

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

TODD GREENTREE

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 13th of May 2014 with Todd Greentree. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, let's sort of start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

GREENTREE: San Diego, California.

Q: And when?

GREENTREE: 1953.

Q: All right. Let's get a little family history. What do you know about, say on the Greentree side of the family first?

GREENTREE: The actual family name is Greenbaum, which was originally Grünbaum, which my great-grandfather brought with him to Ellis Island as a German Jewish immigrant in the late 1800s. Growing up in San Diego during hippie times I changed my name to Greentree.

Q: All right. What about your parents? Where did your father come from?

GREENTREE: So, well he -- I'm fourth generation San Diego. So San Diego, California back in the early, late 1800s, early 1900s, probably was a pretty interesting place. But he was born there. And my mother, my mother's from Indiana, from the Midwest.

Q: What was your family occupied in San Diego?

GREENTREE: My father was an aeronautical engineer, and then he changed careers and became a lawyer.

Q: And your mother?

GREENTREE: She was a housewife, raised four kids. Her maiden name was Todd, my first name. We have a family genealogy that goes back to 14th century Scotland.

Q: Well, what do you know about the Todds?

GREENTREE: They were a Highland sub-clan of the McLellan's, and loyal to Robert the Bruce during the Scottish independent period. Our first ancestor in the U.S. was a fellow by the name of Christopher Todd, who was contracted as a carpenter and came over on the second Mayflower.

Q: Did you find yourself particularly interested in any world affairs or that sort of thing as a kid?

GREENTREE: No, not particularly. California tends to be sort of self-referential anyway and the lifestyle is so good that the local environment provided plenty to stay entertained and active with.

Q: Did you follow foreign events much?

GREENTREE: As a young kid, no, not too much. The big issue was the Vietnam War. The idea of getting drafted was not very attractive. I was very involved in the protest movement. Things like the Cold War and related events or more intellectual involvement, international affairs, nothing at all.

Q: Well, where was high school? I assume it was a San Diego high school.

GREENTREE: Point Loma High School, I dropped out and just worked and hitchhiked around mostly the West Coast. Hitchhiked to the East Coast and spent time in New York. So I spent quite a lot of time traveling around and actually finished school at a continuation high school.

Q: Did you enjoy the hippie time?

GREENTREE: Oh yeah, there was a lot of freedom and great music and when I moved out of my family house I lived in a group house that was a commune with a bunch of other people. We had a food cooperative and a free school and all kinds of stuff going on. It was pretty lively. San Diego was basically a conservative place, nothing like San Francisco at the time, there was still this liberal pocket in the community called Ocean Beach where I lived.

Q: Were you thinking about eventually going on to higher education?

GREENTREE: No, because I was such a thorough member of the counterculture I rejected the idea of sort of following the program. But I always stayed very active learning and reading. So when the time seemed right, I started going to school.

Q: Ah. Well, how did this, you might say, inspiration of going back to school hit you? Was it a sudden revelation, or just you'd been thinking about it for a while, or what?

GREENTREE: Good question. It was actually two things. One, I fell in with a really incredible family, the Hagerstroms. There were eight kids, and they had room for me. James, the father, had been an Air Force officer. He was an ace pilot, an authentic war hero. He'd been an ace pilot in both World War II and the Korean War. And then as the commander of tactical air in Vietnam. He was one of 40 officers who protested U.S. air strategy, one of the first cracks within the U.S. military in the Vietnam War. He went on to become a lawyer. Lee, the mother, she turned 94 yesterday, had been a WASP, a Woman's Air Service Pilot in World War II.

Q: Well, did you find it difficult being back in school? Were you being tempted to being sucked back into the looser life of hippiedom?

GREENTREE: No. It was all seamless. I had been working with dolphins for the Navy and went to the University of California Santa Cruz in 1975 primarily to study marine mammal biology. Professor Ken Norris there was the foremost marine mammal biologist of the time.

Q: Well, it's a great way to be introduced to it. When you were training the dolphins for the navy, was this part of this experiment of using them to look for mines and things like that?

GREENTREE: Well, there were two programs. One was more experimental, scientific oriented, and the other was applied practical with the Navy SEALs. So the program that I was with was the experimental one doing communications experiments and things like that. We crossed over and did a lot of interactive work that the SEALs were doing as well.

Q: Well, did the Foreign Service cross your radar at all?

GREENTREE: Not in the least.

Q: How about countries as far as interest in the Far East or Europe or the Middle East or what have you?

GREENTREE: Yes, well that's where that got started. I ended up doing what was called an "independent major," which was one of the alternative aspects of UC Santa Cruz. You could design your own program and find advisors who would then take it on, very much like you would do for a graduate program, except for that you structured it yourself. So I wrote a proposal and there were two primary professors who sponsored it. I did an independent major that more than anything else was a combination of anthropology and psychology.

Q: Did you sort of concentrate on any particular area or era?

GREENTREE: Yes. The anthropology professor that I was working with had been a member of the Harvard Anthropology Project, which is located in Chiapas, southern Mexico. And it had been going since the early 1950s. So that led me, even as an undergraduate, to do a considerable amount of fieldwork. I did two archaeology expeditions to Mexico and Guatemala. I did anthropology fieldwork with the Chamula Indians in Chiapas.

Q: What did you find that particularly interested you in dealing with Chiapas?

GREENTREE: Well, of course the whole thing was a big adventure. I was working pretty seriously, learning the Tzotzil language. And I went on two archaeology expeditions in Mayan areas of Mexico and Guatemala. In the highlands of Chiapas, I'd say, I was getting the first element of awareness about foreign political environments, because, I it didn't know it at the time, it was the start of this Zapatista rebellion, if you're familiar with that.

Q: Yes, Chiapas was sort of the center of this.

GREENTREE: It became the center of it. The people that started it were actually from the Mexican government, from the National Indian Institute (INI), but they were all Marxist revolutionaries. And they were up there, so there were all these tensions around in the community. But it was largely hidden. If you weren't up there you would never know about it.

Q: As you're doing this, did you get any particular feel for Mexican rule, Mexican authorities?

GREENTREE: Oh yeah. I wasn't really studying politics or anything like that, but there were a couple things going on. One was that the mainstream native society was very integrated into the Mexican PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)), the party at the time that the Mexicans had basically co-opted them. So you had this traditional structure that was linked to the Mexican political structure. And it was that that the early Zapatistas were trying to overthrow. And they were doing it because -- they were successful because a lot -- the Indian population was growing, but the land area, the cultivatable land area was not growing. So a lot of them were going down to get jobs in the oil areas, but others were just being marginalized. It was among that population that the Zapatistas were having their success.

Q: Did you find yourself drifting from anthropology to political agitation?

GREENTREE: Well, no, not directly. But that's exactly the right question to ask. Because, what I had drifted into was being in academia. But I realized that most of the students were busy working on their PhDs and were not interested at all in what was actually going on on the ground. They were quite removed from it.

When I got back from Mexico I was walking across the campus at UC Santa Cruz and I hadn't really even thought about graduate school other than anthropology. But the first thing I saw was this booth for John Hopkins SAIS. I just walked over because I had just heard from a friend that he was going there, and started talking to this very interesting fellow who turned out to be the academic dean, wonderful guy, told me about SAIS. And so I decided that that's what I wanted to do, to go to SAIS and Washington, DC, and get involved in the real world.

Q: Ah. Well, so how's this all going to be paid for?

GREENTREE: Well, I'd always worked. But to get the money for SAIS I went back to San Diego and I worked construction for a year and saved my money.

Q: And then, so when did you go to SAIS?

GREENTREE: I went to SAIS a year later, in 1978. I moved to Washington and lived back east for the first time, which was quite a shock after being a California guy. We had a great circle of people in the Latin American Studies Program at SAIS.

Q: And what were you taking?

GREENTREE: Latin American studies was the concentration, and everyone is required to do economics, which was one of the great things about the SAIS program, because the economics is serious, so you have to learn about that even if you don't want to. Foreign policy and development, also took a lot of development. But the focus was Latin American studies and the head of the program was Riordan Roett, who was quite an institution at SAIS, very well known. And they had a great Brazilian program. A number of Brazilian corporations and the Brazilian government sent a dozen or so Brazilians up to do the two-year program. So, in addition to the general Latin American studies group, we had a great group of Brazilians.

Q: Well, what was going on in Washington? Were there any movements or something that particularly gained your attention?

GREENTREE: I had an internship with the foreign policy staff of Teddy Kennedy, Senator Kennedy. That lasted for a year. It was the year he was going to run for president. It put me in daily proximity to the Kennedy legacy. And now we're getting up to the Foreign Service stuff. I worked as a research assistant at the International Institute for Environment and Development, the president of it was a retired Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador Bob Blake.

Q: Did Washington give you a different perspective on the world?

GREENTREE: The one time I'd been to Washington before that was as part of the moratorium against the Vietnam War; one of the biggest protests ever held in Washington when Nixon was president. So this was completely transforming,

transforming in the sense it was an introduction to the establishment. But also, it was learning how Washington works, just what hundreds of kids go through every year.

Q: Did you at any point plan on taking the Foreign Service Exam?

GREENTREE: I had not given a single thought to the Foreign Service. One day I asked Bob Blake about his life in the Foreign Service. He sat down and told me that he'd raised his sons in Nepal and Panama, and had a great time. He to introduce me to some people. And the first person that he called was Luigi Einaudi. Luigi introduced me to people in Central American Affairs. This was 1980 and Central America was on fire.

That was before the new Foreign Service Act took effect. There was more flexibility. They had me apply for an internship and fast tracked it. I got a security clearance, came in as an intern in the summer of 1980. I had taken the test in the meantime, passed the oral, and by September was in Foreign Service class A 100.

Q: What was your intern program?

GREENTREE: I went to Central America Affairs in the summer of 1980. So this is the peak time when Robert White was the ambassador, human rights was the focus, and El Salvador was the focus of, enormous focus of attention. We had four American nuns who were raped and murdered. The archbishop was assassinated and the death squads were running wild. So that was the focus of what was going on. Robert White had become a huge proponent of human rights, which placed him to some degree at odds with the policy. So the political situation was incredibly tense with Nicaragua under the Sandinistas. The Cubans becoming very active, and then El Salvador on the verge of revolution. And the policy had come in support of a reformist military civilian government that brought in reforms. So we were in support of the government, but the government was not entirely in control of its own security forces. There was a desk officer and I was the intern. I had been there about month when he went off on his new assignment. And something like the day before he left, the embassy in Bern where the incoming desk officer was assigned sent in a cable saying, "This officer is far too important to the conduct of American foreign policy that we have to keep him." So there was this gap. So the, they made me the desk officer for El Salvador in the middle of all this. And it was a pretty interesting experience.

Q: Well, what were you thinking about the Foreign Service?

GREENTREE: *(laughs)* Well, it was a good introduction to the way things work in the U.S. government all too often. But in terms of being a Foreign Service Officer, who could ask for a more and dynamic way to get involved? Secure phones had just come out; one was in the Lebanon Office and one was in the El Salvador Office. One of the things you had to do was physically change the code cards every day and handle the phone. When it rang it made this loud buzzing noise. It was always the ambassador or the DCM (deputy chief of mission) coming on to report that the embassy was under attack or there were 10,000 people in the streets and the army was gunning them down. So, the assistant

secretary who was at the time Bill Bowdler, would come down and sit there and yell -- he and Bob White would yell at each other while I took notes. Roberto D'Aubuisson was this mysterious cashiered army major, allegedly he headed the death squads and had had his visa revoked on human rights grounds. All of a sudden he turned up as the guest of Senator Jesse Helms. Somehow he had gotten into the U.S. illegally and was in Washington. Helms had arranged, not a hearing, but semi-public briefing. They sent me up to figure out what the hell was going on over there. Stuff like that always going on.

Q: Did you feel there was any real policy going on, or was -- this is just people trying to cope with keeping the awful things out of sight, out of mind?

GREENTREE: Well, that's a complex question, because this was the very end of the Carter administration. Carter's foreign policy seemed to have effectively collapsed. The public focus was on human rights, but in fact, there was a policy in El Salvador. Luigi Einaudi was in large part responsible for putting into place. And of course, I'm brand new to all this, although I've been involved in Latin American studies and had been following events in Central America very closely. Personally I felt very ambivalent. This terrible war is going on in which we're on the side of the death squads that are not under control. And, if ever there was a place that deserved to have a revolution, El Salvador was one. So it was hard to make sense of the idea of supporting the democratic middle and holding elections. But nevertheless, there was a policy and it was pretty clear what we were trying to do.

Q: What was the general feeling about the death squads? I mean were people saying, "Well, they shouldn't have them, but they really are taking care of the problem?" Or was there much more opposition?

GREENTREE: No, I don't think there was an appreciation that they were (*laughs*) in any way a positive or useful force. And of course, the military and the security forces in general had very little to offer in terms of solving the problem. But the focus was the fact that this was a political challenge more than a military challenge.

Q: Did you -- I mean you're sort of both a new boy on the block and you're not really in the Foreign Service yet. Did you get a feel for how the Foreign Service saw the Central American mess?

GREENTREE: Well, I felt it was like the kid who's picked up and gets thrown in the deep end and told to swim. So, from the beginning, even though I wasn't formally in the Foreign Service, was definitely one of the team. The Central American Office at that time had maybe eight people, because it had been this backwater. And everybody was there all the time because it was the front-page news every single day. Anne Patterson was the Nicaragua desk officer sitting across from me. Guatemala was also a center of attention. There was really no typical intern work, like answering routine congressionals. There was a bit of separation, I guess that would be one way of putting it, between Cold War containment policy, the version that was being practiced, and putting human rights up front while playing down Cuban involvement. The place where that friction came out was

with Robert White's leadership of the embassy on the ground in El Salvador. The people in that embassy were for the most part very dedicated to him and to his leadership. There was great tension in the department feeling like he was always going too far and they having to keep reigning him in.

Q: How did things develop for you in the internship? Did you do it long or did you move on, or what?

GREENTREE: I stayed there until I was brought into the A-100 class. It was a class that has become fairly well known. It was the class right before the new Foreign Service Act came into effect at the end of the Carter administration. I don't remember exactly how it worked, but there was sufficient budget. We were basically two or three times the size of the normal intake class, it was an extra big class. Then I was on the ground in El Salvador.

Q: You came from a rather unusual background. Did you feel that this served you well or that you had deficiencies, or what?

GREENTREE: I think the greatest deficiency that I had -- and I don't know if that's the right word for it -- that I didn't fit in right away with what I would call "conventional" U.S. government, you know, thinking or standard embassy life. But once I got overseas I tended to gravitate towards the outside world. In the case of El Salvador, to spend my time with Salvadorans more than with folks at the embassy. There was a balance, it wasn't completely one or the other. But other than that, I dove into the work right away. I got to El Salvador right at the time when Reagan was inaugurated. So, literally for much of the time of my assignment, this little tiny assignment in Central America was somehow or other the center of foreign policy.

Q: When were you in El Salvador?

GREENTREE: I was in El Salvador from January of 1981 to the summer of 1983, the dark bloody days of the war through the first elections when things began to turn around.

Q: What was your immediate impression when you arrived in El Salvador?

GREENTREE: Well, it was an extremely beautiful country and was at war. When I first arrived the death squad killings and things were at their peak, were arriving at their peak. There was a so-called final offensive by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation front that failed. And as a result of that and severe suppression, the revolutionary movement became a rural insurgency. That transition happened when I was there.

Q: Well, was this an embassy almost under siege, or how did you get around?

GREENTREE: Well, you know, that's very interesting because of course, having lived through that, the embassy under siege that prevails today is in some ways completely the opposite. My experience was, yes, there was a lot of danger and you had to be extremely

careful. There was a good security officer and basic facility security was fine, if vulnerable. But as the junior officer, I took advantage of what I felt was a certain degree of expendability that allowed me much greater freedom of movement than would be the case today.

Q: I take it -- well, I'm not in the Foreign Service now obviously, but I suspect that the overriding priority in any embassy is don't get any of your people hurt.

GREENTREE: Absolutely. An overriding priority is don't be held accountable if anybody gets hurt. Therefore, everything you do is guided by that. Everything. Recently, when I was in Afghanistan as political advisor with military units, I would go into the embassy on occasion. They called it the Kabubble, the Kabul bubble, because there were a thousand people, but most of them rarely went outside, ever. And when you did get outside it was in a protective package of security. The last thing that anybody would expect or allow you to do would be to take any measure on your own to protect yourself or those around you. In El Salvador it was the opposite. Mostly, you used your judgment and took your own measures.

Q: What was your job?

GREENTREE: At first, I was a vice consul, a visa officer. I started doing political reporting, using visa interviews as a way of collecting information on the reasons why people were leaving. I had a pretty good communications network through the country of people that I agreed to give visas to who then I could contact when they were back. That became a platform for staying informed when I rotated to the Political Section.

Q: Well, could you go out and talk to people in El Salvador, or was it pretty much waiting for them to come to the embassy?

GREENTREE: No, the visa thing of course was ready made for that. But there was an enormous amount of movement and access at all levels.

Q: Well, when you say access, what do you mean?

GREENTREE: I started sort of gravitating toward political-military work almost immediately. As a result of the arrest of American citizens, I got to know the chief of the National Police and the chief of the Treasury Police, which was basically the secret police. The commander of the National Guard, General Vides Casanova, happened to be a next-door neighbor. We became drinking buddies. Because these were the security forces, not the regular Army, I got to know some of these guys better than anyone else. Usually the junior guy in the Political Section was also the human rights officer, and I got to know people in the Salvadoran human rights community, most of whom were connected to the left.

Q: Well, did you find that our officers did not fit very well with the left, or most of them, or not?

GREENTREE: By that time most of the people that were in the political left had been either killed or gone underground. So we had this fairly thin layer of people, some of whom were associated with the Catholic Church. As I recall, there were two or three, human rights organizations. There was another organization called the Green Cross that was distinct from the national Red Cross, which was very conservative. The Green Cross was more grass roots. They were connected loosely with both sides, but sympathized with the revolutionary left. It was difficult, but possible, to maintain contact like that without running undue risks. I think most of the people in the embassy were much more oriented to the establishment society, the upper class, the economic community, and the traditional political parties. Those political parties, especially the Christian Democrats who had been heavily repressed, were very much part of the policy. There was also a lot of work that involved investigating murders of U.S. citizens. In addition to the nuns, there had been two labor activists who had been killed. And so the Political Section in association with the legal attaché was very involved in investigating those murders.

Q: Did you get involved in those investigations?

GREENTREE: Less so. There was an officer by the name of Carl Gettinger who was the primary, and then Bill Brownfield, who came in as the deputy, picked up that portfolio. On that side, I was much more involved covering the death squads and establishing contacts with the extreme right, including some of the really, really far out guys.

Q: What were your impressions of the far out right? I mean were they sort of what one thinks of as far right-ish, or were they a different breed of cat than one would normally?

GREENTREE: Well, they were unique in some ways. Most of them had some association, or some of them had been in the security services. Roberto D'Aubuisson had been a Treasury Police officer, in charge of the intelligence files. Others were connected to the private sector, which was extremely conservative. They identified with this very nationalistic oriented form of anti-communism that dated back to an attempt by the Communist Party of El Salvador to spark a peasant uprising in 1930 to 1932. The conditions were basically semi-serfdom of mostly coffee pickers.

You had old style latifundia of big hacienda, owned by aristocratic Spanish, European descendants, allied with the National Guard that served as sort of a rural constabulary. When this uprising happened in 1932, the National Guard and the National Army mobilized and nobody knows what the real numbers are, but massacred somewhere in the order of 30,000 peasants, mostly peasants, but also the leaders of the Communist Party. So at the time, this was, you know, the time of gunboat diplomacy and we actually had a patrol boat and a destroyer offshore. The commander went ashore, went to the government, said, you know, "United States offers its services to you." And the Salvadorans said, you know, "Get the hell out of here, you gringo, we've got it." They did not want to become like Nicaragua. So the Salvadorans had a very independent sense, and a very violent sense of the purpose of their security forces.

Q: Well, how did you see the church fitting into this? Was revolutionary theology going, or what was happening with the church?

GREENTREE: The church was divided. You had the liberation theologians – many of them Jesuits, led by Jesuits from Spain, some of whom had been in the country for decades. They were well known to have been the sponsors of the revolutionary movement. Some rural priests had been killed. The big event was the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Romero was a moderate. But he was transformed personally by the atrocities that were being committed, and became an outspoken proponent, not of Marxist-Leninist revolution, but sort of as spokesman of the people which revolutionary parties were able to take advantage of. It helped create the strong revolutionary dynamic. The majority of the church remained fairly conservative.

Q: Did you have any contact with the people who were very much involved with the death squads? Maybe not actual shooters, but those who were tied to them?

GREENTREE: Yes. Most of the reporting cables from that time have been released. That was the original project of the National Security Archives at George Washington University using the Freedom of Information Act.

I was doing a lot of reporting on the death squads, about their organization and motivation, the degree to which they were associated with the regular security forces or separate. I was tracking the evolution of the extreme right into a political party. From the shadowy death squads on the violent end, with the private sector organizations they became a political party which became known as ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance)) that has governed El Salvador for most of the time since they started elections in the mid '80s.

Q: Within the embassy, did you have much contact with the ambassador and the DCM?

GREENTREE: The DCM, Ken Bleakley, was a very interesting guy. He was young to be made a DCM for such an important embassy, but Dean Hinton picked him, and I think he was a good DCM. He had been the president of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) and very involved in the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

Dean Hinton was a legendary ambassador. He had been USAID (Agency for International Development) director in Chile when Allende was overthrown. He was ambassador in the Congo and was PNGed (persona non grata) by Mobutu. And then he came to El Salvador. He was a tough guy, an old style Cold Warrior. As a junior Foreign Service Officer, you could not ask to have been under better leadership. The country team in El Salvador became a pretty effective working body, largely a product of his leadership.

Q: Were you deluged with visitors from Washington?

GREENTREE: Yes, deluged with visitors from Washington and with that, the disease of reporting requirements from Congress, which has only gotten worse.

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: It was starting to take hold then.

Q: Can you talk about that a bit? Because it's become prevalent and it's not a positive development.

GREENTREE: No, it's not a positive development because they're total distractions in most cases. And I put a lot of the blame on the way that the department handled its relations with Congress, but of course, you know, being caught in the middle between politics and policy is not easy. And how you get around it, I don't have a great solution. One of the reasons that Central America was *so much* on the front burner all the time was not just the nature of the situation, but compared to the other third world fronts in the Cold War it was accessible. It was much harder to get to Angola, impossible to get into Afghanistan. Central America became the place you could fly to on the weekend or a recess. The practice of every embassy officer having to take responsibility for visitors -- I thought then, and I think it's even worse today -- is terrible, it's terrible to be the control officer. The problem was not having a duty to do, but it is a bad use of resources. But if you're the political reporting officer or economic officer, and suddenly a visit is coming and all of your energy is taken up by these administrative requirements that in some cases go on and on and on for weeks and weeks. Of course, that means you're not doing your own job adequately, unable to cover key developments. I found working with the US military, which of course has much greater resources, they have a protocol section that handles the requirements for visits as their primary responsibility. This makes a lot of sense.

Q: You know, one looks at the logistics of an embassy in crises, and just the care and the feeling of those interested in the crises absorbs so much of the energy of an embassy that the real substance of what officers should be doing gets lost.

GREENTREE: What I think happens is the country team model reaches its extreme as a management and organizational model. When you add security regulations, it sort of ceases to function. Your energy gets absorbed into dealing with your own organization rather than interacting outside in the society in the political environment where you're supposed to be operating.

Q: Well, could officers get around in El Salvador and could you go to somebody's house or not?

GREENTREE: Yes. The security regulations were a magnitude less restrictive than they are today, two magnitudes less. I think I integrated well into a wide range of Salvadoran society, with these groups that were linked to the left, to the military and security forces, and to people that were in the professional upper classes.

Q: Did you find yourself in any particularly dangerous situations?

GREENTREE: Yes. One of the things that I did regularly was get out into the countryside and report on the security situation, which included accompanying combat operations and this sort of thing. I made numerous overland trips that I today would never even think about. On several occasions I crossed over guerilla lines and saw life from the other side. Something that I would definitely never have tried, say, in Afghanistan.

Q: Well, what did you feel you were reporting? A lost cause? A hopeful situation? Dubious one?

GREENTREE: Well, of course I learned very quickly to be entirely cynical about the entire enterprise from all sides, which probably helped me stay objective. Dean Hinton, one of the aspects of his leadership was to tell the reporting officers that your job is to report it the way it is. So that was my perspective. I was able to report, for example, on the security situation in the countryside early on when it had gone into a full-blown rural insurgency. I remember having made a pretty long swing through a lot of the rural departments. It seemed that about a third of the country was under guerilla control, and about half of it, if not under control under influence. That caused a lot of upset because the standard reporting was that there were a few pockets here and there, but that the Salvadoran military had control. When Special Forces Brigadier General Fred Woerner wrote a military assistance strategy in 1981, the analysis validated what I'd been reporting.

Q: Well, were people beginning to lean on you when you were there, saying, you know, get with the program?

GREENTREE: No, I never really felt that. I was the one guy in the embassy that was regularly getting out in the countryside. And you know, the military, because remember, Vietnam was so close, although most of the mil group and the defense attachés that had been in Vietnam, were under much greater scrutiny and restriction so that I would say I established really close working relationships with both the attachés and the mil group, who valued that information, in some ways more than the regular Political Section. So I guess if anything it was the opposite.

Q: Did you find that the mil group was more sort of aware of the things? Did you find more affinity to how they were looking at it than our political reporting?

GREENTREE: Yes and no I guess, and certainly not the extremes that I've seen in other places. I think that the fact that the country team worked well, that you were bringing different points of view to look at the same situation, so that people had the opportunity to grasp what was going on. Most of the time when I was there the MILGROUP commander was a Special Forces colonel, John Waghelstein, a legendary figure in the SF. Marine Lieutenant Colonel John McCay, who was the Naval Attaché, had been in Vietnam for three tours. He had good penetration of the Salvadoran military and understood what was going on. I worked closely with them and learned a lot from them.

Q: Reagan seemed to get quite excited about the situation in El Salvador. Would you say he was the person keeping our concern in that area going?

GREENTREE: Only to an extent that his leadership was the umbrella under which all this took place. The entire approach to the Soviet Union and the Cold War and how this affected it. My impression of Reagan has changed over time, gone from the standard sort of dismissing him as an intellectual lightweight and unimpressive, to having a much better sense of the nature of his leadership. Now, underneath him you had the division between the so-called pragmatists and the so-called hardliners, the ones who didn't give a damn about anything as long as we were fighting the Soviets and their allies. The interesting thing about being in El Salvador was that there was actually a policy -- this support for elections and the moderate center. Because it been put in place under Carter, there was not a huge change in the substance. It was more its ideological character. That and resources. Again, Luigi Einaudi grasped how this all came together and how it fit into the military dimension of the struggle. This was a great contrast with Nicaragua where we're supporting the contras who had no authentic political identity at all.

Q: Well, those countries are so damned complex and each one was quite different from the others.

GREENTREE: Yes, absolutely. You want to say "little" Central America but I guess that's a standard Foreign Service lesson. Wherever you are, no matter how big or how small, that becomes the center of the world. And every place has its own twists and turns and its own identity. You have to understand that, even if you are supposedly serving a higher cause.

Q: What were you getting from home? From your family and friends and all. I imagine you'd be getting people, what the hell are you doing, and that sort of thing?

GREENTREE: Well, interesting, remember I'm from Southern California, so most of the people that I knew from there were not particularly involved, aware, or interested. Questions along the lines of, "Oh, how is it down there?" but not a lot greater degree of information or interest. On the other hand, Washington was quite a bit different; much more interesting and involved. One of my close friends was a fellow by the name of Arturo Cruz, Arturo Cruz Jr., his father had been president of Central Bank and became a candidate for president, was very involved with Nicaraguan politics. And Arturo Cruz Jr. was Sandinista. So we had lots of discussion and debates. Somewhere in the process Arturito, as he was called, got very disillusioned with the Sandinistas and actually switched over and identified himself with the Contras.

Q: Was there concern that the whole place might collapse at any point?

GREENTREE: Definitely, especially when I first went down and into 1982. Military defeat was threatening. There were also a couple of coup attempts by the extreme right. There was a massacre at El Mozote in December 1981. It became the subject of front-

page reporting for weeks, later a *New Yorker* article and a book. Basically what happened was as we started our assistance, we brought a Salvadoran battalion to the U.S., trained them and equipped them, sent them back into the field. They went out on their first major operation and massacred everybody they could get their hands on for three days. I was the investigating officer along with John McKay. I wrote a report that essentially confirmed that yes, the Salvadoran military had committed this massacre. Problem was that Congress had passed legislation that required Ronald Reagan to certify that the Salvadoran government was taking measures to improve human rights. Certification was coming up. I think it was Elliott Abrams who was assistant secretary for Human Rights, Tom Enders in ARA and his counterpart in the Defense Department were called up to testify. So in the process between drafting my cable, having it edited and sent out of the embassy and preparing testimony, it turned into basically a lie that allowed Congress not to have to cut off aid. Anyway, if Congress had cut aid at that juncture then almost certainly the policy would have collapsed.

Q: You left there when?

GREENTREE: It was sometime in the summer of 1983 between the constituent assembly and presidential elections. What was interesting about that was that once the electoral process started to take hold, El Salvador was much less a center of political attention in the U.S. You know, it's important I think that going back to Reagan, just to make a comment on that. One of the interesting things, there's all these little forgotten pieces of this. One of the questions in Ronald Reagan's first press conference after he had been inaugurated was, "Is El Salvador going to become another Vietnam?"

And Walter Cronkite asked him the same question in his first national televised interview after becoming elected. But what he said in answer to that question was basically, "Of course not. I'm not going to send combat troops to Central America." At the same time he expressed his firm commitment to fight the communists, to draw the line in the Western Hemisphere. And that left no doubt about the policy. So it was in that sense, he exercised his leadership. By 1983 when I left, El Salvador pretty much came off the front pages on a regular basis. Not because the controversy of human rights had gone away, but because the policy that had been put in place during the Carter period of supporting the democratic center and holding elections, the policy was beginning to take hold.

Q: Where did you go from there?

GREENTREE: From there I took what was in some ways an equally fascinating job as the aide to the special envoy for Central America.

Q: Good God. You really got wrapped up in the number one issue of the time, didn't you?

GREENTREE: Yes, yes. And then after that I escaped to Brazil weeks before the Iran Contra scandal blew up.

Q: By the way, while you were doing this did the name of Ollie North ever cross your desk?

GREENTREE: Ollie North? Oh yeah, I knew Ollie North well.

Q: What did you know about him?

GREENTREE: Well, he was the Annapolis classmate of John McKay, the marine officer I mentioned earlier who was the assistant naval attaché.

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: So I knew about him before I even met him, but when I was the assistant to the special envoy we were always consulting with Ollie North. The diplomacy was very connected to the Nicaraguan Contras. And Ollie liked to pick my brain because I knew El Salvador. I went back to El Salvador for two months a year after I had left. Tom Pickering was the ambassador, and he had me come back down and do a one-year retrospective on what had changed and whether the policy was working. One of the reasons I say I escaped to Brazil was because I thought that all the funny business that was going on with the contra Enterprise, as they called it, was way out of line and I wanted just to get the hell away from Central America.

Q: Well, before we leave this, how did you feel things were going to come out in El Salvador?

GREENTREE: By the mid '80s I was reasonably certain that this democracy project was going to hold. I didn't really know how to define it then, but I do now, that it was going to be low quality democracy. So, from the political end, Napoleón Duarte, the head of the Christian Democrat Party who became president, really in some ways saved the situation. He was our champion, but he was much better as an opposition politician than a leader and his administration was mired in corruption. ARENA, the extreme right party, came into power. But very fortunately, although extremely conservative leaders came in, they were also fairly rational people. They were primarily businessmen and they didn't feed into the most extreme violence. The military assistance program was operating under great constraints from Congress. And there was a 55-man limit on trainers -- trainers, not advisors. It was sufficient as the Salvadorans became more proficient. They were never enough to defeat the insurgency, but they were enough to get a stalemate. And then, as the Cold War collapsed, Nicaragua had elections and the whole situation changed. It led to peace talks in El Salvador. So, in a nutshell, this whole decade long saga actually worked out OK.

Q: Yeah. Well, did you feel that our apparatus or whatever we want to call it for, for dealing with something like this was effective or hit or miss, or what?

GREENTREE: By apparatus, do you mean our institutional structure?

Q: Yes.

GREENTREE: Worked quite well in the case of El Salvador, and the reasons are probably as much the result of Vietnam and a combination of that with having some exceptional people and getting very lucky. My impression is that our structure for dealing with such situations today is not as good as it was. I'm not sure, but that's my feeling. A lot of that is from my Afghanistan experience.

Q: OK, Today is May 20, 2014. I believe we left off when you were leaving El Salvador?

GREENTREE: Yes.

Q: Where did you go then?

GREENTREE: I went to State and had a very interesting job with the new Central American ambassador, special envoy for Central America.

Q: OK, this is from when to when?

GREENTREE: Starting -- it must have been '83, '84 through '86 I think it was.

Q: All right, so tell me about the job.

GREENTREE: El Salvador was my first tour, so I was still pretty junior. It was one of these special envoy things where they created an office and he reported directly to the Secretary. He was a one-term senator, Richard Stone from Florida, a Democrat. And it was the Democrats in Congress who'd insisted that this job be created. George Shultz was amenable enough. This was my second introduction to bureaucracy in Washington. The ARA Bureau, Latin America Bureau, under Tony Motley fought constantly with the Central American envoy's office, with the secretary in the middle. Doubled on top of that were the hardliners in the Reagan administration versus the pragmatists led by Shultz. It was all crossfire. As the staff aide along with two senior officers, I learned a lot, making frequent trips, mostly into the region, Central America, South America. We had secret meetings with representatives of the Salvadoran guerillas, we had numerous sessions with the Sandinistas, flying around at midnight in a U.S. aircraft. I did that for a couple of years, although nothing much came of it other than making sure our positions were known and keeping up diplomatic appearances.

Q: Could you describe, so we get a little idea of some of what the battle lines were? The hardliners in the Reagan White House more or less were fighting the pragmatists of Shultz. What were the issues?

GREENTREE: The way I would describe it is the pragmatists led by Shultz focused on the relationship between force and diplomacy and standing up to the Soviets. To achieve specific results, getting the Cubans out of Central America and defending El Salvador, it had a purpose that was tied to the actual area. Whereas the hardliners of which you had

Bill Casey at CIA as a preeminent representative, but lots of others such as Richard Perle, Fred Iklé in the Pentagon, they cared about fighting the Soviets. So as long as we were there standing up to them there was nothing else to be achieved. That was the dividing line. Now, of course they the hardliners also claimed that they were the ones who represented Ronald Reagan's true soul. But I think in the end and if you look at the record now it's very clear that Reagan pretty much always ended up on the big issues siding with Shultz, also greatly under the influence of his wife Nancy, and of Jim Baker and others who moderated the behavior.

Q: Well, how did you find yourself fitting in? I assume your heart and soul was the pragmatist to deal with the problem?

GREENTREE: Yeah, my heart and soul was with the pragmatists, but I was a junior officer. I also felt that the pressure from Congress, but also from within the State Department, to grasp at every opportunity to negotiate was not necessarily the right way to go about it either. The counterinsurgency in El Salvador and the Contra War in Nicaragua were linked to each other. There was the sub-regional, the Central American, the broader regional, and then the global dimensions of diplomacy in relationship to those were central elements. The Contadora Process that the Latin American nations themselves were trying to use as their own initiative as a counterweight to the U.S. was also a big focus of action.

Q: Well, I take it that there would be rather significant confusion. The Contra business is moving on that easily from other of the Central American countries on their own working on them than we were. I mean was there real coordination, or what was happening?

GREENTREE: It was very tenuous, at best, for most of the time. Dick Stone finally resigned over the battles with ARA. Harry Shlaudeman, who had been Kissinger's executive assistant, came up from being ambassador in Argentina. This put a hardened professional Foreign Service Officer in the job, and Phil Habib followed him. The experience of how you go about the job as a politician was very different from a professional FSO. The bottom line was the U.S. was going to offer nothing in negotiations short of surrender. It was the maximalist position. And, to the extent that there was a job to be handled through diplomacy, it was getting the regional players on board with that as much as possible.

Q: Well then, how did this organization fit in with ARA? I mean did ARA go along with this, or was there a major dispute with ARA?

GREENTREE: There were major disputes with ARA the entire time. Tony Motley was the assistant secretary for most of that time. There was a lot of ego wrapped up in it, but it was also the bureaucratic structure where you had the special envoy who reported directly to the secretary and didn't have to report to the assistant secretary. You had a fundamental lack of trust with a divergence in missions on top of it. It was in some ways the worst of bureaucratic politics.

Q: I assume that you would have a considerable problem with getting caught up with all these conflicting egos.

GREENTREE: Personally I didn't have much of a problem. One, because I had established a solid reputation in El Salvador and was considered to be a core ARA person at that time. And being junior, I was under the fire. The other two staffers were, Jon Glassman, a Latin America hand who was politically very conservative, and Joe Presel, who was more of a Europeanist. Both of them were Jewish, as was Richard Stone. So you had another stream that ran through this.

Q: Where did the Jewish community fit in?

GREENTREE: It was more indirect. It was tied in part to support political support for the Panama Canal Treaty, which Carter had negotiated, but was implemented under Reagan. Stone had lost the election over his support for the Panama Canal. To show he was also tough on Cuba he was the one who first exposed – and this was famous at the time – a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba. Actually it was a training unit that had been there for a long time. This brought a Cold War focus that interestingly enough ended up creating sufficient political consensus in Congress to support Panama Canal implementation. The Jewish vote was important to that support as were the personal connections.

Q: Well, would you say this Jewish connection would be reflected in what became much later known as the neo-cons?

GREENTREE: Yes, absolutely. The neo-cons were prominent then, but the neo-con movement was not as well understood as a political phenomenon at the time. Many of them were former Democrats who were disillusioned over Vietnam and joined the Republican Party. They first emerged in the 1976 presidential election in support of Ronald Reagan. When Reagan came into power they were a dominant stream within the foreign policy, within the White House and other places in the administration.

Q: Well, in ARA were there sort of groups of people who identified with one working on the policy? Who didn't identify with another working on the policy?

GREENTREE: There were a number of political appointees, most prominently Elliott Abrams who had been assistant secretary for Human Rights and then shifted over to Latin America. They created a strong basis of support, particularly for the Nicaraguan Contras within the bureau. But you know, the bulk of people, most everybody else was just trying to carry out the policy, not really so heavily involved in the politics of it.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, what developed?

GREENTREE: During the time I was there, elections removed El Salvador as the center of political controversy over Central America. Attention shifted to Nicaragua and the covert action program to support the Contras became the center of congressional attempts to combat the Reagan administration's policies. I had a number of offers to continue in

Central America for my next assignment, but thought Ollie North and all of those people who were involved in keeping the Contra program alive were going overboard. I got out and went to Brazil.

Q: Were you aware of Ollie North's activities in one sort or another?

GREENTREE: I didn't have an action role, but I knew all the players and much that was going on. I had caught the beginnings of the Contra program when I was in El Salvador and so was not just reading into the program.

Q: Were you aware of how out of line North's operation was?

GREENTREE: It became increasingly apparent as the congressional opposition to the Contras got stronger and stronger. You had this element of true believer that gravitated to help keep it going. I'll make a couple of observations. One, it was really strange to me that this Marine Corps major, and that's a pretty junior position, had acquired so much power. I remember sitting in his office one time at the NSC (National Security Council), listening to him give the SOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command) commander instructions. A four-star general, a major giving a four-star general instructions. There was something not quite right about that. But, more fundamentally, looking at the politics of military action, I thought, from the very start that the whole effort was a little bit misguided whether or not you agreed with what the Contras were and what they were trying to do. As a covert action, it was purely an expedient military means to fight the Sandinistas and the Cubans in Nicaragua. The absence of any sort of authentic political identity for that organization was a loss and a shame. That was a product of being a CIA driven operation, it was necessarily led by people who were on the payroll in one way or another. Having a more independent, authentic political identity would have not served that interest. There was an absence of policy guidance.

Q: Well, how was Cuba seen at that time?

GREENTREE: Well, Cuba was seen as the motor driving all this. The pure Cold War point of view, that Ronald Reagan frequently expressed, was -- if it weren't for Cuba and the Soviet Union stirring up this trouble, everything would be fine. I think it was not a matter of what we were doing in the region, but the fact that Cuba had tens of thousands of troops in Angola and elsewhere in Africa. Having not been successful in Latin America, they had gone to support revolution in Africa. During the Carter administration, when the Samosa regime became vulnerable, Cuba shifted attention to revolution in Central America. I don't know if you recall, but Secretary Al Haig, who'd been Reagan's first secretary, came out with these public statements very early on in the administration that we should "go to the source" and we should do something about Cuba, attack them militarily. That was one of the incidents that led to his firing in 1982. You had this anomaly, a unique place that Cuba fills, a little third world island country that's a motor of revolution 90 miles off Florida. But, there's nothing we can do about it directly, because we didn't know how the Soviets would react.

Q: Was there any real movement towards saying, "Let's go there?" I mean I'm talking about within ARA.

GREENTREE: No, none whatsoever. I mean, not only was that sort of above the pay grade, the attitude was quite the opposite. I think, really, you're talking about the legacy of the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and of course in the U.S. military, no true appetite whatsoever for getting involved in something that would almost certainly be escalatory.

Q: Did you get involved in the political side of things from the Congress at all, or observe their actions?

GREENTREE: I was not directly involved in congressional, in the politics. But I had lots of opportunities to observe and attend discussions, that sort of thing, yes.

Q: Who were some of the driving members of Congress?

GREENTREE: Well, you had the liberal Democrats in the House, I think were the primary ones. They began with the speaker Tip O'Neill. His aunt was a Maryknoll nun. He had a very deep personal connection.

And it was Maryknolls who were murdered in El Salvador. So, that brought him very much into personal involvement on Central America. And then Jim Wright, the speaker who followed him, was very much involved. You had people like Chris Dodd and Patrick Leahy in the Senate. The legacy of Carter's human rights carried over to Congress and became an element of opposition to the Reagan administration. On the other side, probably the *bête noire* of not just the Democrats, but the Republican moderates, was Jesse Helms who was completely at the other extreme. To give it some larger meaning, it was a contest between the executive branch and the executive branch that had developed out of the Vietnam War. And even though you had this incredible popular president who came in at least in the first term with a strong mandate, actually yielded up considerable amount of authority over foreign policy to Congress. There was something called the Reagan-Wright Plan, I think in 1986. The speaker of house put together a plan for peace in Central America. And the leverage using funding and the human rights legislation as the whip actually brought the president on board. Of course it never went anywhere, but I think that, scholars of Congress may look back on that as a high point of congressional authority over the executive.

Q: Well then, you say that you felt that you'd better get the hell out of this mess?

GREENTREE: Well, I thought I was getting sucked deeper and deeper into the Contra stuff and thought it was going too far. And so I looked for an assignment that would get me out of Central America.

Q: Well, what did you feel about the Contra business? I mean were you following it as far as what Congress authorized and what they didn't authorize, and I mean was it apparent that the Contra business was really a violation of Congress?

GREENTREE: Well, you had this problem where, from a foreign policy point of view, that was your leverage. But the Contras themselves, it was basically a brigand army that committed tons of human rights violations. They were hard to identify with, as the Reagan administration called them, as freedom fighters. That was hardly what they represented. But there were plenty of people associated with them who were authentic opposition figures. The failure was an inability to build a consensus around a political cause for the contras, because the emphasis was so heavily on the military action. That's where the error lay. I really doubt that there would have been any way to find a domestic compromise. The cut off of Contra aid became inevitable. What's interesting is that Nicaragua replicated what had taken place in Angola in 1975 when Congress cut off the covert action program there. A lot of the same people were involved in the administration side, and that led to a much greater emphasis on bringing the Contra operation into the White House, which is what led to the violations of law.

Q: Were there others in this whole apparatus who were saying wait a minute, this is against the law, what's happening and all?

GREENTREE: Yes, there were. But I really think that the dominant attitude with people who were committed to the administration was that at least half of Congress, even if they wouldn't say so, justified going out illegally and keeping the Contras alive one way or the other.

Q: Well, then so what, '86 you went off to Brazil?

Q: What job did you do to there?

GREENTREE: In Brazil, I was, I was the principal officer in Belo Horizonte, which is Brazil's third largest city after San Paolo and Rio, in the interior state of Minas Gerais. It was an interesting position because it wasn't actually opened formally as a consulate at the time. There was nothing on the books for it. There had been one there in the '60s I think until the early '70s when it was closed. Brazil was going through its transition from military rule to democracy. And there had been elections in '85. Tancredo Neves was elected president. He was from Minas Gerais, which had always been a center of moderate-conservative Brazilian politics. When Ambassador Diego Asencio went to meet with the president-elect, he asked, "What can the U.S. do for you?" His first request was to reopen the consulate in his hometown of Belo Horizonte. Therefore, they needed somebody to come to staff it. And I guess I was the guy. But Neves died suddenly before he took office.

Q: Could you describe the city of Belo Horizonte at that point?

GREENTREE: It's a fascinating place, more of an industrial city, steel mills and car manufacturing, that sort of thing. Fairly sizable metropolitan area, but in this very large state of Minas Gerais, which is one of the earlier parts of Brazil that was settled. Huge interior expanses occupied by poor substance farmers. The assignment was great. I was in my early thirties. There was a USIA (United States Information Agency) officer who was assigned there, so we had a little USIS operation. But other than that, we were the only official Americans in this big area.

Q: I see. Well now, you say you're around 30-years-old, representing the United States. Did you find it difficult with relative youth and relative importance in who you represented operating there?

GREENTREE: Yeah, that was an interesting challenge. I think I was like 32, and fairly young looking. So everybody, people would say, "Oh, you know, the consul, oh, you're so young," and da, da, da, da, da. But it wasn't really a handicap to doing the things that a PO (principal officer) does. My Portuguese was pretty good and I felt comfortable in the society, was able to circulate and meet contacts. George Brown was the head of the Political Section in Brasilia. He had been consul in Belo Horizonte, so he had known a lot of the Minas Gerais politicians for years and years and years. He provided the introductions that were all-important.

The DCM in Brasilia was Alex Watson who's a fairly well known Latin Americanist. Alex was extremely popular in Brazil, he was very well known. So he was a great sponsor and help. I was able to offset being so young by having that really good institutional support.

Q: Was there any unrest, difficulty, problems with the revision from military rule to civilian rule there?

GREENTREE: There was some tension. Brazil had suffered enormous financial mismanagement. The military was just as happy to get out of having tried to run the country. The more serious problem was hyper-inflation. The Brazilian currency was inflating so rapidly it created great instability and uncertainty.

Q: Well, when you have inflation such as was happening in Brazil, I mean here you are a worker, and you get the stories where you really needed a briefcase to carry a day's spending money around with you. How did people survive under those circumstances?

GREENTREE: It affects everybody's life in really fundamental ways. So people would adopt a strategy to survive. Most salaries were indexed in one way or another. Wherever you are on the socioeconomic scale you're being pulled along by it on a day-to-day basis, because it was impossible to plan long-term. There were these bank accounts called "overnight accounts" that earned an overnight interest rate that basically kept up with the rate of inflation. So you would have your money in your account and you would take it out in the morning, and that would be the money that you would spend that day. So you

would have to go do things like get gas and go grocery shopping before gas prices and grocery prices rose that day.

Q: Boy. I assume you had to live with that too, didn't you?

GREENTREE: Yes. And of course, we didn't have to suffer the uncertainty and the direct impact, but it was such a feature of life. It was a constant topic of conversation, sort of the center of everything that was happening. Now, of course this was Brazil, and Brazilians are also really great at having a good time and enjoying life. And I don't think that that really stopped them from doing that.

Q: Did you have any significant colonies of Africans, of Japanese, of others in your area?

GREENTREE: Actually, in the northern part of Minas Gerais there were a few traditional settlements called *quilombos*. These were places where slaves who ran away set up communities. And because Minas was settled very early and was an early center of slavery, that's where some of the more established ones were. For the most part they were very remote. People still spoke African dialects, I mean you'd barely be able to understand their Portuguese. The crops were all sort of stuff you'd see in Africa, such as okra and manioc and squash. But then you also had incredibly impoverished populations, large populations of people living in the interior who were descendants of early Portuguese settlers or immigrants who had never quite found their place. They were basically just subsistence farming out there deep in the interior.

Q: What about the business community? What was it like?

GREENTREE: The business community in Minas is secondary to Sao Paulo, but still important. You had Brazilian iron mining and steel production there, which were mostly state enterprises. The biggest foreign investment was Fiat, the Italian car manufacturer. But you had a number of American investments as well, although not nearly as much as we had in Sao Paulo.

Q: Did the embassy intrude much on your work? I mean, were they interested in what you were up to?

GREENTREE: Intrusion, no, I had great support. Most, of my admin support came out of Rio de Janeiro, which is a large consulate general. It used to be the embassy, and I think it never really gained another identity after that. Most of my reporting would go there and then to Brasilia. Because Minas Gerais was so central politically at the time there was a lot of interest.

Q: Well, did you see any changes in Brazil? I mean people were telling you about the old Brazil. Was a different Brazil emerging during this time?

GREENTREE: That'd be a good way of putting it. The political transition was critical. Again, once the military is out of politics it changes the complexion of a place so fundamentally. Economic advancement was going to have to wait for another decade before it really started taking hold.

Q: Well, you know, when I was in Yugoslavia my ambassador was Burke Elbrick. He got kidnapped in Brazil. Was there any radical movement, students or otherwise, that you were concerned with in Brazil at the time?

GREENTREE: Yeah, that was interesting. There were a group of Libyan "students" at the university. Some were supposedly radicals. Qadhafi and Reagan had a great enmity. I don't know if you remember, in 1986 we bombed Libya in retaliation for bombing a Berlin disco. Around that we got bomb threats, had to ask for security from the Federal Police, and went into lockdown a couple times.

Q: Were there any particular consular cases that involved you, or not?

GREENTREE: There were quite a few American citizens, on the order of a couple thousand. It was mostly the usual stuff: passports and social security checks. But we had a few, you know, there was a murder case where an American was murdered, turned out by his Brazilian girlfriend who was jealous because he wouldn't leave his wife. So it was stuff like that, I mean that sort of thing you would find just about anywhere.

Q: Well then, you left there after about two years? Wither?

GREENTREE: I went to, of all things, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Q: Good God. Could you sort of give us the situation of Papua New Guinea and what were you doing?

GREENTREE: Well, it turned out to an adventure, and I would not trade a single day of my experience there for anything. But I could also say it was a mistake. It was one of those crazy Foreign Service assignment things. I don't think it would happen like this anymore, but I think it's probably worth mentioning because it goes to prove you can't plan too much and sometimes it works out just to adapt. So there I am in Belo Horizonte, not exactly on the front line of being able to pursue the assignment process. It was the year they switched the system from printed bid books to a computerized system, but it was only half done. You would send in your bids by cable and they would go into the computerized system that would print out the bid books. But it wouldn't happen automatically. The CDO (career development officer) would have to manually enter your bids into the system. I was talking to somebody else whose last name started with a G and he said, "Oh, you know, I haven't had any feedback on my bids." I hadn't really paid that much attention since it was still early in the bidding process. But then I heard from some others and an office in ARA told me, "Oh hey, you know, we thought you were going to bid on this job, but we didn't see your name on the list, what happened?" To make this

long, complicated story short, the CDO in charge of whatever the letters were, like A through J, left the job, walked off from one weekend to the next. And the personnel office director was out sick. So the deputy was left handling all the bids for mid-grade officers, missed all of the entries for people at my grade with last names from A through J for one cycle (*laughs*). It didn't get fixed until later in the bidding season when most of the jobs had already been assigned. I got offered a choice of Port Moresby or Belize. And I ended up taking Port Moresby thinking, what the heck, the South Pacific sounds like an adventure.

Q: Well, OK. Let's go to Papua New Guinea. What was the situation at the time when you got out there?

GREENTREE: Well, Papua New Guinea is a totally wild and crazy place and it always will be. Enormously complicated, very tribal, tied to, but in truth a world completely unto itself. The size of California roughly if you add up all the land, half of the island of New Guinea and hundreds of islands. In some ways PNG is well suited to be a democracy, because no one tribe could ever dominate over all the others and because tribal politics is always extremely competitive. It's also an extremely wealthy country. Although there's poverty and it's what we would think of as underdeveloped, has gold, copper, coffee, coconut palm and plenty of subsistence wealth. The mines are some of the largest in the world. So, there was actually this weird mixture between very tribalism and semi-modern wealth.

I should mention from the Embassy in Port Moresby we covered Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. I can't imagine getting much more off the radar of the State Department than being there, even very low on the Asia bureau totem pole. With the exception of one issue. The Soviets had for the first time signed fishing agreements with some of the islands. And that was a Cold War concern, because it allowed Soviet fishing fleets into that part of the Pacific, with their accompanying surveillance ships the shipping fleets. This we were opposed to.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

GREENTREE: Ev Bierman, who had been the Republican staff director for the House Foreign Affairs Committee for many years. This was his retirement reward. He was an evangelical Christian, and he had chosen a DCM who was in the same church.

Q: Good God.

GREENTREE: We had a small embassy. I learned Melanesian Pidgin and had the political-economic brief, but actually, 90% of what I did was political-military, very tied to PACOM (Pacific Command) in Hawaii and to other U.S. military facilities in the area.

Q: Just from living, it was kind of a dangerous place, wasn't it? As far as you had tribes coming out of the hills and grabbing cars and, I mean sort of dealing with the Stone Age in a way.

GREENTREE: Yes, it was in some ways even more dangerous than Central America. I usually went around armed, whenever it seemed to make sense for the situation. More importantly, I became close friends with one of the embassy drivers, Kiku, from a tribe called the Chimbu. The Chimbu are famous warriors from the Highlands, very respected. Being with him was very safe, because they have a system called “payback.” If anything happens to one of their tribesman, it doesn’t matter, you’re going to get eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. So as long as I had Kiku with me, I knew that the chances of getting into any trouble were pretty low.

Q: What sort of government did it have?

GREENTREE: Parliamentary, parliamentary democracy.

Q: How did you find dealing with it?

GREENTREE: It was volatile, very corrupt, a mixture of extremely complex tribal and party politics. But I got to know Michael Somare, the longtime prime minister, called the father of his country. He kept returning to power. I was close with him and felt pretty well plugged in. Frankly, to really follow the politics in any detail I had to rely on Australian colleagues; this was much more their bread and butter.

Q: And well, you say your job was political-military mainly. What did this mean?

GREENTREE: The U.S. military, especially the navy, has an inherent interest in all that ocean in the South Pacific. These Soviet fishing agreements expanded the level of interest in the area, and there was a sort of fascination with PNG. I escorted a couple of ministerial delegations to Hawaii, who were received with great protocol and given the full treatment. In association with those, we developed a defense cooperation program. It was built around a small preexisting security assistance program. In order to carry it out, because there was no security assistance office, no military group, no defense attaché, the Department of Defense designated me the acting defense attaché. In that official role I reported directly back to PACOM and to the defense attaché in Australia. We did all kinds of interesting things, such as negotiating low-level B52 and special operations aircraft training routes through jungle valleys. We had a Special Forces program, working with the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. They loved it, getting to work with tribal natives like that. Because of the Soviet presence we had a visible surveillance program with P-3 Orion maritime patrols.

And then there was World War II. Everywhere you go in Papua New Guinea there are remnants of World War II. One of the most interesting parts of the job was to track reports of U.S. aircraft downed in World War II. They would filter down via missionaries and police patrol officers, or even sometimes a tribesperson would show up at the embassy to report they had found an airplane. Once or twice a year the Central Identification Laboratory - Hawaii (CILHI), as it was then-called, would send people out. They would make a circuit between Korea, Vietnam, then they would come down to the

World War II theaters. If a plane had crashed during the war and had not been recovered, they would send teams into the jungle, up into the highland mountains, wherever it was, to recover the remains of the crew. My role was to get to the site, some of these were extremely remote, and verify the aircraft was actually there and whether it had already been identified or not. That was pretty adventurous.

Q: Did you ever get a chance to go on a trail over Owen Stanley Mountains?

GREENTREE: The Kokoda Trail, the World War II supply line. Well, yes and no. I spent a lot of time in the bush. I went a full day tracing the first part of the Trail. It's exactly like the descriptions of it from the war. In other words, you have to have a very, very high desire to be miserable --

Q: (laughs)

GREENTREE: -- for weeks at a time if you really want to do the full Kokoda Trail. It's awful. Steep, muddy, and full of mosquitoes.

Q: A hell of a lot of Japanese died just on the trail.

GREENTREE: Yes, and a lot of Australians and Americans too.

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: Another thing that happened was the outbreak the Bougainville Rebellion, a war that almost nobody in this part of the world has ever heard of, although Australians know about it. I was on the island of Bougainville the day that it broke out, and then went back several times.

Q: Bougainville was famous because this was where the coast watchers were?

GREENTREE: Yes. I met one who still lived there. He was an insurance salesman from New Zealand who was on Bougainville when the Japanese invaded. They had an entire battalion dedicated to finding these guys. It's so remote and so difficult that few of them were ever caught. The natives helped them. He hid out for the entire duration of World War II on the slopes of the volcano that dominates the southern part of island reporting by radio on Japanese ship movements, and they never caught him.

Anyway, there was this mine called the Panguna Mine, a copper and gold mine, one of the three largest open pit mines in the world. It produced about 40% of PNG's foreign exchange. The Rebellion started because the Bougainville islanders resented the fact that the central government took all of the resources from the mine. A former PNG Defence Force officer and a former mine surveyor were the key organizers. One day, I went to the mine in the morning and came back down. Later in the day they had attacked the mine, burned equipment and killed several Australians. And the mine shut down. On that same trip, I had arranged to meet an American missionary, a fellow who had been there so long

he'd been interred by the Japanese during the war. He took me up a secret route behind the church through the jungle. I met with the leaders of the rebellion and heard their grievances. It made for some interesting reporting.

Q: Well, what about Vanuatu? The Solomon Islands?

GREENTREE: Vanuatu, New Hebrides, is where James Michener was assigned during the war and came back and wrote *Tales of the South Pacific*. And it's the location for the musical, "South Pacific." There actually is an island of Bali Hai – I've been there – where nuns took the young school girls from the island to keep them away from American soldiers. For almost a century, the New Hebrides was a condominium government. The British ran the place on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and the French ran it on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. They alternated Sundays. The Ni-Vanuatu, as they're called, were clever. When I went in, they had just signed an agreement with the Soviets. My instructions were somehow or other talk them out of this, tell them it was a bad idea. I met with the foreign minister who basically said, "Hey, we know how to deal with you. You and the Soviets are just the French and the British of today. We're perfectly happy, because if we hadn't signed this agreement with the Soviets you wouldn't be paying any attention to us at all."

Q: (laughs) He's absolutely right, of course. Well, throughout that area we had a policy of strategic denial, I guess it was called, to make sure that the Soviets didn't establish bases in the islands. Was that still an issue?

GREENTREE: By this time the Soviets didn't really have enough juice. They got some surveillance boats out there, especially to try to determine our submarine routes. But they pretty much halted permanent presence with Vietnam. They did have port access in Cam Ranh Bay. Papua New Guinea was the one place where they might get a major port if they wanted one. But the Papua New Guineas were so closely tied to the West that they were not completely uninterested.

Q: How did you find Australians working in these islands?

GREENTREE: The Australians were very protective and often suspicious about what the Americans were up to. But by and large we were so close to them, it was not much of an issue. There were lots of Aussies in PNG, but it wasn't like it was the center of tourism or anything. There were a fair number of Aussies who had spent their careers there. They called them "Black Handers." Before Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, the main authorities in the remote areas were the Australian Patrol Officers. A lot of them were still in the government of Papua New Guinea. One of the standards of dealing with the government was "Find the Australian," because many times if you wanted to get a straight answer to anything or actually get something done, you literally need to do just that.

Q: By the way, did you find you were dealing with anthropologists? I guess they can find a tribe and go to the anthropologist happy hunting grounds for the rest of their lives dealing with them?

GREENTREE: The most interesting anthropologist I met actually though was a guy from UCLA who had done his PhD on street gangs in Los Angeles. He was doing research on tribal warriors from the Highlands who had migrated to Port Moresby and joined gangs called “Rascals.” They could be extremely violent. He was very interesting, something of a street guy himself, so he knew how to handle himself. I learned a lot about the tribal politics from him.

Q: What about Ironbottom Sound and all that?

GREENTREE: I did a lot of diving. PNG is the ultimate Mecca. I did several expeditions with friends who had a boat equipped for long-range trips. For example, we found a B-17 that had been ditched in 1944. It had settled in deep water, 150 feet, and was in pristine condition. We dove it and were able to identify the aircraft. In fact, the numbers on the aircraft were still visible on the tail down in the water. National Geographic’s principal underwater photographer, David Doubilet, had dived on the boat. He came out and National Geographic did a whole project. They located all the living crewman from the plane in the U.S. and flew them to Papua New Guinea. The nearest village on shore from the reef where the plane crashed was called Boga Boga. Villagers had gone out in their canoes and rescued the air crew. When National Geographic brought them to Boga Boga they had a reunion with the elders who had rescued them. They told stories and had a huge feast. It was an amazing experience.

Q: Oh boy. Did the Japanese come back there at all?

GREENTREE: You know, that’s very interesting. The Japanese do go back. They go to sites to have memorial ceremonies where their family members had died. there’s a port city, Lae, on the northern shore of the mainland. It’s the place where Amelia Earhart took off on her trip across the Pacific. There’s a little memorial to Amelia Earhart and behind it is a Japanese war memorial.

Q: Were this sort of social occasions with the tribal societies kind of a strain on you?

GREENTREE: No, not too much. The food could be unpalatable – manioc without salt, sago grubs the size of your thumb, under-cooked pig. Too much beer. I did spend as much time as I could out in the field, especially the islands. There was real work to do, things that you would never imagine. One time I had to go out to an island where they had they had a cargo cult that was causing problems. You know cargo cults?

Q: You might explain what the cargo cult was essentially.

GREENTREE: Cargo cults are a form of religious practice in this part of the South Pacific. They are mixed with Millenarian Christianity, belief in the return of the son of God. The origins were from when the first white people started showing up in big sailing ships with trade goods. And the people learned the way to get that stuff was by praying for it. When Americans came in World War II with technology that none of the islanders

had ever known, the cargo cults expanded. It's called commodity fetishism. They would make mock-ups of things they wanted. For example, refrigerators out of planks of wood, telephones out of coconuts, and carved wood for Coke bottles. They would make an altar and wait for them to come. There were two versions. One was naïve, make a wish. The other more cynical version was, "Well, we used to have all this stuff, but the white people stole it and we have to get it back."

Cargo cults still exist today. Some of them are quite sophisticated. On the island of New Hanover they had the President Lyndon Johnson Cargo Cult. They knew about USAID and the Peace Corps. In the embassy, we had a file filled with letters from them, complete with a Lyndon Johnson Cargo Cult seal. They would say "Please send us your airplane with the following" followed by a request list for refrigerators, air conditioners, cases of beer, all this stuff that they wanted. They used the Catholic Church on the island for their meetings. The priest for the area was an American. He had tried to get them off this cargo cult stuff for some time, but was not having success. So he came to the embassy and asked for help. The Ambassador agreed and sent me. It took two days to get out there, first flying to the nearest airport and then by boat. I brought a Polaroid camera because everyone loved photos, some commemorative U.S. coins to hand out, and newspaper obituaries of Lyndon Johnson. I wore a suit as the official American representative and put up an American flag in the community center. The priest was there and people gathered. I told them I was very sorry to report to them that Lyndon Johnson was no longer president and he had died. This was 1988. I think it convinced them, because we never heard anymore from the cult.

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

GREENTREE: After that I came back to the U.S. for a year at the Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, which was a think tank at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) that does not exist in that form anymore.

Q: When was that and could you describe what you were up to?

GREENTREE: It would have been mid-1989. Mike Vlahos was the director. My main project was a monograph titled “The United States and the Politics of Conflict in the Developing World.” FSI co-published it with the Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict. This was a joint service outfit prior to the creation of Special Operations Command.

Q: Well, tell me, what was this –

[Break/loss occurs here – original p. 53]

Q: What was the timing and when did you leave?

GREENTREE: I left the Secretary’s office Resources, Plans, and Policy in 1999 to go to Angola. I went first as the pol-econ counselor and then was DCM.

Q: Could you describe, what was the situation in Angola?

GREENTREE: If we think of Angola today, if we think of it at all, it is an oil producing country. Actually, it is the second rank producer in Africa, a notch under Nigeria. When I got there in 1999, the civil war that had begun in 1975 had restarted. It was the first war that the U.S. became involved in after Vietnam. Then, as the Cold War was winding down, Angola became the first regional conflict the U.S. and the Soviet Union collaborated on. That was in 1990. The UN brokered peace agreements twice and both failed. The UN Security Council authorized a major peacekeeping force. At its high point there were about 35,000 peacekeepers, making it the largest UN peacekeeping operation prior to Yugoslavia. When I got there in 1999 the civil war had started again and the peacekeeping operation had collapsed and was closing down. Instead of the peacekeepers cantoning fighters, the peacekeepers were confined to cantonments. Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA ((União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola)) had restarted the war for the second time after he lost presidential elections, and the Angolan government was fighting against him. This was a full-fledged war, not some small-scale guerilla struggle, but a major civil war. Once the Cubans got out in 1989, we were no longer in the middle of it. At the high point there’d been 50,000 Cubans fighting in Angola. Now it was the Angolans themselves.

Q: Well, how stood things when you got there?

GREENTREE: When I got there the government was just beginning to plan a major offensive. The U.S. was estranged -- I think that's the word for it -- from the Angolans. They didn't trust us. By this point they'd been dealing with the Soviet Union since '75, and we were against them throughout the rest of the Cold War. They'd seen the worst that the great powers could do. Russia was a greatly diminished player at this point, but still involved. Since it was a former Portuguese colony, the Portuguese were very much involved. And then there was us. We had a group called the "Trio" -- Portugal, U.S., and Russia. We met regularly, but it was a vestige of the UN reconciliation relationship. There was no real policy or initiative. The Angolans preferred to keep the great powers sort of at arm's lengths. To extent that we were involved, it was about oil, not the war. We would make feeble comments about conflict resolution, but there was nothing in particular we were trying to do in Angola. But the Angolans themselves, the Angolan government, was determined to defeat Savimbi once and for all. The Israelis were one of their partners, not in any political role, but providing technical assistance, their usual thing. Through the offices of Ambassador Tamar Golan, who was known as Israel's queen of Africa, and was quite close to the Angolans, I had a meeting with the head of Angolan Army, General João de Matos, the chief of staff. Up to this point the Angolans had not been talking to us. Now, with Israel's help we started a very interesting relationship with the Angolans that gave us a good eye into what was taking place in the course of the offensive against Savimbi.

Q: Well, no policy, but we were involved. Were we handing out arms? Ammunition? Giving intelligence? Or were we doing anything?

GREENTREE: No. There was no intelligence sharing. The relationship was very limited. The Angolans, the East Germans had trained their intelligence service and the Cubans were still providing security for President Dos Santos. For example, when you'd go into the presidential office, there, in his outer office, his bodyguards were all very large black guys. You couldn't tell by looking if they were Angolan or Cuban. But, several times I heard them speaking Spanish instead of Portuguese, so they were obviously Cuban.

Q: Did we feel that we were running cross purposes, or had the Cubans almost kind of lost their raison d'être?

GREENTREE: That's an interesting question. For Fidel, who was still in power at the time, Angola was a major victory. It was his defining point in many ways as a revolutionary leader. Nowhere else had Cuba 50,000 troops fought a war. Cuba was involved everywhere from Nicaragua to Syria, but these were combat troops in a full-out war against South Africa and UNITA. By this point the Angolans themselves had long ago stopped being revolutionaries. They weren't Marxists anymore, they were basically a petro-capitalist kleptocracy. The Cold War was over. So to some extent the fruits of revolutionary victory no longer existed.

I can make one other point that is historically very interesting. From an American perspective, you ask most Americans, "You know how we helped South Africa become a

democracy?” and everybody shakes their head, “Yes, yes, weren’t we good?” Well, the truth is that we were on the other side. We were allied with apartheid South Africa. It was the Cubans siding with the Angolans who hosted camps for the ANC (African National Congress) that helped end apartheid. And Mandela, when he was released from prison, his first trip wasn’t to Washington, DC but to Angola, and his second trip was to Cuba. He thanked the Cuban people for their sacrifice, calling the Cuban defeat of South Africa in Angola the crack that led to the end of apartheid.

Q: Yeah. Who was your ambassador?

GREENTREE: My first ambassador was Joe Sullivan, and the second was Chris Dell, both career Foreign Service of course. We were extremely well represented in Angola at the time, but we did not have much of a policy to speak of. I was going to say that in this first meeting that I had with the chief of staff, General Joao de Matos, who’d been a guerilla commander, he said – and I’ll never forget it – was, “You know, first we fought against you,” meaning the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). “Then we worked with you. We bought into this whole peacekeeping thing. And that didn’t work. And now we’re going to do what we should have done in the first place, which is to kill Jonas Savimbi.” And that’s what they set out to do.

Q: Well, how did we feel about Savimbi?

GREENTREE: Savimbi had been our great ally. When we got started in 1975, there had been a group called the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Liberation Front of Angola)) headed by Holden Roberto. They were basically proxies of Mobutu in Zaire. UNITA and Jonas Savimbi were secondary figures. But in the opening of the civil war, the Cubans defeated the FNLA. They collapsed. But Jonas Savimbi survived, with support from South Africa. He was a true guerilla bush fighter and a very charismatic leader. He was also a political chameleon, a genius who convinced any number of Americans that he was a great freedom fighter. So Jonas Savimbi became in the Reagan administration one of the pantheon of freedom fighters.

Now, here it is 1999. The Cold War is long over. Savimbi has gone back on not one, but two UN brokered accords when he lost the elections. So here he is back at war again, not financed by any foreign power, but financed by diamonds – blood diamonds – from illegal diamond mining in territory that he controlled. Yet American officials are still referring to him as “Dr. Savimbi”, as if he had some kind of legitimacy.

Q: Huh.

GREENTREE: The Clinton administration had put UNITA, an insurgent organization, under sanctions. But we would get visitors from Washington, including the assistant secretary for Africa Affairs, Susan Rice, who asked President Eduardo dos Santos in a meeting, “Why aren’t you talking to Dr. Savimbi?” I thought he was going to choke on his coffee. They had launched this full-out offensive to kill the guy and she’s suggesting that we talk to him.

Q: Did you have a problem with visitors not quite understanding what we were up to? Or did you sort of not really understand what you all were up to?

GREENTREE: I thought that on the ground we had a very good understanding of what we were up to. We didn't always get the details, and the Angolans had learned well how to act secretly. And they had also learned that money was the bottom line. They didn't have any sense of ideology whatsoever. The oil majors were all there. Chevron, which had been Gulf Oil, was the original major operator. Exxon was entering for the first time. They were all bidding aggressively on new deep water blocks. We knew who we were dealing with.

One of my favorite examples of a Cold War legacy was in a place called Cabinda, an enclave where Chevron had its operational base and the main ground station for pumping offshore oil. The facility is literally an enclave. You're in poverty-stricken tropical Africa, and you go through the gate into Chevron-world, with manicured lawns, beautiful buildings and housing, a club and swimming pool. The first time I went, I remember noticing the perimeter fence had this very strange construction, very heavy with an unusual kind of barbed wire, and these steel guard towers. I'd never seen anything quite like it. I asked the Chevron security manager about it. He took me to some map drawers in the security office and pulled out these maps of the facility from the Gulf Oil days. They showed a double fence around the perimeter with a minefield in between. The writing was in English, Spanish, and Russian. So you had the irony of a U.S. corporate oil facility being guarded by Soviet-backed Cuban troops against attacks by guerillas sponsored by the CIA and South Africa. It was one of those amazing Cold War ironies. You had to see it to believe it.

Q: What was happening in Angola at the time? I mean political, economic developments? Was there much going on?

GREENTREE: The MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola)) had been in power since independence in 1975. Dos Santos had been since 1979 and had a complete and stable lock on power. Savimbi and UNITA were in the interior fighting a full-on civil war. You had diamond production, but the big game was oil. When I was there they were up to a million barrels a day. Now they are double that. They were opening up the first new "ultra-deep" oil blocks offshore. We had a contentious issue that estranged us further from the government. In their effort to win bids, Exxon had written a letter that implied that if they were awarded these oil blocks relations with the U.S. would become closer. This was something the Angolans valued. Exxon received several choice blocks, but then the MPLA government acted like we never lived up to it. Basically, the U.S. position was, "We never promised anything. Exxon wrote this letter. Oh, but by the way, we support oil corporations." We didn't really have a clear policy, and I don't think we were interested enough to clear this up.

There was another fascinating issue. We had a first-rate economic officer in the mission, Jill Derderian. She had a degree in resource economics. She wanted to be in a tough place like Angola because she saw it as a not very well understood and expanding oil market where there wasn't going to be a lot of competition. She did a terrific job. What she discovered was a big surprise. Think 1999, 2000, 2001, she's reporting that the Chinese are coming into Angola very seriously. They're bidding on oil blocks, making a strategic move to secure new Angolan oil production. We got a very dismissive reaction from Washington – State, DOE, CIA – to this reporting: “ Oh yeah, ha-ha, China keeps saying they're going to do things. They'll build a bicycle factory or a stadium, but it never amounts to anything.” Except that today, Angola is one of the two top sources of oil for China, along with Saudi Arabia.

Q: What about Angola's neighbors? Were they a problem at all?

GREENTREE: Not really a problem. This is something that is not well understood in the U.S. Angola has a powerful military, with arms and contractors from the former Soviet Union, and they know how to use their power in Southern Africa. South Africans were, I wouldn't say intimidated, because Angola was not threatening South Africa in any way. But the Angolan military was a class above everybody else. The DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) was in chaos. They didn't hesitate to use their power in the Congo. That goes back to the time when Mobutu was in power and a long history of animosity. The Angolans invaded twice to teach them a lesson. They were secretly involved in putting the current president, Joseph Kabila, into power. There are Angolans in the interior, in the eastern Congo, working with Rwanda, also with Zimbabwe. Their eyes are on minerals and resources as well as political manipulation of the situation.

Q: How did you find the government? You know, as a working organization?

GREENTREE: The government was an interesting creature, a cut above your typical disorganized politically, chaotic sort of administration in the developing world. The MPLA was a pretty sophisticated political party in the 1970s. Although they were Marxist-Leninist they'd always been very pragmatic. They always had ties to Europe through the Portuguese and to a lesser degree, the French. In fact, what they were about was making money. Dos Santos, the president, is one of the wealthiest people in Africa. Multi-billions of dollars. Nobody knows -- little of it is transparent. There's a very small elite at the top that is quite privileged. And that was the MPLA reward for maintaining stability.

Q: Well, what was going on out in the bush? I mean were schools getting out there?

GREENTREE: Once you got outside of the capital city Luanda and a few other places, it became not third world, but fourth world pretty quickly. They had been at war on and off, by that time for more than 25 years. The Portuguese had loved Angola. I mean Angola was their promise and their dream. In 1975 it was the world's last major colony, completely racist and, and archaic. The Portuguese had built these beautiful interior cities and had these huge farms, and all of it was destroyed. The infrastructure was terrible. The

population for the most part had reverted to tribal subsistence or was in camps receiving humanitarian aid. There were the diamond mining areas where you had these wildcat diamond mines along the rivers with people living in semi-slavery. And then you had the civil war. The Angolan army had tens of thousands of soldiers, some elite troops, but mostly conscripts; they refer to themselves as cannon fodder. The UNITA army, which was made up of Ovimbundu tribesmen from the central plains, who followed Savimbi with great dedication, were hardened guerillas, tough fighters. You had a nasty civil war, with all the stuff that's in the paper today – blood diamonds, child soldiers, terrible atrocities, human rights violations, most of it deep in the interior. Very little of that was getting out into the world at large. People didn't care.

Q: Well, did you see, compared to other places, when you're talking African hands, did you see this -- I mean it sounds like Angola had real options with money and all coming in? Or was the money going anywhere other than into African graft pockets?

GREENTREE: At the time, to the extent that the money was being used for public services, it was being used to finance the war, in addition to making a small group of people wealthy. They did have a vision that once they got over the war but they had a vision, which they're fulfilling now. The country has been growing at a 10% rate now for five or six years steadily. In some ways it is quite transformed. But the interior is still pretty bleak and most of the people are poverty stricken.

Q: Was there a substantial American expatriate colony there?

GREENTREE: There were few independent Americans living there. The biggest contingent of Americans were tied to the oil industry. There were weekly charter flights from Houston that would land in Luanda, and then transfer workers at the airport to Cabinda and from there to the offshore oil facilities. They'd never really enter the country.

Q: Well, how did you find life there?

GREENTREE: It was rough, definitely the hard end of hardship posts. I had a decent apartment in Luanda in a building built right before the Portuguese left in 1975. But just getting out on the streets was chaotic and not necessarily secure. Travel outside of the capital city was dangerous. To enjoy Africa was a matter of going to South Africa, and Namibia was a wonderful place to visit, an incredible contrast. But Angola itself was very difficult, and the Angolans themselves – these were people who had been at war for almost three decades. They were tough people.

Q: Was there much in the way of political reporting?

GREENTREE: Actually, there was quite a lot to do. I spent most of my reporting time dealing with the war and the political-economy of the oil industry. The second officer covered internal politics. Much of it was not traditional reporting. For example, one of the first outbreaks of Ebola happened in northern Angola. It spread through long-range

truck drivers, and became associated in the tribal villages with voodoo practices that ended up spreading the disease and creating epidemics. Traveling in the interior was fascinating, although dangerous. There was a journalist in the early 1950s, John Gunther, who traveled around the world and wrote a series of “Inside” books. In *Inside Africa*, he described Angola as one of the most unknown parts of darkest Africa. When I was there, the interior departments like Moxico and Malanje were still deep, dark, unknown Africa. There were no safari groups heading out to circle the lions or anything like that.

Q: Did you feel that there was much attention played to Angola back in Washington?

GREENTREE: No, sporadically. It didn’t usually get outside of the Africa Bureau channel. The most significant thing that happened diplomatically when I was there was a cock-up. It was related to the Congo. When Mobutu died in 1997, Laurent Kabila had gotten into power. He’d been a longtime resistance guy, but he turned out to be a nutcase. Che Guevara knew him when he was trying to stir up revolution there in the 1960s and decided he wasn’t serious. Kabila was terrible as president and he was assassinated in January 1991. It’s never been proven, but I’m pretty sure the Angolans were involved. Laurent’s son, Joseph Kabila had been slated to take power, but he disappeared. There was a UN Security Council resolution, and I forget the exact wording of it, but the basic idea was let’s help Joseph Kabila get in power and stabilize the Congo. Except that nobody knew where he was. Our UN ambassador at the time was Bill Richardson. If you remember him.

Q: Oh yes, from New Mexico.

GREENTREE: Yeah. So Bill Richardson came out leading this UNSC delegation to find Joseph Kabila. It was a “where is Joseph Kabila?” thing. I remember him lecturing the Angolans that it was their responsibility to help and blah, blah, blah. We tried to explain to Richardson. “No, you don’t understand. The Angolans are *behind* this. The Angolans are manipulating the situation. They know where Joseph Kabila because they *have* him.”

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: “And they will deliver him into power when they determine that it is in their interest to do so.” It was another example of how between Washington and what’s happening on the ground, you get things backwards.

Q: So how did you find being DCM?

GREENTREE: Oh, I liked being DCM well enough. A part of it having a good relationship with your ambassador; that’s an important part of the job. What I did not like, frankly, was running up against State Department bureaucracy. It’s tempting to dump poor performers to small hardship posts where few other people want to go. A big embassy can absorb them with less impact. You do get some excellent officers, but your ability to exercise leadership is pretty limited when people are more focused on their own issues than in serving. There was another crazy problem. We were getting ready to build

a new embassy. The project had been on the books since the 1980s, a very nice design. They had put everybody in singlewide trailers that were supposed to be there for two or three years while they built the new embassy. Except that because of the civil war, it was 10 years later and these things were falling apart. In the meantime, the staff had doubled in size and they brought in the Inman security standards had been revised upwards. But the budget had been frozen. The building they had designed 10 years earlier didn't fit the reality. We were in this impossible situation, without a way to get from here to there. The back and forth was *extremely* painful. Of course, one way or another eventually it worked out, but maybe not for the best.

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: Maybe there was nothing unique about it. But, the question of, how did I like being DCM? The substantive work was great. On the management side, it was extremely difficult, because of the lack of latitude to be able to do much on the ground; to take care of people the way we thought needed to be done. Those are just a couple of examples.

Q: Well, so you left there in 2002. Where did you go?

GREENTREE: I went to the Naval War College as State rep. It's a one-year assignment, but I extended for a second year and retired out of there.

Q: Well, did you feel the Naval War College was designed to give you some relief or reward or to get rid of you, or what?

GREENTREE: Well, I had several options at that point. After Angola, the Africa Bureau was very good and offered me deputy director of one of the offices. And I could have gone back to Latin America for an overseas assignment.

But then this Naval War College position came up. I called in about it and talked to some people who had done the job before. The officer who was there at the time said, "Oh, you're going to love it here." The Naval War College is the premier military service school. You've got a stronger link to State at NDU (National Defense University) in Washington, but in the tradition of strategic studies, the original school and the one with the highest caliber is the Naval War College. So I actively sought that.

Q: All right, well let's talk about the Naval War College. I haven't had many people who've served there. First place, describe the setting and then what you were doing.

GREENTREE: The Naval War College is located in Newport, Rhode Island, which is a very interesting town. It was a center of the Gilded Era and has all of these mansions and still a lot of wealth, and was the home of the Americas Cup race. It was also the base for the Atlantic Fleet, although it moved to Virginia in the 1970s. The War College has been continually in operation since 1895. Alfred Thayer Mahan, who was the famous naval strategist that Teddy Roosevelt followed, helped start it.

It's the typical service school format that you have at the Army War College, the Air War College, Naval War College, and NDU. Officers from all the services and from civilian agencies, and foreign countries take a one-year course. For the military officers it's part of their joint professional military education. It's a ticket for command, especially for the senior course. So you tend to get the best of the military. The course has three sections, and I opted to be a member of the Strategy and Policy faculty. You don't necessarily have to do that, but it made it much more interesting.

Q: Yes.

GREENTREE: The bottom line is that was a transforming experience. After taking it, my sense was, "Oh my goodness, every Foreign Service Officer should be exposed to this fairly early in their careers." It would do an enormous amount to develop a better strategic perspective of the role of the Foreign Service. Not just specifically in a political-military sense, but in understanding the role of the military and the broader relationship between national security and foreign policy.

Q: Did you feel that, you know, fighting guerillas and all this, was changing? That the navy was having a problem coming up with a role?

GREENTREE: There was a bit of that. The course that I was teaching at the time was a strategic history of war, not just naval, but had barely anything to do with irregular warfare. You know, 9/11 had happened, and I was there in 2003 when we went into Iraq. So there was definitely an atmosphere of "we're at war." A lot of the officers were rotating into assignments that would take them into those theaters. The bigger issue about the role of the navy was how overall maritime strategy related to national security strategy. The navy's role in irregular warfare was just beginning to come onto the scope.

Q: What was your impression of the naval officers that you dealt with?

GREENTREE: My general experience was high. And not just the Navy, but all them were a very motivated group of officers. There is this idea out there that you're coming here for a year to relax, if any of them actually have that idea it quickly goes away, because they work very hard. That said, the Navy, even though they had the premiere center of education, tends to value that education less. They felt that they didn't necessarily have to use the Naval War College to send their top 5%. Since they had more billets than the other services, they could do things like -- I remember, when I was there they were getting ready to retire the A6 close-attack carrier aircraft. There was a whole cadre of senior A6 pilots who were too old to retrain for the naval version of the F18. Not many going to continue into senior command, but they sent a lot of pilots and weapons officers to the Naval War College.

Q: Well, one of the things I've heard from time-to-time is that the navy seems to be somewhat disconnected from the world view. You know, they don't have to serve on the ground and their view is not that of, you might say, a Foreign Service Officer.

GREENTREE: Yes, it's interesting. I thought most of the naval officers I worked with are pretty smart guys. Whether they're submariners or aviators or surface warfare, they're oriented to engineering and dealing with technology. Even when they're leading men, it's men who are dealing with machines and sophisticated technology. Then you've got this other dimension. A ship captain at sea operates independently or semi-independently when he's part of a fleet. The strategy that you're following is a product of the fact that you're in ships. You can go anywhere you want to go. You don't think the same way strategically as you do when you have land forces that are deeply integrated into the place, wherever they are. That creates a difference. When you get into the senior ranks then you get a real distinction between officers who remain basically engineers, then on the other side you've got more strategic thinkers. But you also find that in the army, for example, between the guys who become general officers who are senior fighters, and then you have a few generals who become the strategists and work more on the political side.

Q: Well, I would have thought that at that time -- I mean you would have noticed a certain amount of oh, I don't know what you want to call it, disquiet with the submariners. You know, guerillas and terrorists are kind of hard to control by submarines.

GREENTREE: *(laughs)* Yeah, although now -- not too much then, it was just starting -- now you have a generation of submarine commanders who have been on those guided missile submarines converted for special operations. And you also have the Navy SEALs.

Q: Yeah.

GREENTREE: That was in its infancy. Although there is a long history. Submarines were delivering frogmen onto the beaches in World War II, going into dangerous areas to be on standby missions to rescue down pilots and that sort of thing. I worked with any number of submarine commanders. They tend to be extremely thoughtful, very smart guys. Not always necessarily the most expressive, you have to get with them and scratch them a little bit before they come out.

Q: It sounds like a fascinating job to get beyond the operational and do some thinking and developing things. What was sort of the general feeling about going into Iraq?

GREENTREE: That's a very interesting question. The Naval War College was a very interesting place to observe and experience that. Because this is supposed to be the premiere school for studying and teaching strategy. I'll never forget, we would have these weekly round table discussions in Strategy and Policy Department. They took a vote, so there's a group -- there were 24 on faculty, half military, half civilian -- some of the civilians were prominent experts in the field. And they took a vote on who supports the

Iraq invasion. And it was 21 to three. And I remember thinking, “Well, wait a second. You guys are supposed to be teaching the lessons of history here (*laughs*). How can you all be so blindly supporting this? It’s obviously going to be a disaster.” But they did.

There was one fellow, not in Strategy and Policy, but he was in the Research Department. His name was Ahmed Rashim. He was from Lebanon originally. He had dedicated his career, much of his career to the Iran-Iraq War. So, at the time, he was one of the few legitimate, bona fide experts on Iraq and the Iraqi Military. He previewed with us a PowerPoint presentation that he’d been invited to give the Defense Department. This is just prior to the invasion. This would have been February. Basically, he said that, “You’re going to have two big problems on the ground after you go in. One is that this is a country that’s been under an extremely repressive, authoritarian government under Saddam Hussein. So when you take off the lid, the capital city is going to be like taking the lid off a pressure cooker. The big problem you’re going to have is keeping order in Baghdad.” And he said, “That’s going to be a huge military challenge, because you’re going to be the only force of order there.” The other point he made, and in *great* detail, he said, “There are five Republican Guard divisions. Not, regular Iraqi Army, but the hardcore of the Iraqi Army. Three are going to disband. They’re just going to fade away. Of the other two, one’s going to remain and fight, and the other is going to un-organize and then reform to fight guerilla war. This was the lesson that they’d learned from 1991 war, the previous Gulf War. And the most important military challenge that you’re going to face, because you’re not going to be able to prevent this from happening, is you’re going to have to get out and secure all of the armories, all of the places where weapons were being held.” And we had the intelligence, we knew where they were. Part of the PowerPoint was, here are the key ones and here are the weapons they have in them, here are the units. He went through this in great detail.

So he goes down to Washington and gives this briefing to Rumsfeld and to Paul Wolfowitz. I don’t know who was there from JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff). He comes back and I remember we were sitting at a small table in the cafeteria. One of the guys in Strategy and Policy was a close friend of his. So when Ahmed walked in he waved him over. Said, “Ahmed, sit down. Tell us, how did it go?”

And he didn’t look very happy. He said, “Well, I gave the briefing.”

And said, “Yes. And how was the discussion?”

He said, “Well, there wasn’t much of a discussion. When I was done, I put up the slide that said ‘Questions?’ Rumsfeld said, ‘Thank you very much. You can leave now.’”

Q: Well, what was the problem with most of the people who didn’t want to go into Iraq? Was it the basic policy or was it they didn’t see what we were after, or what?

GREENTREE: Well, the people that I knew that were opposed to it recognized that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 or Afghanistan. We didn’t believe any of this intelligence, that it wasn’t fabricated, it was exaggerated. And that it was attacking the wrong target.

But you know, part of it was also the same problem of attacking, declaring a Global War on Terrorism rather than a war against al-Qaeda in retribution for 9/11.

Q: Were there any overt statements of they didn't agree with it in naval ranks, or did -- this is pretty much OK, that's it, and that's what we're going to do?

GREENTREE: There was no outspoken opposition or anything that could be characterized in that way.

Q: Yeah, you wouldn't really expect it, but I was just asking.

GREENTREE: Yeah, no.

Q: Well then, after all this, you're finally getting ready to pull up stakes. What did you have in mind, or did you have anything in mind?

GREENTREE: You meant to do after I retired? Well, my wife, -- I didn't mention, we had met in Angola where she had been the head of the International Red Cross Delegation and then was managing humanitarian operations for the UN. We decided to be where we wanted to live. So we moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico and set up a home base there. I started to do what I had intended all along, which was to write and teach.

Q: And so what have you written and what have you taught?

GREENTREE: I got a very generous grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation and spent a couple of years writing a book called Crossroads of Intervention, about insurgency and counterinsurgency lessons from Central America. That was my main writing project. Albuquerque is about an hour away where the University of New Mexico is located. Andy Ross, who had been at the Naval War College, took a job heading up their Center for Science and Technology Policy and had a chair in the Department of Political Science. We got together and started a Strategic Studies Program at the University of New Mexico. It was very interesting to take the model of the Naval War College and put it into a regular American university. My main teaching effort was doing that.

Q: What is your impression of the students you're dealing with? These are grad students.

GREENTREE: Well, actually it's both, undergraduate and graduate. University of New Mexico is the state school, and I'd say that you have about as great a mix of student body as you could find anywhere. For example, there are a number of graduate students who were getting their PhDs with sponsorship from Los Alamos or Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico. At the other end, UNM is open admissions for undergraduates, some just gravitated because they didn't know what else they wanted to do. New Mexico has about five times the national average for military service and there are any number of vets who are now in school. These were all guys and some girls who had done tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, so they'd been in combat. They were very

interesting to have as students in strategic studies courses alongside these other students, who might be doing peace studies or anything else.

Q: Well, you find a different outlook among the students than professionals you dealt with? Compared to say, you've just been in the military. Or the Foreign Service.

GREENTREE: Tremendous. When you put everybody together in courses, the purpose of which is to study war and to study military, to study force and diplomacy, so that's your context, whatever attitude they bring into the course, as they start to acquire knowledge and perspective, for the most part they graduate to the middle, which I think it's an appreciation that's less knee-jerk in either direction.

Q: Well, I know that -- this goes way back -- but I've talked to people who went to war colleges maybe 20 or 30 years ago and were saying that when they'd have war games that the Foreign Service types were far more likely to reach for dropping a bomb than the military who would opt for diplomacy.

GREENTREE: Yeah. But, okay, there's an interesting contradiction in that. Most of my Foreign Service career dealt with political-military issues in one way or another. What I discovered is that there's a streak of anti-militarism in the Foreign Service that I don't find in the end very well substantiated. It's very reactive and based on, as much as anything else, on lack of knowledge. I don't think it's very healthy. One of the benefits of having State Department officers attend the service schools is you begin to break that down a bit.

Q: Yeah, well I think part of the thing is, I come from a different generation. And almost everyone in the Foreign Service, I mean 60-years-old now, practically we were all male, and 90% or something served in the military; often just as privates or nothing very fancy. But a much better appreciation of the military than I think later generations have.

GREENTREE: Yes, I think that's right. And the opposite is not the case. Beyond recognition of an Ambassador's authority, there tends to be a shade of anti-Foreign Service in the military, natural separation. But once they get into contact, most learn quickly to appreciate what the State Department is supposed to do. The problem then becomes the distance between what it is supposed to do and what it actually does, which is not always a good match.

Q: Today is the 17th of June, 2014. All right, you retired in 2004, and then you were called back again?

GREENTREE: Yes, I went to Afghanistan at the end of 2008. I had been in contact with Chris Dell, who was the deputy chief of mission in Kabul, the deputy ambassador as they called the position. Since I had worked for him in Angola, he asked if I wanted to come out; they could use me. So I signed up.

Q: And OK, so what happened?

GREENTREE: Well, you know, as things tend to work in the State Department bureaucracy, the fast track took about five months to get on board. I came in on an LNA, a “Limited Non-career Appointment,” a re-commissioning in the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you get any training going out there?

GREENTREE: No, nothing to speak of. I took the crash and bang security course, which is about as minimal as you can get, but it helps get your head back in the game.

Q: OK, let's talk a little bit about the process. When you got there, did you know what you were going to do?

GREENTREE: No, not exactly. I knew that I would be out in the provinces, it wasn't to work in the Kabul. As somebody with a lot of political-military experience, I'd be working with a military unit. But exactly what that would mean, no. I got to the embassy, I was attached to the Office of Provincial Affairs, which at that time -- this was before the military and civilian surge -- was a small office run in an intimate and personal way, taking care of the few dozen Americans who were out in the field. Most of them were with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, the PRTs.

Q: You were where?

GREENTREE: I went out to Task Force Warrior. I was attached as the political-military advisor to the brigade level military command that was in charge of four provinces. It was not a Provincial Reconstruction Team, which are located in the provincial capitals and usually run by the military, but there would be at least three civilian officers assigned, one from State, one from AID, one from the Department of Agriculture. They were responsible for managing programs and monitoring the political situation. I was at the next level up, the military task force in command of the PRTs, but also in command of the combat units that were in those provinces.

Q: Let's talk about the composition of the team, and then we'll go into the work you were doing. First place, the military. What were the military like in this particular team?

GREENTREE: Task Force Warrior was extremely interesting. It was commanded by an engineer, Scott Spellmon, who had been a West Point football player. His brigade had a battalion or so in each province and one large combat battalion that was actually the French contribution to Afghanistan in Kapisa Province, where the most fighting was. There were also several Special Forces detachments. One of the four provinces Bamiyan, which is where the Taliban blew up the ancient Buddhas when they were in power. Up in Bamiyan, the PRT was from New Zealand. Everybody else was American.

Q: How did you find cooperation with French and New Zealand and American troops?

GREENTREE: Excellent actually. The New Zealand detachment in Bamiyan was fairly peaceful, but it was very isolated. They were doing mostly development projects. With the French, I was very surprised. There was almost no friction at all. The commander was always a senior French colonel, and they rotated their best battalions between the Chasseurs Alpins, the mountain infantry, and the Marine airborne. The liaison office in the Task Force headquarters were all Foreign Legion. We got along quite well and they were well integrated into the command structure.

Q: When you arrived there, what were we trying to do? We, the American, the United Nations. I mean were you going to defeat the Taliban? De-settle them? Go after al-Qaeda? What?

GREENTREE: First of all, I would minimize the role of the United Nations. They were certainly present, and the role of the specialized agencies was important. For example, the World Food Program and the UNHCR, the refugee organization. But the role of the UN was minimal compared to ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), which was the international military command, which was in turn, really an American led operation. Where I was, in Regional Command East, what we were doing was economy of force operations with a largely exaggerated objective, which was essentially the idea of defeating the Taliban. But it wasn't much more than a notion. This was before the surge. If anything, the ISAF presence prevented the Taliban from taking over. They were deep into their resurgence at that point. And there was an effort at training the Afghan security forces, primarily the Army. But it was of secondary importance.

Q: In your particular group, did you have a set of tasks to perform, and what were they?

GREENTREE: The Task Force had multiple roles. One was to support the PRTs out in the field. One was to maintain coherence of command across the four provinces, Bamiyan, Panjshir, Parwan, and Kapisa. And Kapisa province was very, very conflictive, lots of fighting, because it's where the Hindu Kush Mountains reach their closest to Kabul. This was the closest place in to the north and the east of Kabul that insurgent forces coming from the direction of Pakistan could penetrate. The other important role was to secure Bagram Airfield, which was the main military airport and base in northern and eastern Afghanistan. The big prison was there as well.

Q: You've been in insurgent situations before. In the area you were what was your feeling of the state of the game with the local population?

GREENTREE: The local population by and large was actively, or at least passively, allied with the government. Nevertheless, there was still plenty of Taliban support, particularly up in the higher reaches of the Hindu Kush. There were Pashtun villages that had long been under control of the Taliban and Hekmatyar Gulbuddin, another one of the factions. Kapisa is a frontier zone between Pashtuns and Tajiks, so you had an ethnic divide filled with friction. In the high mountains the Pashai were a separate group that the others regarded as hillbillies and was generally semi-hostile. Panjshir was in our area. The Panjshir Valley was the only place where the Soviets were never able to take over

during their time. It had been the home base of Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was the great hero of the Afghan resistance, assassinated by al-Qaeda on the 9th of September, two days before 9/11. They were at the core of our alliance, the place where the retaking of Afghanistan began right after 9/11. The mission there was maintaining good relations and stability with them. Provincial reconstruction, what you would normally think of as a civilian mission, of running projects and that sort of thing, was very important. That's what made having an engineer as commander so fascinating. Military engineers build things in difficult conditions, and that's exactly what they were doing, constructing roads and buildings and doing other kinds of projects.

Q: Did you have much contact with, I suppose you call them village elders, or in other words, the leaders, political leaders in the area?

GREENTREE: That was the essence of my job. That and serving as the liaison to the embassy, the other civilian officers and the PRTs, supporting them, and then serving as the political advisor to the commander. We worked side-by-side the entire time, and the interception between the military situation and local politics took up most of his time as well.

Q: Well, talk about this. I mean, I assume you didn't speak the basic language there.

GREENTREE: No, I did not have time to learn Dari or Pashto. Basic courtesies, but not anything beyond that. It was rare to have an English-speaking Afghan in a position of authority. Fortunately, in the Task Force we had some truly excellent Afghans, not just the regular interpreters who could be of varying quality. We had an Afghan legal advisor who was also a law professor at the University of Afghanistan in Kabul. His English was flawless, basically. He was an essential element of the team.

Q: When you got there what did you see were your major tasks?

GREENTREE: My first responsibility was being the political advisor, working side-by-side the commander. There were also a number of incidents of serious civilian casualties. This was a high point, before General McChrystal came and refined the rules of engagement. So there was no clear doctrinal guidance. Regional Command – East was actually using body counts in public statements, for example. So putting together a counterinsurgency strategy as best we could was critical, designing operations that took account of the need to have a political component, not just a military component. Of course, the problem was that resources were very limited, and the civilian structure that really should have been there to take over was just not present at all.

Q: Could you figure out how the people at your level in the Afghan government looked upon the Karzai government?

GREENTREE: At the level of provincial government leaders, Karzai had done a pretty effective job. He doesn't get a lot of credit. But you know, we like to put our American filters on everything, so it led us to criticize his shortcomings. Actually, in Afghan terms

he had done a very effective job of divide and conquer among competing factions, and co-opted those who became part of his organization. For example, the Panjshiris, as long as they had a vice president that was a member of Karzai's group, they remained satisfied because the patronage and access to power would flow from there.

Q: Were we distributing money, or what? I mean sort of to keep the machinery running.

GREENTREE: Well, the gross influx of funds, primarily through USAID (United States Agency for International Development) that went for the most part into Kabul were important sources of revenue. It wasn't just the U.S., but it was all these different countries and agencies. The role of direct subsidies to various political leaders at the local level was not the decisive factor. It was much more what was channeled through Kabul through various mechanisms.

Q: Did you get any feel for how Karzai was considered in the local leadership?

GREENTREE: Yes. More on my second deployment, but in this deployment I didn't get the sense that Karzai was perceived as an illegitimate leader or as a puppet of the U.S. or any of the sort of things that would lead you to question the overall stability of what we were doing. In fact, it was quite the opposite, there was a remarkable amount of stability on the part of the government, which was kind of amazing because what we would think of as the functioning of a government was very corrupt and shallow, not very competent.

Q: Were you sort of giving advice of how to do things, or were you just sitting back -- not using this in the right term probably -- but you know, making sure that they had the proper tools and equipment to go ahead with governing?

GREENTREE: That is the idea of having political advisors and provincial reconstruction teams. But I personally never had a lot of faith that we would know any better how to run Afghanistan than Afghans. It would be more about how to secure funding for this or that project, how to organize joint Afghan-coalition operations to defeat the insurgency. There were a lot of "shuras", meetings where they would air their grievances. There was the whole project of modernizing the Afghan government, as we like to think of it. It's the work of generations. The idea that was going to happen on a short time frame was never in the cards, even though plenty of people were trying to do it.

Q: How did you find the various specialists on your military side? Were they up to the job?

GREENTREE: In general the military was far more competent than on the civilian side, even though there would be some shortcomings. For example, our task force was pretty heavy on MPs, military police. They were a great asset, especially if they were from reserve units, because you would have regular police officers on reserve duty. Even though they had been trained in military policing, their skills in community policing, or even state highway patrol officers, that was all really useful with the Afghans, in helping bring basic order.

Q: How'd you find the general population? Did they pretty much hunker down, or were they what you'd call cooperative?

GREENTREE: Afghans were irrepressible. That's the most amazing thing about them, they're totally resilient. Here they've been at war for over 30 years with the majority of people living just above subsistence level, by no means what we would consider wealthy. But they're going about their lives. They've adapted to war in amazing ways. Afghan society is lively, vibrant .

Q: How about our troops, the combat troops? It's always a difficult situation to have people with guns breaking into houses and the equivalent.

GREENTREE: I found the evolution in special operations very interesting. When I first arrived the residual of 9/11 was very strong. Most of the special operations guys were separated from the general-purpose forces, conventional troops. That sort of thing is usually not helping, and was something you had to overcome on a personal, unit-by-unit basis. The serious operational problem was many of these Special Forces units had gotten away from their original mission, which was to work with the Afghans, with the Afghan military, and instead they were focused on man-hunting, getting intelligence and then tracking down Taliban and supposed al-Qaeda people. And that did begin to change. The most effective unit on the combat side were the Marine Embedded Training Teams, the ETTs. They're three-man teams at the battalion level who lived and worked side-by-side with the Afghans. The ETTs in our area were excellent. Ironically, as soon as the Marines went in to Helmand Province in the south, they pulled the ETTs out of the field, which was a huge loss. They were never replaced.

Q: How did the teams, these military teams, work when you were beginning?

GREENTREE: They had a small brigade equivalent headquarters. At battalion level, the core group would be, for example, a lieutenant colonel, so a rank equivalent to an Afghan kandak (battalion) commander; sometimes a lieutenant, and a senior non-commissioned officer, with an interpreter. They were employed as combat advisors, would live and march with the Afghans, and provide critical communications, say, to call in artillery, close air support, or medevac. They were also in liaison with us at the task force, which was critical during combined operations.

Q: Did you feel that the Marines may have had a firmer grasp of what the whole thing was about, or not?

GREENTREE: I thought that the Marines in these ETTs operating at the tactical level knew what their job was, knew what needed to be done, and were doing great work. When the Marines went into Helmand as a much larger battle group they got a lot of praise for their counterinsurgency work, but comparatively it was not a great success.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Taliban? I mean sort of al-Qaeda and the Taliban sometimes are sort of mixed in together. Did you see the Taliban as being a viable solution to the situation in the area? You'd get them to be more amenable to cooperation?

GREENTREE: Well, you know, Taliban, I wouldn't say that I had a lot of intimate interactions with them, although, there would be a meeting with Afghans and you could often point out who the sympathizers were in a group. This is a comment on the strategy: One of the unfortunate errors that took place after 9/11 was in our eagerness to get revenge we violated the Afghan way of war. That is when one side wins, the other side puts down their arms and reconciles with the side that won. And this is what the Taliban wanted to do. They were signaling wildly after the overthrow of the Taliban Emirate in 2001 that's what they wanted to do. In fact, a lot of the guys that ended up in Bagram and then Guantanamo were actually captured when they came in to negotiate. And that was a mistake, because our insistence on hunting them down as if they were all criminals, rather than just adversaries who had lost, was what provoked the rise of the insurgency more than anything else.

Q: Did you realize this at the time, or was this in retrospect?

GREENTREE: I didn't realize it immediately, but it didn't take long. Because this is what the Afghans were saying. If you listen to the Afghans, it would be pretty easy to understand.

Q: Were you able to sit down over coffee -- with an interpreter and all -- but sort of sound out the Afghans?

GREENTREE: Yes. And the nature of that process between my two deployments was quite different. But absolutely. So for example, during this first deployment with Task Force Warrior in the east, I spent quite a lot of time in all the provinces sitting with the governors who would call these shuras (meetings) with representatives from all over. Afghans were very involved and never held back saying what they think.

Q: Did you get any feel about what the -- I would hate to use the term average Afghan -- but what the people who were leading the Afghans at the provincial level thought of American, other groups, foreign groups, what we were doing there?

GREENTREE: Well, if you're trying to think of a place that's thoroughly foreign, Afghanistan has got to be at the top of the list. Culturally, everything about it is so distinct from us that I'm not so sure we meshed very well. But Afghans as a people are -- even though our view of them is wild and unsophisticated -- are actually very sophisticated, have a pretty good grasp of what we were about, and recognized that we were a critical aspect of their stability, even at an individual level they didn't like us. I think most for that reason were perfectly happy to be in association with us. The fact that we also brought along a lot of goodies in a financial way, development projects, only made it better. The countervailing part of our operations that didn't always benefit them,

especially when there were civilian casualty incidents. So, in some ways we ended up also being our own worst enemies.

Q: Do you feel that we spent an awful lot of time, concern, with the role of women. How was this playing within the provinces?

GREENTREE: That's a perfect example of how foreign and different our cultures were. And don't get me wrong, I'm not saying there's nothing wrong with promoting equality for women, but that's very much our value. Attempting to impose it uniformly on a place like Afghanistan was not a good idea. My opinion is it needed a discrimination between places and times and people. For example, in Kabul and other urban centers, those sorts of ideas have positive impact. The Hazara, who are the Shia minority, maybe 15% of the population or so, they're progressive and receptive. But to promote women's rights among the conservative Southern Pashtun, even though that's where women were most suppressed, was a mistake because it fed the insurgency rather than dampened it.

Q: Did you feel you might say pressure from above, particularly the political element in the United States about this? That we should change our tactics?

GREENTREE: I wouldn't say pressure. It was an element of the policy and it was misguided. Just like, as I was saying before, going around capturing anybody who had been in the Taliban was a mistake. Similarly, the notion of reconciliation, that we're going to sit down at the table with these guys and negotiate power sharing at the national level, is also completely misguided.

Q: How did you feel about your superiors in Kabul, at the embassy?

GREENTREE: The embassy, during my first tour I thought the embassy was well run. This was the transition from the second Bush administration to Obama. When I first came the ambassador was Bill Wood -- actually I'd known him in El Salvador -- who was competent, had a good grasp, and tried to keep a fairly low profile. He exercised influence, but was not too heavy-handed. Chris Dell as his deputy, it was a pretty good team. The embassy was not small, but of a reasonably manageable size. The separation between the military and the civilian sides of the house was not healthy. But in terms of the mission itself, I thought it was pretty well run. As I mentioned before, the Provincial Affairs Office, handling a few dozen Americans was taking good care of its people.

Q: What did you feel was our objective? I'm just going through this book by Bob Woodward called Obama's Wars. And they're talking about whether victory over the Taliban, or degrading the Taliban, or these were major considerations.

GREENTREE: The absence of a coherent strategy at the national level made it more difficult to carry out an economy of force operation on the ground. But we're talking about early 2009. In the middle of that deployment I moved to Kandahar. That was to be in the same role as political-military advisor to 5-2 Stryker Brigade, which subsequently became quite well known, in some ways notorious. That was the first combat brigade that

came in at the start of the surge. This was the surge of 15,000 troops that President Bush had ordered before he left office. The total surge that President Obama declared was added to this. Kandahar was the center of gravity of the insurgency, and you could see immediately how the addition of combat power on the ground made a difference independent of the overall strategy.

Q: What was the situation when you went to Kandahar, and when was it?

GREENTREE: I got to Kandahar in early August of 2009. Conditions were getting dire. The main combat unit in the province was a Canadian battle group, with one or two American battalions attached. They were being completely outmatched by the insurgency. Not only were significant portions of the countryside under Taliban control, Kandahar City itself, which is the second largest city in Afghanistan, was being contested.

Q: What was the Taliban doing when they controlled things?

GREENTREE: Well, they were having a surge of their own. Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban, and it's the political center of gravity, not only for them, but for the government as well, and the southern Pashtun. Karzai himself is a Pashtun from Kandahar. So just by contesting power, they were able to create a situation of perceived instability. Now, in the actual areas that they controlled they were fairly limited. I mean you're talking about small outlying villages and districts. They would institute Sharia Law and people would go around court-shopping. If they had a dispute, they would go to the one where they thought they would get a legitimate decision, rarely the official government system. Wherever there were opium poppies under production, usually you'd have Taliban providing security or at least gaining access to revenue from that.

Q: Were you all trying to stop opium?

GREENTREE: Not directly. DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) led counterdrug operations. But there was a contradiction between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency, because so much of the rural population depended on income from opium production. And because the political structures were built around it, and in some cases security force structures were built around it, counterinsurgency operations that relied on support of the population would be disrupted by counternarcotics operations that were intended to eradicate opium.

Q: Were there debates on what the hell to do?

GREENTREE: We were always debating and discussing it. But at the level of policy, it was a contradiction that was left unmanaged.

Q: What was your impression of the civilians who were coming there? American civilians?

GREENTREE: During the second half of my first deployment there were relatively few civilians. I would say it was a mixed bag. I think that in many ways the entire civilian operation was misguided, especially in its separation from the military. But more importantly, there was an exaggerated sense of power. Since the U.S. was the dominant force this translated into the power to transform things, to make decisions, to take action, but really it could not be accomplished in that way. Of course the parallel is Vietnam.

Q: Yeah, I served for a year and a half in Vietnam back in the '60s. I had a feeling that there were an awful lot of people who were using Vietnam as a way to get away from marital problems or to earn money. They weren't as dedicated or competent as they should have been.

GREENTREE: I thought people were pretty dedicated to what they were doing, I just thought it was largely misguided. I wrote a long article about this that was published in the Journal of Strategic Studies in June of 2013 called "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing" and used a paper by Bob Komer, if you know that name, from Vietnam days?

Q: Oh yes.

GREENTREE: I took long passages from Komer's analysis, and just took Vietnam 1969 out and put Afghanistan 2009 in.

Q: Well, the second time you're in a much more difficult province, weren't you?

GREENTREE: In Kandahar, yes. The main activity with 5-2 Stryker was a long operation to take back Arghandab District. It was just to the north of Kandahar, the traditional gateway of the city, and had been under Taliban control for several years. This was the center of offensive operations at that time. There were a lot of American casualties and accusations of overaggressive use of force. New counterinsurgency rules of engagement that were more restrictive had just come into force, but they didn't fit well in a place like Arghandab. The big lesson I took away was, it would take about two years to reestablish normalcy after the first operations. If you multiplied that time figure by the level of forces that we had in there, even at the height of the surge, it was going to take at least four to five years to maintain that progress and extend it to the rest of the South. In other words, because the surge only lasted for 18 months, there was never ever enough time to make it work.

Q: What was the problem with the Stryker brigade?

GREENTREE: Strykers are big eight-wheel light armored vehicles intended to be the forefront of infantry movement. They are regular army, not special operations, but the troops are trained and equipped to be extremely aggressive. They had been used extensively in Iraq as rapid reaction forces. When they got to Kandahar they weren't unsuited to the terrain necessarily, but trying to make them run like they'd run in Iraq, move in really fast over roads made them vulnerable to IEDs (improvised explosive devise). The original versions were flat bottomed, so the Taliban quickly learned to make

huge IEDs that would detonate when the Strykers rolled over them. There were several catastrophic kills that killed all the crewmen. That was one issue. At that time, Kandahar was a NATO command and was rotating annually among NATO nations with troops in the province. The commander had been Dutch and now was a British officer who was much more concerned that American forces stop operating semi-independently. But here you had a situation where you had more American forces under command of British and Canadians, who actually had fewer forces. You had this command asymmetry. The 5-2 Stryker got a reputation of being overaggressive. They got caught up in some unfortunate incidents, particularly one where one of the NCOs (non-commissioned officer) turned out to be a sociopath who intimidated members of his team to go around killing Afghan civilians. They were called The Kill Team.

Q: Did you get involved in any of that?

GREENTREE: I knew the people involved and was interviewed when there were incidents. I was close to the commander, Colonel Harry Tunnell, and saw my job as trying to help the football team learn how to play baseball.

Q: Yeah. Well, I mean I would have thought that the army would have adapted rather quickly to a changed situation.

GREENTREE: Yes, and certain elements did. I mean it wasn't rank-specific. You could find young lieutenants and captains who totally got it and were doing great things out in the field, and you'd find battalion commanders who were insensitive and just wanted to ride up the next hill and take care of business. This all in the context of units that are rotating in and out for a year. Unlike Special Forces who develop continuity by having six-month on and off rotations, these conventional units might not see another tour for several years and might not ever go back in the same place. You had great breaks in continuity, which would lead commanders, naturally enough, to come in and want to win the war on their watch. They tended to regard the people who came before them as knowing nothing and now they were going to take care of it.

Q: Ah. Well, did you find after a while you were sort of an old hand?

GREENTREE: To some degree. I'd been in other wars and didn't feel I wasn't learning everything from scratch. Even though Afghanistan is an enormously complex place, a lot of the critical things were basic to everywhere. For example, the key to success is getting to know the culture, to know the people that you're working with and building trust with them.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the instructions you were getting from above were well founded for the most part?

GREENTREE: Well, I was working primarily with military units on my own. I would go to the embassy from time to time and I found that in the second half of the tour it was already beginning to expand and get a little bit beyond the scope of what could be

controlled by a small office. That would change completely when I came back just a year later in 2010. Tying back to what I was saying before, about having a sense of power to do things that really couldn't be done, I thought that we were quite a bit off track on a lot of dimensions. Not just on the civilian side, but on both the civilian and the military side.

Q: I mean one of the things, just watching this from afar, watching both what was happening in Iraq and Afghanistan, a lot of civilians in an embassy don't constitute a real addition to our effectiveness.

GREENTREE: Exactly. The embassy in Kabul, where most of the people were, was called the Kabubble. The problem was, one, a security situation that made it extremely difficult to get around, to do anything. Compounded by the fact that a lot of Americans didn't know anything, so even if they were not under enormous security restrictions, they would not necessarily be effective operating in society. On top of that, the security bureaucracy continued to grow and increase its power, which in my thinking made the mission enormously more difficult.

Q: Well, this is of course one of the problems. A security bureaucracy is designed to keep people from having casualties, and to avoid casualties you damn well don't want people to go out anywhere.

GREENTREE: Yes. In order to do your job you have to go out, so you're caught in a contradiction. The lowest common denominator becomes accountability. Nobody in a position of responsibility wants to be held accountable for any casualties, so there you have it. The story of my career is figuring how to effectively get out and around that. Being attached to a military unit, I didn't face those kinds of restrictions. The way I ended up thinking about was every general officer has a PSD, personal security detail, guys whose job are to be his bodyguards. But the idea that a PSD could tell a general, "Oh, you can't do that" and cancel the mission, that's kind of ridiculous. That's the point it's gotten to. In other words, on the civilian side of the house, the security officer, who may have very limited knowledge about what's going on out there, can determine what the mission is. And that's extremely unhealthy.

Q: Yeah. Did you feel that by the time you left that security concerns trumped everything else?

GREENTREE: Yes, that's the way it is. I can give you one example. The Special Forces detachment in Kandahar was an extremely well led, great unit. They had a program called VSO, Village Support Operations, to provide projects associated with their activities. They had a group of contractors, but first preference was to rely on USAID and the Department of Agriculture. The two guys that were assigned to this operational attachment were great. One of them had been a military officer, and they were both experienced, hands-on, field guys. An order came down from the embassy that prohibited them from going out into the field, unless a security officer had physically visited and certified any location where they wanted to go to. That was ridiculous because, first of all, getting a security officer out from Kabul and then getting to the field locations, it

could take weeks just to accomplish that. And how is a guy from the embassy supposed to have a better idea of the security situation than the Special Forces who were living and working there? That sort of thing was all too common.

Q: Well, what would you do? I mean, usually a bureaucracy takes care of a stupid order like that.

GREENTREE: These rules shut them down, kept them from going out into the field where they needed to be. The threat was they'd be curtailed, sent home if they acted on their own.

Q: Were you aware of the problem of corruption the Afghan government?

GREENTREE: It was pretty much impossible to avoid. Between corruption and drug trafficking and so on and so forth, you never knew quite what you were dealing with. And of course, U.S. dollars were an enormous source of corruption. Once money went out the door, you didn't have any control over it.

Q: Did you get involved in any anti-corruption or trying to do anything about it?

GREENTREE: Like all things, the situation is more complicated than it seems. So the answer is yes, but in a funny subversive sort of way. There was a big anti-corruption campaign being run by ISAF, targeting individuals and that sort of thing. The problem was it was a big showy campaign that was having counterproductive effects. For example, the president's brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who was assassinated, was the kingpin of the south. By targeting him, we were damaging our relations, not just at the local level, but after all, AWK is the president's brother. The wisdom of that was always pretty questionable.

Q: Well, were you becoming disillusioned, or did you think that -- was there light at the end of the tunnel?

GREENTREE: Oh, I didn't have any illusions going in, so there was nothing to become disillusioned about. I think the whole thing was unfortunate, but those conditions were set very early on -- as early as 2001 actually, when we broke trust with President Karzai in a pretty fundamental way and never really recovered it. By the time I got down the second time, after President Obama had announced the surge and at the same time announced a deadline for it, it was obvious that it was strategically contradictory.

Q: When you say broke trust, what was that?

GREENTREE: Well, to make a long, complicated story short, one of the first things Karzai did after he became president was name the governor of Kandahar. This was arguably one of the most important appointments after the president. The governor that he named was the leader of a tribe, the Alikozai, who were the traditional guardians of Kandahar. During the time of Taliban rule, they had cooperated with the Taliban. This is

typical Afghan behavior. But when Karzai appointed him governor of Kandahar, his rival, Gul Agha Sherzai, from the rival Barakzai tribe took advantage of the situation by going to the special operations and CIA officers he was working with and having the newly named governor arrested and sent to Bagram Prison -- in front of his clan and his family, by the way, a total humiliation. Karzai learned very quickly that we were his critical allies, but he couldn't necessarily trust us.

Q: Did you find your second assignment a whole new ballgame, or what was happening?

GREENTREE: The second tour was in some ways a whole new ballgame. After I got back from the first tour, I started working almost immediately with the 10th Mountain Division, headquartered in Fort Drum, New York. They were preparing to deploy in October 2010. It was interesting because 10th Mountain had been the first regular military unit sent to Afghanistan, had been in command of Operation Anaconda, the first big operation when they were flushing al-Qaeda and Taliban out of Tora Bora in early 2002. Not to blame just them, but there were huge problems. When I started working with 10th Mountain, they seemed enlightened, which subsequently proved to be true through the whole deployment.

Q: Were they getting ready to go back again? This was sort of in the cards?

GREENTREE: This was many years later. Like all units, they spent a full year doing pre-deployment work. I basically was attached to them, made a couple of trips to Afghanistan prior to their deployment. On one of those visits, a suicide bomber hit our convoy. It killed the most high-ranking officers of any single strike in Afghanistan.

Q: I remember that.

GREENTREE: Yeah, so that got them off to a difficult start because they lost a significant number of their high command before they even deployed.

Q: How would you say their field operations were?

GREENTREE: 10th Mountain was first-rate. Understood the conflict. They were the main effort, the key unit at the height of the surge, and did a great job, both on the military and on the political side.

Q: OK.

End of interview