I served there for eight or 10 years, I can't remember exactly, but I believe that it was President Nixon who appointed me to the Federal Farm

Credit Board located in Washington D.C. in 1972 for a six-year term. That was also an interesting experience.

When I was president of FS Services, it was first named Illinois Farm Supply; when we merged with Iowa it became FS Services, Inc., coined from our inverted parallelogram logo (FS). We were then members of and the largest owner of Central Farmers Fertilizer Company, located in Chicago, Illinois, which now has gone public and is on the New York Stock Exchange as CF (Central Farmers) Industries. We were also part owners of the National Cooperative Refinery Association at McPherson, Kansas, and a number of other cooperative associations. I served on the board of these organizations.

I was president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, in Washington, D.C., for a year or two. I also had some international experience with the U.S.-Japan Businessmen's Council, which was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, and also with the European agricultural organizations. And so I'd gotten used to traveling and, as a matter of fact, I was a little bit weary of traveling. The company was very kind and furnished an airplane for me. I had learned to be a pilot and used that plane extensively, especially after getting my instrument rating, but I used it mostly for trips up to 600 miles. After that I, would fly to a larger airport and catch a jet for a lot of the international travel and even some of the domestic travel except when I had other passengers who needed to travel with me.

In over 30 years of flying, I had two memorable experiences. The first was when I was returning to Quincy from somewhere in Minnesota in the clouds. I heard on the radio a request from a commuter airline captain to deviate around a cell near Waterloo, Iowa. I did not have weather radar at that time, so I thought that it would be a good idea to ask the air traffic center to guide me around that storm. I made that request from the Minneapolis center but they transferred me to the Chicago center. It took a few minutes for me to connect with the Chicago center and it looked very black ahead. When they finally responded and I made my request, and a few seconds later, I reported that I was taking on hail. They came back and said that I was only two minutes from clear sky and recommended that I slow down and continue on course. I had already slowed down and scouted down in case the windshield caved in. Thank God, the plane was equipped with a double strength windshield, and I suddenly flew out of the storm and into clear skies. I looked the plane over and slowly increased my speed up to normal cruise speed and continued on to Quincy.

After landing, I looked at the damage and found many dents in the wings, tail section and even some dents on the under side of the wings. I guess that I flew over some hail stones which were on their way up for another time around. The insurance company covered the repairs but it took several days to get back in operation. The next plane I used was equipped with weather radar.

The other memorable event was on a bright morning with not a cloud in the sky when I was returning from the east and was only about 60 miles from home. The autopilot went off and the plane started to drift off course. The distance measuring equipment (DME)

failed and then smoke started curling out of the instrument panel. I immediately started a fast decent and began to look for a long corn field, if I had to make an emergency landing. The smoke stopped and I started to check out all of the controls and found that I had no electrical equipment which was working, but the mechanical system was working all right.

I knew exactly where I was and knew that I could be home in about 10 minutes and the smoke had stopped so I proceeded on to Quincy. Since all of my electrical equipment was out, I had no radio and I began to think that I would have to lower the landing gear manually. Since I had not done that before, I got out the manual and read up on that procedure. I knew that there was a small hand crank under the front of my seat but I did not know how many turns it would take to get the gear down and locked. I knew that the light which would verify that the gear was down and locked would probably not work.

I lowered the gear the number of turns indicated and it seemed to stop but I could not see the gear. I entered the downwind leg and base leg and flew about 100 feet above the active runway. I pulled up and flew another down wind and they gave me a green light. Since this was my home base, the attendants in the tower knew the plane and me and knew that I was having some kind of trouble. The next pass was lower and near the tower so that they could check if the gear was down. I lifted the near wing so that they could get a better look at all three wheels. They gave me another green light when I was on downwind. I landed as slowly as possibly could and as soft as I could and was greatly relieved when the landing gear seemed to be solid under me.

Fortunately, I was alone and the insurance company concluded that the voltage regulator had failed and let the generators run away and blew all of the electrical equipment and caused one radio to overheat and charred the diagram on the back – which caused the smoke – and they covered all but the regulator of the \$25,000 total cost of repairs. After that, every time I took off, I asked where the good weather was - north, south, east or west. Even if it was at night, I could fly by my compass until I came to the clear weather and had a good chance of landing safely even if it was dark.

Thirty years of flying, four years in the army and fifty years driving farm machinery, and hundreds of thousands of miles on the highway, which I considered to be the most dangerous, I did not have a scratch – someone up there must be looking out for me – and I am thankful for that.

Now, I wanted to mention to you, since you will soon be moving to India, that the cooperatives of the United States who were producers and marketers of fertilizers - plant food - were told by the Cooperative League that there was an opportunity for us to help the farmers in India with a fertilizer project. Our mission was to design and build two fertilizer plants, one in Kandla, teach the farmers how to operate them and supervise its operation, help organize a number of local farmer cooperatives who would eventually own that facility and would market the products and help educate the farmers on how to use fertilizer products in India. And that was a very interesting experience. I was in India once or twice a year on that project for seven or eight years.

It's my understanding that that Indian Farmers Fertilizer Company, IFFCO, is now the largest manufacturer of fertilizer, plant food, in India. And they're even growing internationally. The last time I heard from them, they were building a plant in Portugal.

One of the problems I had was that I believe that the farmers, who use and own the cooperative, ought to manage it. But the government thought that they needed to oversee this project and I had a little bit of difficulty in accomplishing my philosophy in that respect. I hope the farmers still own it and control it, because I firmly believe that that's the essence of a cooperative, that it's theirs and they use it and they can give good advice on what is needed.

I was chairman, or president, of the Cooperative Fertilizers International. We had a 10-year contract. We donated \$100,000 a year for that project, which lasted for ten years. My good friend, Don Thomas, was sent there to manage it, and he did a great job and we still keep in touch today.

I retired from Growmark in 1980. The name was changed when FS Services and Illinois Grain merged. I'd been there for 21 years and I decided that that was long enough. I really wanted to retire at 20 years, but the Growmark organization was not fully approved at that time and I didn't want to walk out and send any signals that I wasn't in favor of the merger and so stayed on another year.

After that, I got a call from Seeley Lodwick and he asked if I would be interested in helping in the election campaign of Ronald Reagan, who at that time was running for President. I said, "Well yes, I like him and I think he would make a good president and I will help, but I can't do anything until I retire from the cooperative, because that's a no-no." And so after I retired, I joined Seeley out in Washington and we did a little bit of work for the Reagan campaign.

After Ronald Reagan was elected and John Block, who was the Director of Agriculture for Illinois, a good friend of mine, we were both outstanding young farmers by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, or the JCs, and knew each other quite well, was named Secretary of Agriculture. Both the Secretary and Mr. Lodwick said they wanted me to be a part of the new Reagan administration. Well, I said that I had agreed to go to Kenya for a period to work with Agriculture Cooperatives Development International, an organization that I had helped start, and I'd needed to see what the progress of that was before committing. Nothing much was happening, so they called and, and said you have to make up your mind. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go to Kenya next week and find out what the situation is, and I'll decide then."

I went there and found that there was a man in the government of Kenya that thought that government ought to run the cooperatives. And in selling my experience to the cooperative leadership there, they had sent some of my speeches, one of which was my philosophy on government involvement in a cooperative (*laughs*). And he threw up roadblock after roadblock, and I concluded that this thing was never going to get

approved for me, while that guy was there. They got rid of him later but it took about six months. I was going to have to pay income taxes here and income taxes there and I couldn't import any automobiles or anything without paying import taxes. Under Secretary Seeley Lodwick called as planned, the ag counselor there in Kenya came to my hotel and said "Mr. Lodwick wants you to call him back."

So I went to the embassy and told Seeley, "I've decided that this job isn't going anywhere, so I'll accept your invitation to join the Administration."

He said, "Great, when can you start?"

I said, "Well, we're going to be here for one more day, and when I get back to Washington I'll just get off the plane there and report that day." And, I did and found that the only thing that was open at that time, it was in April already, was the manager of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation. I spent my first 11 months there, and it was a very difficult position because it was hemorrhaging losses like there wasn't any tomorrow.

When Seeley showed me the financial statement I said, "Seeley, this corporation is bankrupt." He says, "I know, but we'll take care of that. There'll be money available."

One particular incident remains in my memory. The weather in the southeast was rainy and wet and the farmers could not harvest the wheat and then plant their second crop, soybeans. The farmers in that area wanted the Crop Insurance to extend the planting deadline so that they could still secure the insurance. I asked the actuarial people to check it out and our personnel in the area, to check with the land-grant universities in the area to get their estimate of yields for soybeans planted after our closing date. The answer came back that the yield would be from very low to zero. So I denied their request.

A few days later, I received a request to meet with a group of legislative assistants representing senate members and congressmen from that area. That, of course, was granted. We discussed the situation and I told them that after our research, we would be insuring an almost certain loss. I told them that I still stood by my decision.

The leader of the group asked if I knew who they were. I said that I thought that they were representing legislators who had created the program, funded the program and could probably shut it down whenever they decided to do so. The leader said "Well you seem to have that about right."

I then asked, "Do you know who I am?" The leader said, "Well, not very much about you, tell us." I said that I had not asked to come out here in Washington, did not need to be here and would be glad to go back and help manage the family farm. While I am here, however, I intend to manage this corporation like a business."

The leader said that no one is able to run government programs out here like a business. That leader's name was Haley Barbour, who is presently the Governor of Mississippi. The longer I stayed, the more I appreciated his wisdom.

The present program has a prevented planting option but the decision has to be made while it is still an insurable risk.

Another interesting experience while there, was a personnel problem. A staff member told me that he had an employee who worked in the mailroom who disappeared about 1:30 P.M. each day and didn't show up again until about closing time. I asked, "Have you told him that we will not tolerate that kind of performance?" He replied "Yes, but it does not do any good." I said, "He must conform to our required work schedule or he will be terminated." My staff member told me, "Well, he is a veteran and is black." I responded "He probably received credit for that when he was hired, but if he is not doing his job, you should fire him."

I learned a lot from that experience. I found out that I could not discharge an employee for being an alcoholic – we had to cure him – so we sent him away for three months to get rehabilitated. While he was gone, we learned that he had been thrown out of his apartment and he was sleeping in the basement of the office building and was climbing in and out of the basement window. We also learned that he was securing a lot of flashlight batteries from the supply room. He finally admitted that he had been selling them out on the street and decided to resign. He came in and said that he was resigning and was going to get straightened up and would come back like a new man. I said, "Good for you, I accept your resignation."

But it was an interesting experience. But then I had an opportunity to find another spot in the department and became the associate administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service, and the General Sales Manager for the department. That was a very, very exciting experience. I was tired of traveling when I retired from Growmark and it's kind of ironic that I stepped into a position that required even more travel. I learned to sleep on the plane, and, and I was on one overseas assignment, I think, about every month for seven years. I remember I was across the Pacific five times one month. I learned how to solve the jet lag problem – you just get so weary that you can sleep anytime and anywhere.

One interesting experience remains in my mind. A staff member came into my office and asked what I thought about guaranteeing credit for the export of Pepsi concentrate. I looked at him with disbelief and asked, "What kind of farmers produce Pepsi concentrate?" He asked if I knew what Pepsi concentrate was made of. I said, "No, tell me." He said, "It contains a very high percentage of fruit juice." After getting up from falling off my perch, I said, "I know a lot of farmers who grow fruit and if fruit juice is a high percentage of the concentrate, I'll approve it. "

The next day it was announced and I got a call from the agricultural editor of the *Washington Post* We were friends because he had previously been the farm editor of The Bloomington, Illinois, newspaper when I was President of Growmark there. He asked, "Mel, what kind of farmers grow Pepsi concentrate?" I chuckled and said that is exactly the same question I had asked when the proposal was presented to me. They told me that

it had a high percentage of fruit juice and I know of a lot of farmers who grow fruit. There was a silence and he said, "Oh." He asked if it would be O.K. to write an article about it. I said that it would be all right with me, it might even be helpful. The next day there was an article titled "Amber Waves of Pepsi Concentrate."

I was always delighted to meet with the people in the foreign countries. I enjoyed knowing and trying to help them. But mainly, I was interested in helping the U.S. farmers increase their exports and improve their efficiency, and thereby providing cheaper food for all the citizens in this country. So that's the thing that drove me during that period. And I remember it as a great experience and also being with Growmark I was with lot of fine people in both organizations. And so that was about the assignment until I retired in 1989.

*Q: If you could talk a little bit, Mel, about some of your highlights of your tenure as General Sales Manager and in particular the work in Iraq and the work in Algeria, because those were huge operations. And one other point is that you were general Sales Manager longer than anyone else in history. You were General Sales Manager from 1982 to 1989 for a span of seven years. Chris Goldthwait did the work of General Sales Manager a year longer, but he was acting for the first I think three years and then was General Sales Manager for six. So you, you hold the Guinness Book of World Records for --*

SIMS: I see.

*Q: -- for tenure as General Sales Manager. If you could highlights and in particular Iraq and Algeria.*

SIMS: I'll start out with the story on Iraq. The Wheat Associates called and said, "We have a mission coming from Iraq and wondered if you could meet with them."

And I said, "Yes, I think I can," and we scheduled the meeting for a Thursday.

Well, at the last minute they called and said, "The Iraqis have been delayed. They will not be here until Friday. Can you still come?" I later learned that their travel schedule was secret and changeable.

I said, "No, I have another commitment." And I said, "I'll send Larry McElvain to explain the program to them."

So he met with them and they called back and said, "Well, they still want to meet with you."

So I said, "When can they meet?"

"Well," he said, "that's a problem. The only time they have left is Sunday morning, in Denver."

And I said, "That's when I'm supposed to be at church!" (*laughs*). I said, "Are these people serious?"

"Oh yes." And he said, "They're prepared to make a purchase, 300 million dollars of agricultural products while they're still here."

I said, "What time do they want me to be there?" (*laughs*). "I'll sure be there." I flew out Saturday night and a man from Wheat Associates met me at the airport and kind of briefed me on what had been going on and I met with them the next morning. It was a group of five or six Iraqis and I was impressed with all of them. They were forthright and seemed to be good businessmen. And they said, "Well, we'd like to come to Washington on Monday and get this finalized and we're going to leave on Wednesday and we'd like to get these orders completed on Tuesday."

They came and we finalized the agreement and they purchased \$300 million worth of farm products before they left. Before that, we'd only been exporting about \$50,000 a year to them. They'd been buying mostly from Russia and were not satisfied with the way it was working. We prepared and signed an agreement so that they could buy the products from grain exporters in the private sector. They borrowed from a bank in the United States and then we guaranteed the bank that if the Iraqis didn't pay, we would. And I remember one person asking, "Why do you want to deal with Iraq?"

I said, "Well, I think that this will greatly expand our exports and they'll pay us because they have oil." And I said, "We extend a lot of credit to countries and they don't have oil or didn't have it at that time, so I think their credit risk is good." I fortunately said, "The only big constraint is a military risk." At that time, they were fighting with Iran but were winning that war.

After the program had been working for a time, the delegation came back. I called up the State Department and I said, "These people are coming, how we doing with Iraq?"

"Well, we are doing all right."

I said, "If they come can I have a lunch for them?"

"Well, sure," they said.

"Well, how about asking, Secretary Block to also come?"

"Well," he says, "we don't know that we want to go that far at this time."

They came over every year to renegotiate another contract and I visited them in Iraq to see how things were going, once or twice a year during my period with them, which was about five or six years as I remember. They missed a payment twice. Someone called up, and said they didn't make their payment. So I got on the phone. The time you needed to

call Iraq was about 3:00 AM in the morning with the time change. I told the person that, "You didn't make that payment." He said, "I'll take care of it, it'll be paid today." And it was. And that same thing happened a second time. Other than that, they did everything they said they'd do and we got them up to a two-billion-dollar sales program a year, and we were giving credit guarantees for that. The Secretary was glad to meet with them after they became such good customers.

They wanted to buy agricultural chemicals under the program but I said that we only helped with agricultural products, which were grown in the U.S. or processed products there. An exporter reported that one purchase of grain also needed to have a tractor put in the ship on top of the grain. I said that we do not participate in any shady activity like that. On two occasions an exporter told me that they had been put on a black list because they had sold some grain to Israel. I said that I would stop that the next time we met. I told them that if they wanted to kill the program, that would be the quickest way to do it, So they stopped but it came up again a few years later and they stopped doing that again, after I talked to them.

Then when they invaded Kuwait after I had already retired, I thought that this is going to be a difficult time. Now it is history, what happened in Kuwait and eventually the overthrow of Saddam. I never did meet Saddam Hussein and matter of fact, never really wanted to. I can remember one time when we were traveling somewhere south of Baghdad and we stopped at a grain storage facility. The person who was with me said, "You know, down 50 feet below the bottom of that grain storage silo is quite a military installation. Would you like to go down and see it?"

And I said, "No, I don't believe I want to get involved in that." Many leaders in the Middle East really thought they were a lot stronger than they really were, militarily. I knew that when war broke out between us, it wouldn't last very long. But when we first drove them back out of Kuwait, a lot of people thought we ought to have finished the job then. And I had mixed emotions about that. I thought what we probably didn't have plans as to how to take over and what would happen after the war. That turned out to be the case and there were chaotic conditions there.

I wanted to say one thing about the lady who was ambassador in Iraq.

*Q: April Glaspie.*

SIMS: April Glaspie, that's right. And she was one of the best ambassadors that I ever worked with. She knew Arabic perfectly. She was right involved in all of our discussions, sitting there on the edge of her chair. And if the translator made a mistake, she corrected her. And I'm sorry that it ended up the way it did for her, and I'm not sure but what she might have been the fall guy for what happened, but to give her some credit, she was an excellent ambassador. I met with one ambassador who would not even meet with a export promotion group who was there when I was there.

Now the question is, how much loss did the U.S. incur? I don't know, but it was probably several million dollars. But those two-billion-dollar export years provided lots of jobs and better prices for a lot of people in the United States. And what's that worth? I'm not able to determine, but it was very much. They defaulted on the loan when the U.S. took them out of Kuwait. And that's the military risk we assumed. But after the war, I think we continued to try to do business with them. I guess it was difficult because of the lack of experience of the government people there at that time. And I'm not sure how much is going on now, but we made a lot of friends in Iraq during that period. And, and unfortunately, a lot of the people I worked with there, didn't survive.

The U.S. is, of course, still involved in trying to help Iraq become a shining light in that part of the Middle East. We need that. I expect that the debt still owed us for the defaults has been forgiven by now but is probably charged to Agriculture. The total cost in trying to save Iraq is enormous and our loss is just a small part of that picture. But I still wish that it had not happened.

As we look back now, I must admit that the results have to be mixed. The last year I was there, some of my staff members were reluctant to continue guaranteeing more loans. At that time I did not see any real threat of Iraq engaging in a war. After I retired and went back to the office to see some of my former associates, I met with Larry McElvain who had just returned from a trip to Iraq. He said that while there, he had an eerie feeling that they were preparing for war. I said, "That is very bad news."

*Q: I have to tell you a story, because I followed you into Iraq after one of your visits by about one month. I was working in the Dairy, Livestock and Poultry Division at the time and Iraq was our single largest market for chicken meat. So I was sent in to do some analysis of their imports and the Iraqis were very secretive. They were similar to the Soviets in trying to hide statistical data from us. And so when I first asked for statistical data and poultry production and trade, they told me they didn't have the data, data were very difficult to find, the usual runaround. But then I said, "Well, I'm a friend of Mr. Sims," and the doors opened. And I got, I got complete data because I was a friend of Mr. Sims who had just been there a month before.*

*And well, "How do you know Mr. Sims?"*

*I said, "Well, my wife is from Illinois." "Oh well, then you must be a good friend of Mr. Sims." And we got all the data we needed --*

*SIMS: (laughs)*

*Q: -- which we transmitted back by telegram. And the Iraqis did not allow the embassy to have computers, so all the statistical data went back with -- in Morse code with a telegrapher's key. And I caught hail Columbia from the communications unit in the embassy because statistical tables are not easy to transmit by, by Morse code.*

SIMS: Well, that's interesting. In FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service) they used to call me the mayor of Baghdad because I'd spent at least two, three trips there a year and they'd be here about two trips and, and we became very close friends. The chairman of the first delegation was a man named Ghanam Aziz and he was a Christian, but he was still involved in government, an elected official, and I never have heard the details of his demise, but I can imagine in my mind what happened to him. He was a very fine man. Another man that headed the delegation was a veterinarian and I said, "You know, in ancient times they didn't have refrigeration and pork meat would not keep very well." But I said, "That excuse is gone now. We have modern refrigeration."

He interrupted me to say, "I eat it all the time."

*Q: (laughs)*

SIMS: *(laughs)* And another fellow was a fine, fine gentleman, a staunch Muslim. He was a great and a reputable person. And I heard he got killed in an auto accident, but that's all I know. So I have some fond memories and some pictures downstairs that I want to share with you.

*Q: Oh, that'd be great.*

SIMS: Yeah.

*Q: Aside from Iraq, you also did some really groundbreaking work in opening up the market in Algeria, which at one point, as I recall, was one of the largest markets for eggs in the world. And if you could, if you could talk about that.*

SIMS: We got acquainted with the ambassador from Algeria while in Washington. And we were not doing much with them and we initiated a new program that gave some special incentives for agricultural exports, more or less to combat what the European community was doing.

*Q: Was that the Export Enhancement Program?*

SIMS: Yes, so I scheduled a trip to Algeria, the staff got it all arranged for me. And I'm trying to remember who it was that was ag counselor there the first time. But anyway, that was my first trip to Algeria. And I met with the people and they said, "Why, should we buy from you?"

And said, "Because it's going to be equal to or better than any other price you can get anywhere else in the world. And besides, we have good products and we give fair weights and we do what we say we'll do and you can depend on us."

And they thought maybe they'd take a little nibble, as I remember, and we had a small sale to start with. But then things continued to develop, and it became a respectable market for us before I left. And I don't know whether they'd communicated with the

Iraqis or not, but that was another market which worked very well. Of course, the developed countries, like Japan and others, did not need our credit guarantee I didn't have much dealing with them because I was mostly working with the developing countries around the world. Even though that was more difficult physically, that pleased me because they're the people that we need to help and probably held the most hope for expanding our export market.

*Q: What was your proudest accomplishment over seven years?*

SIMS: Oh, there's just a whole bunch of 'em. I don't know if I can visualize one. I remember a time when I was testifying before, Congressman...

*Q: Jamie Whitten?*

SIMS: Yes Jamie Whitten for appropriations. And he asked, "What are you doing about cheese?"

I said, "Well, we're trying to market it. Matter fact, when I was just in Algeria and they didn't know what cheese was." So I said, "Well, the next time I come I'll bring a sample of cheese." I called up the Commodity Credit Corporation, and asked, "Can you provide me a little sample of cheese to take to Algeria so they can try it?"

It turned out that they gave me about a 25-pound chunk of cheese. I didn't know how to get it there without hand-carrying it. And Jamie says, "You know, it'll take a long time to get rid of all of our cheese, 25 pounds at a time," (*laughs*). And we had a laugh. But he was a very friendly and personable and helpful person while he was there for the General Sales Manager's program. But I took that to Algeria and they, kind of liked it, but they'd never eaten cheese before. I don't remember that it resulted in a sale of cheese, however.

I guess if I was to say the proudest accomplishment was while I was there I think we completely got rid of all of our non-fat dry milk that we had in storage, our cheese, our sugar -- that's an interesting story, and a lot of grain. We practically emptied the inventory of the Commodity Credit Corporation. And I don't take credit for that, but I give Secretary Dick Lyng a big applause for that, for helping think it through that we had these commodities in inventory, we're paying for storage, we have our money tied up, and it makes good sense to get rid of it. And so he called me one day, said, "Mel, we've got 300,000 tons of raw sugar stored. Can you get rid of it?"

"Well," I said, "what are the constraints?"

"Well," he said, "we don't have many."

I said, "Well, of course I can get rid of it."

And he said, "Well, one thing we don't want to do is upset the world market."

I said, "I agree with that. We'll try not to do that." And we went to all different places or contacted them, and finally we learned that in China, their sugar crop season was over and they had a bunch of sugar refineries that were sitting idle. And we thought now, this is a good place to pursue - we had a good chance of talking them into importing this surplus commodity. .

Bill Randolph and I went over and talked to the Cereal Oil Foods agency. They were the ones that would handle the purchase. And we talked and talked and talked. And at the end of the third day, I said, "Gentleman, we have to go to Shanghai tomorrow." I said, "If you're ready to take this, we'll make a deal and close it now. If you're not, and then change your mind, call us in Shanghai and I'll send Bill back to close the deal."

And after we finished the discussion, they said, "You know, the longer we bargain, it is considered to be a better job that we have done in negotiating."

And I finally told them, "You have done well, but this is our last price. We're through negotiating. We're going to Shanghai. If you want it, you call us there."

So they called and said, "Yes, we'd like for you to come back."

I said, "Does that mean you're ready to buy it?"

"Well, we want to talk."

I said, "No, we're not talking any more," (*laughs*).

And they said, "OK, come back and we'll give you that price." It was a bargain price. But then we had trouble with shipping. The sugar was in New Orleans. And you know about 27 miles out of the mouth of Mississippi is where the silt builds up, and they have to keep digging that out or --

*Q: Dredging.*

SIMS: Yes, dredging it out is the word. But even then, the ships can't haul a full load. So they asked if it would all right if they tied up and topped out in Cuba? I said, "No, I can tell you right off that isn't going to work." Somehow we were importing sugar from the Philippines to store in our program here in the U.S. Never did understand that. So I said, "Why don't we, instead of them shipping it to us, have them ship it from the Philippines and fill our order there?"

Well, somehow the shipping industry didn't think that was a very good idea. So that wouldn't work. But, we did get rid of most of the surplus commodities during that period and that's because Secretary Lyng decided that storing the commodities was not a good business proposition. Now, I understand they're still keeping some of those storage facilities, paying rent on it, staffing it, etc. And I guess I fail to understand how much it

would cost to start up that kind of a program again, and maybe it's better just to keep it idle. But anyway, we emptied a lot of storage facilities during my period there.

*Q: You worked for Dick Smith when you first came to FAS and Dick passed away a few years ago in Florida. Maybe you could fill in some of the blanks of that part of the history, of, of what it was like in FAS immediately after Dick Smith brought the agency back into the Foreign Service and he also had some very strong management philosophies about how the agency should be run. So could you talk about that a bit please?*

SIMS: Well, it took a while for me to get really acquainted with Dick Smith. But he had a lot of fine qualities. He had a good vision of what the Foreign Agricultural Service ought to be. I think that his vision gives a lot of strength to the organization yet today. Helping him was, George Pope. He was also my Assistant General Sales Manager for a while. And the two of them filled me in quite a lot on how all the negotiations had been. And I suspect Rep. Jamie Whitten was involved in this as well. And I thought it was a great move to have that be an agency. And we could focus on utilizing people there who knew about agriculture and were skilled in it and they were dedicated and well educated people. And it was, and is today.

I had heard before that if you can get into the Foreign Agricultural Service, that's the best agency in the department. And so I jumped at the chance of going there. Dick had several divisions under his supervision. At first I was just the General Sales Manager and in charge of export credits, but then the commodity divisions were put under my administration.

*Q: Jimmy Minyard.*

SIMS: Well, yes, it was Jimmy's division. Dick added that to my responsibility. I never did really give that as much time as I should have. But it was, also a very fine experience. And I was, and continue to be, a strong supporter of the activities that the cooperators have with the department and thought it was money well spent. And I know some people said that the commodity entities ought to do it themselves. But it's pretty hard to do too much promotion of U.S. agricultural products and their derivatives. So it was a good experience.

When Tom Kay took over, he was a great Administrator. His great expertise was working with the Congress, because he'd been working with them for a number of years, he knew many of them, and, and as far as appropriations were concerned, we didn't have any problems after he took over. Some people asked me if I was interested in being the Administrator, and I said I don't know enough about getting the funding and I'm afraid I'd get in over my head there. I loved what I was doing and I was really happy to see Tom Kay come. He was a great person, and had a beautiful personality, and helped make it an interesting assignment. I'm trying to recall things that might have happened when Dick was there. I think some of the new programs were started. He was, of course, involved in what's the best way to organize the agency.

I had one interesting experience when the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) decided that we ought to disperse a lot of dairy cattle herds to try to prop up the price of milk.

*Q: The old Dairy Termination Program?*

SIMS: Yeah. And so I thought -- well, I'd been a dairyman for a while and I thought, "You know, there's a lot of people that had spent their lifetime getting their herd built up genetically and then to send them all to the slaughterhouse seems to me to be a waste. If we export them, that production probably won't come back to bite us." And so we tried to get it going, but it was, I guess I'd have to call it a disaster in retrospect. I know that some people had a load of cattle on an airplane and they picked up some strong headwinds and had to land in Paris to refuel. And the heat was so bad that they had to get the animals out of that plane so they could survive. And then when they loaded them back up, the French wouldn't let them proceed to their destination. They cattle had to go back to the U.S., as I remember the story. And then when they decided to bring them back to U.S., they first had to land at that quarantine island out there. And it was just a mind-boggling affair. But, we did send some, to Iraq, but I think most of the people had them butchered (*laughs*), instead of going into a dairy herd.

*Q: Well, I remember boatloads of those cattle arriving in Turkey.*

SIMS: Yes.

*Q: When I was trade officer in Istanbul.*

SIMS: Yeah.

*Q: We had boatloads of Holsteins arriving in Turkey and being distributed to Turkish dairymen.*

SIMS: And it worked well there?

*Q: And it worked fairly well, but the problem was is that the Turks of course believe in the evil eye and so they were always protecting their cows from the evil eye, keeping them indoors, so they weren't getting much sunshine.*

SIMS: Oh, I see.

*Q: And the cows kind of suffered from that.*

SIMS: (*laughs*) Yes, I suspect so. Well I went down to visit one of the ships that they were using in exporting the cattle, where was it ?

*Q: Yeah, down in -- down there in the coast of Virginia.*

SIMS: Yes, that is right, I asked Ben Thompson, who had helped manage the program go down with me. And that was an interesting experience. So I got an idea of what a cattle ship looked like, for exporting cattle. But I never was real proud of the end results of that program, and we worked hard at it. I convinced Ben Thompson to come back from retirement, on contract, I guess it was, and he worked hard on it too. But it was one of those things. You cannot win them all.

I didn't mention anything about the PL-480 program. We had the administration of section two of that program. It was sending surplus commodities to countries on long-term credit. I had some difficulty with the fact that it had to be shipped on American ships. But you don't build a ship overnight and we do need to have ocean-going vessels, regardless of what comes up security-wise and so forth. And so I finally got used to subsidizing the American ships. But it hurt our commercial sales if we had to abide by that American ship requirement. Mary Chambliss was our institutional memory for PL-480. She had been a part of that program since its beginning and was a great member of the team. Our budget for that program was about \$3 billion per year.

We had a program in which we were going to get rid of some surplus corn, as I remembered. I believe maybe that was a barter arrangement.

*Q: Yeah, if you could talk about the barter. Because there was a -- you were in the middle of Congress' desire to promote and barter, and that was a very interesting experience. I remember one of your quotes saying at some point that you were testifying to Congress and said something to the effect that money was invented for a reason. If you could talk about barter.*

SIMS: Yes, I remember that statement too and still believe it. We had a mandate from Congress that we would do so much barter, during the next year

*Q: And why was that? Why the big emphasis on barter?*

SIMS: Well, the legislators thought that there were countries out there that needed some commodities that we had in storage and they had some things that we needed, like oil. It just sounded good, we would just give them some food and they'd give us some oil. And in theory I can follow that. But I soon learned that the people that sold oil didn't want our dry milk. And the people that wanted our dry milk didn't have oil. I can remember going to Mexico and the petroleum company there just kept shaking their head. And I think I went to six or eight different countries trying to promote that program. Maybe I wasn't a very good salesman, but I tell you, I wasn't able to sell that program. We came back and were called in to testify. Well, I just could not make it work. And I said I had concluded that there's a good reason why money was invented centuries ago, to facilitate trade between people and countries. Because those people had money to buy generally, and we had money to buy the oil. But the people that sold us the oil didn't want to take corn or wheat or just non-fat dry milk or cheese or whatever we had (*laughs*). So they finally accepted the fact that this was a good idea, but not one that had a practical basis.

*Q: Right about the time you left was when things started to unravel in Eastern Europe. We just started to see the rise of Solidarity in Poland and of course as time went by USDA had a role in, in technical assistance to Eastern Europe and eventually to Russia and Ukraine and other countries that came out of that experience. Could you talk a little bit -- this was just about the time that you were preparing to leave USDA. But if you could talk about that from your perspective.*

SIMS: Well, I have to say I was not very much involved in that as I remember. I saw it as an opportunity for us. I'd like to say that I had several mentors while with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. First, President Reagan, I'm not sure that he knew about that, Secretary Richard Lyng, Seeley Lodwick, Tom Kay, Jim Ross, George Pope and Chris Goldthwait, my three assistants, Jimmy Minyard, Bill Davis, Dick Cannon, Norm Kallemeyn and others.

I do want to tell you that Florita and I took a cruise, after retiring. I think it was the Baltic Sea cruise. We stopped in Poland and went on the walking tour while ashore. I struck up a conversation with the guide as we were walking along. After a while, he asked, "What did you do?"

I said, "Well, I retired from the U.S. Department of Agriculture."

And he said, "Oh, we love the United States," right away. And he said, "We, would have starved if it hadn't been for the U.S." And then he told us how the underground worked and the mimeograph machines that they used to print the underground paper and, they were just great. About everyone we met in Poland, was a friend of the U.S. And we felt very comfortable there. It was good to hear some appreciation for the work we had done.

I'll tell you, one time when we were on a Baltic Sea cruise, we landed in Russia, near St. Petersburg, and every time we went off the ship we had to go through immigration. And every time we'd come back to get on the ship we had to go through immigration again and show all of our papers, etc. That's the only country that I had ever visited, about 87 countries and that was the most stringent process that I'd encountered anywhere. But the great wheat sale that Don Novotny was involved in, occurred during that time.

We have entertained some farmers who came to visit our farm from Russia. My son had a dinner for them and invited me to come and I got acquainted with them. I have concluded that if Russia just had the right leadership we could be great neighbors and trading partners, much more than we are. But the leadership there must have their own reasons, I guess, to be very skeptical of all who come there.

Now, I visited China many times and I have some friends here ask, "Why are we cozying up with China?"

I said, "Because the people in China are just like we are, they work hard, they save, and they buy things that they need. The government is communistic. We have to admit that."

But I said, “The people, by what they do, are capitalist. And they’re going to be a big factor in the world, and already are right now, and we must learn to work with them.” All the people I dealt with, including the government official in China, were friendly, kind and compassionate people. The younger generation there, if you stood on the sidewalk, would gather around you in just a little bit.

I didn’t say anything about my experience with the World Food Programme. In our budget, we had, I think 300 million dollars that we contributed to the World Food Programme each year. When the World Food Programme started out, the U.N. General Assembly decided that they ought to run the World Food Programme and when they got together about all that they wanted to talk about was international policy. The Programme did not do what it was supposed to do. Finally someone came up with the idea that the structure ought to be reorganized.

The governing body ought to be composed of 30 members and 15 members would come from the donating nations and 15 members from the recipient nations. Since I was from a donating nation, I was on the board for six or seven years. They had a two-week meeting every spring and fall in Rome and that interfered with my schedule. I did stay for the first week and sometimes for a few days in the second but then turned it over to an assistant.

The management would present the proposed projects for the next six months for comment and approval. They had some interesting projects – one was the Work For Food program The country would propose an infrastructure project, as an example, and the workers would receive food for their work. The program was designed to help countries, which had suffered a natural or military disaster. It worked well and was well managed, and even today I hear of the World Food Programme getting to a country promptly after a disaster has occurred.

Today, we live in one world and yet some people think that we ought to just deal with ourselves and not worry about foreign aid and market information collection and things like that. We must learn to live with each other and work together for our common good. There may be times when we disagree with each other and even fight each other but we must stick with the principals that made this country great and be able to protect our freedom. I doubt that our people will provide the finances to police the whole world.

I am concerned today, that our government is spending much more than we are receiving. I’m not pointing at any political party because both parties have been involved in creating our present dilemma. I have been seeing reports that our country is heading for bankruptcy. Some say it is not if, but when. That, they say, will be when the U.S. will no longer be able to service their debt. We look at Europe today and see some very difficult problems and their combined economy is larger than the U.S. We may be able to gain some in revenues but we must reduce spending. I’m preparing for some decreases in agriculture and even in some of the entitlements. I wish that we didn’t have to endure that but to do nothing might be even worse

I can remember when I was involved in the grain marketing business, Illinois Grain, and even in the international export business, Farmers Export, that there was a country named Rhodesia, it was a British colony, They were a formidable competitor in the world corn market.

The British then thought that they ought to give the colony their freedom. That was a popular program going on all around the world at that time And, they did. The citizens changed the country's name to Zimbabwe and elected a guy named Mugabe to be their president. One of the things he did, among other things, was go to all the big large efficient farmers and tell them we're going to buy your farm, didn't ask it was for sale, told 'em we're going to buy it and this is what we're going to pay you for it. And there's just one hitch to that: you can't take the money out of the country. When I visited there, well, last time was maybe in the mid-1980s, I asked the person with us from the embassy there, "How's this guy, Mugabe, doing?"

He says, "Well, he says all the right things but does all the wrong things." That country has just gone to the pits.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

SIMS: Starvation is occurring, health is deteriorating, poverty is everywhere. I think there are gangs going around the country. And it's just a shame. Now, the United States is not going to do that, I pray and hope. But -- because ours is a much larger economy. And Japan has gone through a difficult time, and they're recovering even though it's going to take a lot of time, then maybe we can also survive. I hope there are enough people that understand economics that will help us get this turned around to where we start getting some of this bickering stopped and get some of the debt paid off. And so my experience in going around the world is that there are lots of countries that need lots of help. But I don't believe we can be the savior for all countries in the world. We don't have that much wealth. And there's not anybody that has enough money to bail us out anymore. So, I can remember when I used to hear old fuddies talk about the country going to hell in a handbasket, well now I'm one of 'em (*laughs*). But I'm optimistic, too, that there's so much to save here and so much to be thankful for, and, I must say our government's not perfect by any means, but visiting some 80 some countries, I haven't found one that I think I'd sooner live in.. So, we've got to solve our problems and keep it the great country that it has been and hopefully will continue to be

*Q: Mel, thank you very much.*

SIMS: Thank you. I've enjoyed reminiscing with you this morning.

This is just a brief update on what I've been up to lately. In February 2011, I formed M Sims LLC. Its purpose is to keep some of the inherited farmland intact so that if any future family members desire to engage in production agriculture, they will have access to a land base, like my brother and I had, when we began. Sims Farms, or any successor, will have the first right to rent the land. After my generation, any future member will

have to be a blood relative of either the Melvin Sims or the Dean Sims family to qualify for membership. If any member wants to cash out, it will have to be offered to the LLC at a 25% discount and agree to a 10-year payment schedule.

This requirement obviously puts a penalty on those who want to cash in and benefits the remaining members. At least 80% of the net profit will need to be paid out to the members each year so that it should be a competitive investment return – long term. I put in a little over 200 acres and some working capital this year and more will go in as time goes by.

The land, which was put in, in February, has already gone up 15 percent. It is hoped that future generations will gift or will their units in the LLC and most of the land, which they inherit, into the LLC and then on to their children. I hope this will also tie the family closer together in the future.

This project has helped keep me off of the streets.

*End of interview*