Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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WILLIAM PIERCE

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Pierce}

Q: Alright, why don't we start at the beginning? Can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

PIERCE: I was born March 3, 1944 in Atlanta, Georgia. My father was from Michigan; my mother was from just up the road in Georgia. He was a civilian with the Army Corps of Engineers. My father died in 1949 of a brain tumor and my mother relocated back to Cartersville, her hometown, where I grew up.

Q: How did your mother and father meet?

PIERCE: My father was working on a dam for the Corps on the Etowah River, some 40 miles north of Atlanta, from the flood. It was near the town my mother came from and that's how they met. This would've been, I think, just before the war. After they were married they moved to Atlanta and that's where he was based.

Q: Was your father an engineer?

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: Where did he get his degree?

PIERCE: The University of Michigan. Specializing, as I recall, in hydraulics engineering.

Q: And your mother; what was her background

PIERCE: My mother's father was a lawyer who was born in 1880 in the woods north of West Calc from a rather poor country family that had been there since the Cherokee Indians were kicked out; just after that in the 1800s. He was a very poor boy and was taken by Mopaberry and became Mopaberry's first graduate through school in Plum, Georgia, which was created for country boys in the early 1900s, late 1800s or 1890s. He went to the University of Georgia Law School and became a lawyer. My grandmother was from a wealthier family who owned land in and around Georgia and western Northwest Georgia.

Q: Basically at the time you were beginning to be aware of things you were growing up – was it in Carterville?

PIERCE: Cartersville.

Q: What was Cartersville like?

PIERCE: Cartersville is a town that was founded sometime before the War Between the States as a rail head. It was preeminent in the foothills of the Piedmont, the foothills of Northwest Georgia. It was preeminent in mining. There was a lot of farming around it, but it was primarily a mining town. It was, at the time that I grew up, maybe six or seven thousand people. It has since then taken off and become a major textile center. Cartersville is located forty-four miles north of Atlanta. It's a small town; semi-rural city type atmosphere.

Q: Did you grow up with your mother and grandparents then?

PIERCE: Yes. My mother first – after my father died – lived for a short time with her parents and was able to rent, and later buy, a house on her own where my brother and I were reared.

Q: Did your mother go into some line of work or…

PIERCE: My mother had one or two years of college and ended up becoming an assistant – I guess in today's parlance, an executive assistant – for a small insurance agent. Sold insurance up until she retired, which would've been perhaps 20 years ago.

Q: What about school?

PIERCE: We had a small city system and I grew up in a small city system. At the time the system was segregated and remained segregated until I graduated in 1962 and afterwards. It was just a typical Georgia school system. I'm trying to recall the number in my graduating class – perhaps about 88, something like that. I went to Davidson College after

that.

Q: Well, before you went to college, in high school and grammar school, what were your main interests in school?

PIERCE: That's kind of hard to think about. Let's see. I read some; I started reading more when I was about 12 or 13 and discovered English as a course of great interest midway through high school. English poetry. That was also about the time I figured out I wasn't very good at math or science.

On the outside, it was a small town and we did a lot of roaming through the woods. Very, very beautiful mountains, hills, river system; the Etowah River that was dammed by my father. The area was a good site for old Civil War sites, old antebellum houses.

The Etowah River is named after the Etowah Indians. Near the town there are three Indian mounds that are remnants from the Etowah Indian community, which I believe disappeared perhaps in the sixteenth century. But you can still find – or you could at that time – artifacts in various areas around the county: arrowheads. More professional people have found immensely interesting artifacts: shards of pottery and indeed shards of bone. It was an interesting place to walk around for a 12-, 13-, 14-year-old kid. My brother did a lot of that with me.

Q: Any Civil War battles in that area?

PIERCE: We were in the path that Sherman took from Chattanooga to Atlanta. The church that I was brought up in was used during the Civil War by Sherman's troops as a stable. There were no major battles in that direct area, but twenty miles south of Cartersville is Kennesaw Mountain, which was a famous point in the progress down from Chattanooga to Atlanta. North of that is Resaca, where my grandfather's uncle witnessed that battle. There were numerous smaller incidents throughout the county that I grew up in, Fairfield County.

Q: As an aside, my grandfather was a young officer with Sherman at the time, went down – and it was the Kennesaw Mountain – and came the whole way down.

PIERCE: You know the area then.

Q: Well, he knew it.

When you were in high school, did the national or international world intrude much – or any event?

PIERCE: Absolutely not.

Q: I was getting a blank look. (laughs)

PIERCE: *(laughs)* Not at all. I mean I was good at geography and history and it had an interest to me, but in the sense of the international events as they progressed in the world, I had little idea. We're talking at the age of 14, 15, 16.

Q: Well then, you graduated from high school in what?

PIERCE: '62.

Q: Was the family pointing you, or were you pointing yourself, towards anything?

PIERCE: No, it wasn't at all. I had good grades, and being a member of the Presbyterian Church there was a certain link to Davidson College which had a pretty good reputation. I was able to get a scholarship to go to Davidson; it was not anything that I chose. It was not an intensive search type of mode that you have today; it just seemed to me the natural place that I ended up without much of an awareness of what Davidson was, or what an education there would produce for me. At the time it was the thing you did upon graduating from high school if you were going on to college.

Q: And Davidson is where?

PIERCE: Davidson is about 20 miles north of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Q: What was Davidson like? You were there '62 to '66, would it have been?

PIERCE: '62 to '66. The Presbyterian Church still had a very strong influence over Davidson and its curriculum. Everyone was required to take courses in religion. Required chapels – assemblies basically – that you sometimes had to, sometimes not, go to three times a week, and vespers on Sunday evening. It was a certain sensitive issue that the tenured professors had to believe that Jesus Christ was the evangelical savior of the world, which at the time Davidson prided itself on introducing new and sort of forward leaning ideas in theology. It was at times embarrassing for certain college leaders to explain how you could advocate certain ideas in theology or have professors advocate them and still have this requirement for full professorialship. That was an interesting sidebar. And it gave me an interest in religion.

It's interesting. I think I was not a religious person as a youth and although I attended church and Sunday school, the religious indoctrination that I did get in my teenage years was totally wiped out after two years of courses in religion in my first two years of college.

Q: Well now, by the time you were at Davidson, which is not a backwards college by any means – it's right up there with the Ivy League type schools and all – was the political world, the national world and the international world, beginning to cross your ken?

PIERCE: No. I had a little interest in history; I did take a couple of history courses beyond the basic. Interestingly, and I haven't felt this in a long time, but the outside ideas that were most interesting in the Davidson community were ideas of theology.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: That was a time at which the famous thought "God is dead" permeated and it was immensely discussed by professors in courses that we had. I didn't have any real interest in political science and I really didn't have any exposure to what may or may not have been discussed sort of in and amongst political science circles at college. Historically we did basically what I think has been done for decades before that in studying British history or studying world history – nothing on the cutting edge of international events.

Q: What about the Civil Rights movement, because this is really cranked up, and here you are in southern North Carolina. You're in the battleground there. But did that move in?

PIERCE: It was after that that Civil Rights became a major issue in wanting to detract the attention of Davidson. In my class of maybe 300, there may have been 2 blacks; one was an exchange student from the Congo. Again, it was not a topical issue. Davidson was a very conservative place. Davidson was very highly fraternityized at the time. It's since become coeducational and drifted away from this, but while there were Civil Rights demonstrations and Civil Rights movements and issues popping around the country, Davidson in the main there was an attempt to look at dismantling or reducing the influence of fraternities. The major demonstration at Davidson during my four years there was one in support of the fraternities.

Q: Did anyone ever talk about diplomacy or American foreign affairs?

PIERCE: I'm trying to think to what degree. One of the things that did occur is that it was mandatory to go into ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) the first two years there. The ROTC gentlemen are interested in getting you to sign up for the total course and join the army. One of the issues they continually pushed was Vietnam – this was in '64, '63 – laying out the harsh reality of being an enlisted man versus being an officer, although they didn't tell you about the fatality rates amongst officers. They were sufficiently attuned to the situation. They said, "It's going to happen; it's going to get worse; and everyone who graduates from this class is going to be subject to a draft and you can either go in as a private E-1 or you can go in as a second lieutenant. You can make the decision right now."

I signed up for ROTC for the four years. After I graduated I did go into the army.

Q: Well then, by the time you went into the army, this would be in '66?

PIERCE: Actually, no, it wasn't. ROTC produced different things for me. Firstly, in your sophomore or junior year you had to attend a six-week basic course as a Private E-1 at Fort Bragg. That was six weeks of hell for me. I've never spent a more uncomfortable, unsavory period of time in my life. Fort Bragg, if you've never been to the area – faithful North Carolina – it's in rolling little pine stubs and swamps of North Carolina where the skeeters (mosquitoes) are about two-feet-long and the weather is hot as hell. It was designed, more or less as I recall, as sort of a soothed infantry regiment where you wake up at five-thirty and you stay up until midnight shining shoes and being harassed by a very typical sort of drill sergeants. I was not looking forward to a career in the army after that.

As my senior year grew to an end, I had to do two things; I had to, number one, put down my dream sheet of what branch I wanted to be in, and had to put in my three choices or my four choices, at least one combat or one combat support branch, which I did not want. I also had to put down on my dream sheet where I would like to be posted. Vietnam was not on that list. I put down two rather, what I considered interesting branches: military intelligence and transportation of some kind. The third one I put was the engineers, which I figured by process of elimination would be perhaps the best of any combat branch if I had to get it. I also looked at all the places I could put down as to where I wanted to be assigned: Germany, England, Vietnam, the U.S. (United States), Alaska, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. So I thought if I put things close enough to Vietnam I might get overlooked for Vietnam. So I put Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

When I graduated I was a member of the Army Corps of Engineers; an English major. But I was a member of the Army Corps of Engineers and signed for one year in Thailand in 1967; they wanted me a year later than after I graduated. So I had to figure out after I graduated what to do for a year.

Q: So just what did you do for a year?

PIERCE: I was, to some point, at a loss; I'd expected going into the military rather quickly. I knew there was a shortage of engineer junior officers, but apparently it was the way they were trying to program people in and there was a real shortage apparently of lieutenants – and second lieutenants especially – and especially in the Corps. I quickly enrolled in basic education courses at the University of Chattanooga in Tennessee – Psychology, Education 101, that type of thing – so I could get enough credits over the summer to apply for temporary certification as a teacher. I was hoping to perhaps teach English for a year, but they were all locked out. I ended up teaching French – which I had not done very at college and was the farthest thing from my mind – at a high school in a suburb of Chattanooga, Tennessee for a year.

Q: What was your impression of the high school?

PIERCE: That's just a hard question to answer. I did not ever compare it to the school I'd gone to. It was where I discovered that students can be rough; teaching is extremely

physical and very mentally demanding. I taught five courses a day. It's where I developed an immense appreciation for grading homework and how difficult it was, and how difficult it was to grade tests where you make tests into essays or into writing tests and they become extremely tedious, time-consuming, very difficult to rate. One of the teachers there, I remember, was an oldie. The old English teacher who had attended the Scopes Trial.

Q: This was the famous monkey trial.

PIERCE: The monkey trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1921, '28, I forget.

Q: Something like that.

PIERCE: A delightful older man. The Spanish teacher I knew very well; she seemed to be very professional. Although my French was not good at all, I was hired because they had a major problem. I was hired in August to begin in August. That was hard for me and it was hard for the students. In the group of students I was able to find there were one or two who were outstanding. One told me that he wanted to go on to study French in college as a result of being taught by me, which was very surprising. Another one, who was apparently somewhat just lower than top tier in the country, as I recall, was given a full scholarship to Princeton. The most disheartening thing in my year at Red Bank High School was the pressure from his family, or just the pressure of just being from Tennessee in the 1960s, he opted to stay and go to college in Tennessee.

Q: When the military took you in, had you had any engineering?

PIERCE: No, I figured out I was an English major in engineering, E-N-G, and the army stopped spelling after that. I found it rather amazing because the Corps of Engineers is the place that graduates from West Point aspire to, and only a very small portion go there because the other branches have to have their share of graduates. And yet, I, without any engineering whatsoever, got into the Corps of Engineers.

I was ordered to report to Fort Belvoir in June and I was prepared to have this unsavory experience as I had at Fort Bragg. When I got there I found out that that was not the case. Firstly, as an officer, you weren't treated like a private, which I didn't know much about that. Living in a BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters), getting a decent salary for being in the army – not a lot, but a decent salary – and the people that you met were just like you; you had English majors and Poli-Sci (political science) majors. I remember there was a ballet major. From all across the country. Very interesting people; good conversations and I made some good friends.

I was there for about maybe two months, six weeks, getting instruction in how to be an engineer. More or less you go through an entire series of courses on how to build bridges, how to build temporary bridges, how to lay concrete. Of course they don't expect a second lieutenant to do all of that, but you've got experts around and staff around you in

the platoon or the unit that you will be in to do the precise operation. You just need to know a bit about it. I think they were looking at sort of a commonsense managerial approach to leading a unit of men, either in combat or construction. I ended up going into construction, which I was very pleased with. Again, getting away from that sort of Vietnam orientation.

I think one of the things you also learn in engineering is you've got to economize on material that a good engineer will use to be within the standards of safety and the standards of aesthetics, but not to overdo your need for supplies. But in the engineers where they didn't have time to go through all of that and you've got more of a specialized area, the safety factor was enhanced terribly so when everybody called for a certain tensile strength in your rebar or called for a certain composition or width of concrete to make the optimal support in a culvert system, that was not doubled, but it was enlarged tremendously for the situation that an engineering unit would find itself out in the field. We built in all these safety factors in the event that you would lead a platoon on and you did have to build a bridge, you would have such safety factors built into the operation that you would not risk the structural integrity of the bridge or whatever you were building.

Q: After six weeks or two months of this, you must've had engineering skills flowing from you.

PIERCE: *(laughs)* Not really.

Q: I was going to say, you know, I mean trying to absorb what they could throw at you.

PIERCE: The thing that was comforting to me is I never was put into a situation where I would have to be tested. I was assigned to be an assistant S-4, which you might recall this is at a logistics aspect in a group headquarters for the Corps of Engineers in eastern Thailand. The headquarters was a small unit, independent, a little base camp outside of Korat, Thailand. That's where I went in perhaps that September of '67. I was to stay there for one year.

The headquarters group was under the command of a colonel and with various engineering units attached to this group spread across eastern Thailand, from the farthest north part down to the south doing various projects – road building; there was a building of a cantonment inside Sattahip, Thailand in the southeast corner. A cantonment being an area where you could receive supplies and later distribute them into a system, into a network across the eastern highland – road building along the eastern ridge of Thailand. There were some special facilities buildings that we built for the Air Force in Korat. We were building other roads in Northeast Thailand as well as other facilities up in that area.

The Army Corps of Engineers was in Thailand in support of the Air Force. The mission of the Air Force in Thailand, as you might recall, was to provide strikes from air cover, air support, and strikes in Vietnam. Our mission was to simply support their facilities and their structures.

Q: This was your first real look at a foreign country, wasn't it?

PIERCE: I was definitely homesick. Although I never had any intention of studying in Cartersville at all, I was extremely homesick for about two months. It was in December, I think, as I was strolling through a marketplace in Korat, redolent with scents and sounds – it sounds kind of trite, but it was just exotic – and I sort of had an epiphany. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed seeing people, I enjoyed walking through the market, I enjoyed eating the food, I enjoyed everything about where I was. It was about that time that I began to become sort of far more interested in Thailand and quit concentrating on being homesick. I had a two year obligation in the military: a year in Thailand and a virtual guarantee of a year in the States. In other words, Vietnam was out of my life as an option. I stayed a second year in Thailand and became a first lieutenant after a year, which happened during that period of time, and then I extended a third year in the Corps and kept that in Thailand as well.

Q: How were you sort of getting to know the community in Thailand?

PIERCE: That didn't happen to any great degree. I had one Thai friend who worked in my office. He took me down into the city several times. I met his parents and his siblings; had several meals with them and enjoyed that very much. I liked talking to his father. He had given me a smattering of introductions in Hinduism, and then their food. And also Thai beer was very good at the time.

I knew another friend, Chinese-Thai, as a contractor. Contractors love you when you're in supply. But always was careful to avoid the pressures that you're naturally inclined to by contractors, but became much more aware of the environment that a businessman would work in, in Thailand. Aside from that, it was work; you worked 10-, 12-hour days sometimes. Not a lot else to do.

After my two years in Korat, I spent the third year in the far northeast at Sakon Nakhon, Thailand. One of the things I loved to do, which we could do at the time, was use Jeeps for private tours on the weekends. And I loved to drive along the Mekong River on the Thai side – we were not allowed to go on the Laos side – stop in various towns, talk to people, look across the river, see who was coming and going. I always thought the hills of Laos were far more intriguing than Northeast Thailand. I don't know if you've ever been there – you'd see it's sort of a dusty, not very hilly, not very inspiring area; a very poor and neglected area of Northeast Thailand. Finding roadside restaurants, meeting a lot of Thai, exploring, just experimenting with the local food and always the good beer. I was just impressed by the innovation that the Thai had in just coping with life.

In Northeast Thailand, officers were specifically made to spend a weekend pass in Bangkok. This was done by the battalion commander at the time in Northeast Thailand to try to keep officers from uncompromising situations in the local area around the military base that I was in. We had about a thousand people in this battalion setting.

Quite often I would find myself in Bangkok and end up hoofing it back to Sakon Nakhon, which was 300-350 miles, which you could do in a day by local transportation: by buses, taxis. And it was fun. It was challenging.

Q: Were you beginning to start reading into Thailand or Southeast Asian culture and all of that?

PIERCE: Not a lot. I got interested in Lao – Northeast Thailand is Lao – and picked up a few Lao expressions of decent, passable restaurant type; got to where I could read road signs, which is not an insignificant achievement in the Thai language, and tried to learn a little bit more Thai. After three years it was decent restaurant Thai. Jokes, how to ward off touts and beggars, and how to be genuinely friendly.

I met a Peace Corps fellow up in Sakon Nakhon. He taught me a lot about Thai politeness. The military does it better now, but then there was an attempt to try to inculcate culturalization into so-called "moving forces." There was no SOFA for Thailand, which was a major problem.

Q: SOFA being?

PIERCE: Status of Forces Agreement. For a period of time I worked in adjutants in Northeast Thailand and one of the problems I dealt with in military justice was some of the problems that we had there also we has in Korat. Thais are very easy to offend. The king's picture is on their currency, the baht falls to the ground and starts to blow away. You step on it. No, not at all. You don't step on it. You were going to step on the king. Holding hands – just like in many places in the third-world, men held hands with men and it was not unusual for you to be talking to a Thai and he's holding your hand, and you want to recoil but you don't. It's not unusual for – and we've learned a lot more about this and it's very obvious, but in Oriental societies especially, but other societies, people have a closer space in social contact than Americans are comfortable with. And you've got to learn to at least accept that. These are the types of things that after a long period of time in Thailand I got used to.

Q: What was your impression of how the American military was working with the Thais? Did it seem to be going fairly well or…

PIERCE: Yes it was. This is at my level as a second lieutenant, a first lieutenant, and ultimately a captain. Well there were two things as I recall and obviously it's not historical; it's not liable to be accurate. But we were building roads, we were building bridges, we were building culvert systems, especially in Northeast Thailand where I was the last year. All of this in support of our observations that we used to launch raids, primarily against Vietnam, for the Air Force. But in the northeast for so many years it had historically been a neglected area. To see roads built and what it would do for villages two or three kilometers from the road, in order to facilitate a villager's use of the road to get to Udon, a city that without the road might take a day to get to, or half a day to get to,

now you could get to it in an hour or an hour and fifteen minutes. And the amount of commerce that you would see; as I would be driving these roads or going on these roads on the bus trying to get back to my headquarters on Sunday night, packed with people and getting off at these little waysides along these highways and walking two, three, four kilometers back into the rice paddies to their village. We were facilitating all of that. I consider what we were doing not so much in support of the Air Force, but in support of basically giving the Thai a real sort of boost in their development in an area that needed it badly and was threatened at the time by an insipient sort of Communist movement which we called Thai Cong. We were in league with the Thai Corps of Engineers, the Royal Thai Engineers, who in Northeast Thailand were also doing some road building in concert with us. We frequently had get-togethers with them. That's where I discovered their immense propensity for drink.

Q: How about what you were doing – was there any concern about indigenous Communist insurrections?

PIERCE: Yes. That was the local insipient Thai network, which I don't recall. It was not an issue that a construction support person got into. MB fleeting conversation with military intelligence I got the impression – probably more than that – of Chinese support in one way or the other for them. I was under the impression that the insipient Communist groups, which were being hunted and were being shot at, were being killed. But they had decided that we were good and that we could stay. Because we were going to leave roads and they liked roads. They thought roads were good. They could see that as a road down to Bangkok.

The year after I left, however, it got untenable for us; we began getting threats. And I believe by '72 – I'm not sure – we had pulled out of the area because of threats against us. We were not offensive; we had a normal issue of standard weaponry. We were not any fighting constabulary whatsoever. When the threats came this was about the time the Nixon Doctrine was getting into full sway, and as I understand it that's when we started leaving the area, pulled back. We completed one road between Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom on the Mekong border, and we were working with the Royal Thai engineers on a culvert system for another road between Sakon Nakhon and That Phanom on the Mekong River. It was on that road that we began to get threatened and then we pulled out.

Q: Well then in 1970 you left Thailand?

PIERCE: I left Thailand and I left the military.

Q: Did you have any thoughts about what you were going to do?

PIERCE: No, not a one. I had no thoughts whatsoever. I got out of the military in June and I thought maybe I'll go to law school, because my grandfather was a lawyer. Well starting in June to go to law school in September was difficult back then, too. I called up

– I think the best place to try this was the University of Georgia, from which my grandfather graduated. They said something like, "Well what about your LSAT?" and I said, "L-S-A-what?" They said, "Well you have to take that." So I quickly found out what the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) was, got a little brochure and saw that it was being given in July and looked around and it was given in Marietta, Georgia; it was given in Rome, Georgia; it was given in Atlanta, Georgia. It was also given in Paris, France. I decided I'd rather take it in Paris as opposed to Rome or Marietta, so I went to Paris to take the LSAT in July and got indoctrinated into Europe. And it was a time where I spent two weeks sort of sitting in the Jardin des Tuileries reading this book on how to pass the LSAT, took it at the American university there and then roamed Europe for awhile. Going down to Marseilles, trying to get to Tunisia where my great-uncle lived, finding out that all the planes in July were booked. I went to Algiers instead which was very vexing to me because it was then that I was introduced to the fact that there was terrorism in the Middle East. Because at the time I was trying to do this, they had had two instances of Palestinians high-jacking aircrafts.

Q: Well we're talking about Black September, too. That was not a good time.

PIERCE: No it wasn't. Of course I was naïve and I didn't read the news, so I went to Algiers. *(laughs)* I knew that Algiers was not exactly friendly to America at the time and that they don't like our Middle East policy. That's about the extent of what I knew. But when I got there I talked myself into a three-day visa. It was a pit. It was utterly dirty, a very, very sort of poor place, extremely expensive with the Algerian dinar vastly overvalued. You had to convert at the airport. All this good stuff. But I was able from there to fly to Tunisia where I stayed with my great-uncle for about two weeks.

Q: How did you happen to have a great-uncle in Tunisia?

PIERCE: My great-uncle, my grandfather's youngest brother or next youngest brother, was an extremely handsome man who was very intelligent – self-educated, taught himself French. He was in the Coast Guard during World War I and afterwards decided to go to Europe and bum around, which he did. He was a very charming man and he circulated amongst some very nice people in Paris – very interesting artist people. He met his wife-to-be who there. He was very sensitive whenever he was asked what he did for a living. He didn't like that question at all. And from a more Protestant viewpoint he didn't do anything. But he was told to go to Hammamet, Tunisia, and build a home, by an older man whom he felt immense respect for. So he did. In essence he started the artistic colony of Hammamet, Tunisia, which is today a rather sort of prominent area. But he started it in 1928.

Q: So what did you do while you were there?

PIERCE: I went to the beach a lot and read a lot. Traveled around a little bit. He always had people coming in to visit his house. He'd have some secondary author. On his wall he had pictures of movie stars, and literati of the day would come and visit him. Jean Jui,

Jacques Cocteau, Trevor Howard, the Beatles or was it Paul McCartney? I forget. He had little mementos like signed pictures and they would come and autograph things and stick them on his wall. He had a lovely library.

I went back and found out that I was on the waiting list for the University of Georgia. I almost didn't make it in, given that I had started so late, but did. At the end of my next to last quarter, my second year, I took the Foreign Service exam. I had done it once in college. I did it in college just as a lark and didn't do very well and a friend of mine suggested I do it in law school. I did it and didn't really expect anything out of it and I passed it. As I was progressing through law school, they said, "Well come on up for the oral," and I did and I passed that, too.

Q: Do you recall the oral – any of the questions or things they were asking you?

PIERCE: Some questions about Thailand. At the time you had to opt for the cone you wanted to go into and I looked at all the qualifications and decided that the best chance I had was in admin. (Administrative Cone), so I opted for admin. Questions like, "Where was the setting of Lord Jim?" because on one of my trips in Thailand I had taken R&R (Rest and Recuperation Leave) and went to Brunei. Questions like, "Who was Lady Mo?" Lady Mo was the statue of a woman in the middle of Korat, who several centuries ago, I think it was the Burmese – might've been the Cambodians – were invading and she massed an army together and went out and defeated them. A little bit about the Nixon Doctrine and then normal types of admin, managerial questions.

Q: Did you find that your work in an engineering office was helpful with that?

PIERCE: I don't recall. I found that my legal education helped; appreciation for the Constitution, appreciation for John Marshall, for whom I have developed an immense respect.

Q: How did you find law school?

PIERCE: Well, hard. My academic career at Davidson was not stellar. When I took the LSAT I did very, very well on the LSAT – shocked me. So I thought that it would be just natural for me to coast through law school. Well it didn't work that way. I learned how to study. My first year I was sort of adrift and didn't do very well at all, and then I began to study. I remember I was happy we could have Saturdays because Saturdays gave me 12 hours to study as opposed to the normal six to seven that I was studying out of class. It was in my second year that I'd be able to turn it around. My third year I was doing quite well.

With a quarter left, in December of 1972, I got a call at home – I just happened to be there – from the Foreign Service saying, "Would you like to join the Foreign Service?" I said, "Well, I have a quarter of law school left and I really sweat a lot for this degree and I'd sort of like to keep it," and I got the rigmarole of, "Well, you're on the list. You might not

be on the list in three months." Blah, blah, blah. So I accepted it and dropped out of law school with a quarter left, under the proviso that I would take – I got some type of agreement – LWOP (Leave Without Pay) after my first tour, and also the university assented to let me return after two years overseas in the Foreign Service. So that's what happened.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

PIERCE: January of 1973.

Q: What was your basic officer course like? I mean the composition of it and all. Do you recall?

PIERCE: The composition – let's see, maybe there were 30 new officers; the average age was 28, which was my age at the time, but there were two or three that had just barely graduated. There were a couple in the Peace Corps, a few retired attorneys, a retired stockbroker. Actually there were a lot with Peace Corps experience. Some with military like myself. There were maybe three or four political officers, three or four economic officers, and the rest of us were consular or admin. officers. When I went in, there was the business of a decision that had been taken at that time if we were going to open up consulates all up and down Vietnam. There was a big lobbying effort to get volunteers to go to these places, which a couple of people did do.

I don't know how the courses are today; I would imagine they're not unusually different. I mean this is a B&F (Budget and Fiscal) course, this is what you do for representation, this is what you do for political reporting accounts; the usual mix of things. Little briefings, sort of a sparse briefing by the Agency (Central Intelligence Agency). I'm trying to think, did DOD (Department of Defense) brief us? I don't recall. What the Op Center (Operations Center) does.

Q: Were you pointed personally towards any particular area?

PIERCE: No. Not at all. I mean I was in the admin cone. The crying need, which is always the case for admin officers, had been the fringes of the Sahara, French – assignments to N'Djamena or Nouakchott. I seem to recall both of those where on there and maybe Cotonou was on there. It was amazing, there was something like eight Francophone admin African assignments for admin officers, and little else.

Q: Yes. So what happened?

PIERCE: I got Surabaya, Indonesia, which I didn't even put it on my so-called "wish list," and I had had to go find out where it was. And when I called my mother up and told her I'd been assigned to Surabaya, she asked if it were farther away than Thailand was. It was the one place in the world that I could've gone to that was. *(laughs)*

Q: Did you get any training before you went there?

PIERCE: Yes. Very good training. Got 10 months of Indonesian and one or two administrative courses that went into a little bit more detail. But again, not very useful for a junior officer who is going to do admin work in a – what was it at the time? – six American officer post. Indonesian was very good. The Area Studies was very good. I was able to get to a 3+/3+ in Indonesian.

Q: With Indonesian's language there's an affinity, isn't there, between it and English? Or at least people seem to find Indonesian easier to learn than something like Thai.

PIERCE: I imagine it is. What I would say is that within 10 months you could easily get to a 3/3; getting beyond that into the 4 level – and I'm talking about not an FSI (Foreign Service Institute) 4, but a 4 in the field, a 4 in the way you feel that facility or relaxation of the language – there's a major jump. A jump in use of vocabulary, a jump in appreciation of dialect, and a jump in simply formulating your words, which makes it not easy at all. There's also, when you start getting into this type of dialect which is frowned on – I understand that, but it's what you use when you're there – you get into major pronunciation problems. It is in some ways, but at the same time I find it at a level of subtlety that's not easy to master.

Q: Well then you went to Surabaya and you were there from when to when?

PIERCE: I was there from August or September of 1973 until about July of 1975.

Q: In the first place, in general, how were American-Indonesian relations at that time?

PIERCE: You're going to ask me questions about the political situation which I'm not going to know much about. I can give you answers based on what I experienced.

Q: Well, I mean, just sort of the feel that you were getting.

PIERCE: Okay, well, the relationship was decent. Suharto at that time was close to us in various ways. How close, I don't know. Relationships were good. Pretty good. I think good economic times and good political ones. The conventional reason of course being Suharto was a welcome development as opposed to his predecessor, Sukarno, just in terms of sheer stability and continuity he brought. And in streamlining the country's political process, which by all accounts, was a chaotic one in the '50s; one that Sukarno began to master, but in wrong ways in the '60s. Suharto was able to first bow to it a bit, just barely, and slowly basically castrate it. And the streamlined approach of Golkar, which is the so-called non-party of all the diverse groups underneath the umbrella of an organization which, by the way, Suharto happened to head, and made the political system more streamlined. It wasn't chaotic. And there was a certain hope that it would produce genuine reform; it would produce ultimately democracy. Not to be, but that was what the hope was.

Q: Where is Surabaya and how did it fit into the Indonesian set-up?

PIERCE: Surabaya is the second largest city of Indonesia. Currently there are about four million people. At least in the daytime, four or five. It's in East Java; it's an hours plane ride from Jakarta – maybe 800 kilometers, but I think it's more than that. It was the major city in the Dutch colony, the major commercial port, the largest city, which had the first overt resistance to the return of the Dutch; actually the British came in their stead when they first came back in 1945. And this is the place where the Indonesian Revolution occurred against the returning Dutch. Therefore it's called "the City of Heroes." After the war, as Jakarta gained more preeminence, and centralization took more power, bit by bit, from elsewhere in the country, Surabaya suffered for it. In the early '70s it was beginning to see a small spark of resurgence of its commercial vitality. It was there anyway, and it had the beginnings of some of the light industry that ultimately turned out to be pretty substantial. Today the Surabaya area produces probably 15 percent of the country's economic growth.

Q: Was it a Consulate General?

PIERCE: At the time it was not.

Q: Who was the consul then?

PIERCE: The first guy when I was there was Bob Randolph. After a year, a-year-and-a-half, he was replaced by Dick Howland. After that Dick was consul. We had a consulate in Surabaya since 1880, maybe a little later. We had a continuous presence, only interrupted during the war. We returned in 1949. It was upgraded to a consulate general in 1988 perhaps, maybe a little later.

Q: What was our consulate doing when you were there?

PIERCE: It was a sleepy post. There seemed to be a pretty brisk sort of interest in commerce, trying to promote commerce, to provide information to American businesses, to facilitate information for the few American businessmen who were there, the larger number of American companies there. And interest in political reporting on developments throughout eastern Indonesia. The consular district at the time had a simple job in East Java, Bali, and Lesser Sunda, east and west. In other words, from Central Java all the way out to West Timor. Lesser Sunda are the islands between Bali and East Timor; the two provinces, rather impoverished, rather poor places.

Administrative officer was my primary duty, but I also did about 40 percent consular work. We tended to have a lot of people die in Bali. It required a lot of effort on the part of the consulate to work deaths. Going down to Bali, carrying through on the decedent's next of kin's wishes in terms of the disposition of the remains. In many cases that meant shipping them back to the States. One specific case for me was a cremation. I also did one

of these deaths where she was buried locally in Yogyakarta, which is a special district surrounded by Central Java.

Q: How did you find working as administrative officer there?

PIERCE: For someone who had a little experience it wasn't too taxing. I'm trying to think how many houses did we have – five, six? Three were U.S. government-owned or leased; I don't think any leases were renewed during that period of time. The office was leased. Maintenance was minimal. Furnishings were already there. We had a sub-cashier. Then you had accountability that you had to do. We had one construction project which was significant. We built a classified vault which today is the one in Surabaya we would use as our basic holding area. With the supervision of a Seabee and a local contractor it took about six to eight weeks to do that. Probably even today it's the most secure, strongest, best-built building in the whole country.

Q: One has looked at Indonesia and so many things sort of ran down. How did you find it? I mean, the Indonesians as workers – because you were involved with them.

PIERCE: I got the same thing when working with Thais in Northeast Thailand. The conventional – and stereotypical – way to approach it was to cite slip-shod work and a tendency towards them not having a good work ethic. I think, firstly, you explain, number one, the caloric intake is so much smaller, and therefore they don't have the energy that one would expect coming from the West. The second thing, I think, is that you specify very clearly what you want. In any case, you have to watch very carefully what people are doing. In that particular construction, when we were doing reinforced rebar and a certain quality of concrete, the engineering did help in my understanding of what was going on. And you would do that anywhere. You had to stick to strict standards and you had to look very carefully at what was going on. We had a very good Chinese for a contractor and he employed indigenous Indonesians, and he knew what we were trying to go for and he did it. He did it quite well.

I found this to be the case over and over again. I never felt any great sort of disparity between what I expected and what I got in terms of a contract. We were just being careful which is what you should do anyplace.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: My second tour was in Damascus as GSO (General Service Officer) had more of an unsatisfying aspect to contractors than had been the case in Surabaya.

A couple of things about Surabaya I do need to underline. I did consular work and also was allowed to do some political reporting, with a junior officer slot, with three State Department officers at the time. One, the consul gave me East and Central Java, the econ/commercial officer, who did the other part of consular work, did the same type of thing in East and Central Java. We frequently went to Bali, which wasn't looked upon as

a reporting situation. Two things that stand out were the travel that I did, and the plane crash.

The plane crash was a PAN/AM (Pan-American) plane, and I forget exactly the flight number; it was coming from Hong Kong to Sydney, as I recall. There used to be two flights a week through Bali and they were the only non-Indonesian flights allowed outside of Jakarta at the time. I got a call one night about 1:00 a.m. from Jakarta about the plane was missing and was told that I and my colleague, the econ/commercial officer, should get down to the site of this crash and begin to investigate as soon as possible. Which meant that we drove. We took our FSN (Foreign Service National) consular clerk with us. We had been aware of how many people were on the aircraft, 121; 28, I think, were Americans. Around about 10:00 a.m. we found ourselves in northwest Bali looking up at a mountain perhaps two or three miles away, and with binoculars, at the very top of it you could see sort of a black char. And this began my experience for about the next two weeks of trying to manage American interests in a situation like that. Trying to deal with the host of bureaucrats and organizations that were interested in this, and the occasional contacts with family members who came to the island or who were on the island waiting for the people on the plane. It was an extremely trying time. It was a period – one 36-, 48-hour period – with six hours sleep. We had participants in the investigation trying to save people, but of course all were fatalities.

Q: What had happened?

PIERCE: Apparently the PAN/AM plane, as I understand it – and this is from reading some transcript of the black box several years later –navigationally strayed and was not where it was supposed to be. It was supposed to be coming into an approach at the airport to the south of the island and instead found this 10,000 foot mountain in its path on the northwest side. I cannot remember if this navigation error was described in the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) report on it. The plane hit some of the mountain, broke probably into the portion that dropped over the mountain. As I found out, it was only then that the aircraft fuel engulfed the plane and combustion occurred and anybody who would've been alive at that time, would've been annihilated. We had the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) there as an identification team. They had the NTSB there because it was a PAN/AM plane. We had a gaggle of PAN/AM vice presidents. This had been the third PAN/AM crash in the South Pacific in 18 months. We had the FILA – flight engineers something, I forgot. We had representatives from the French, the British, the Australians, the Japanese, all the consulates. We had a crust of Indonesian bureaucracy and I'm trying to think if we had anyone else.

The site of the air crash was a six or seven-hour drive north of Denpasar, the capital of Bali. No one was alive. I never visited the crash site, which apparently took three days ultimately for a U.S. military team to get to – and they tried, although the Balinese could get there in about 12 hours. It was, and still is, in a really quite undeveloped area of Bali; very much jungle. Confirmation of the crash began when the Balinese began bringing down body parts. There were no full bodies, but some torsos. They were brought down

and put in bags. The FBI team was there to try to help with identification although to me it didn't seem possible that this could happen. They set up a workshop in the hangar down in Denpasar and were convinced that they would be in a position to identify some of the remains. Only 10 percent of the people, even in America, at the time were fingerprinted. Their effort was stopped by the Indonesian government at the behest, as I understand it, of PAM/AM a day or two after it started. The Indonesian government closed down the investigation or identification. That was very upsetting to me.

The one thing I was able to extract was a promise that the Indonesian government would produce death certificates, which we could use to process the report of American citizens' death. The problem with the remains that we did have, and they were substantial – several body bags – was that the Japanese side, the Shinto Japanese, wanted to see Japanese citizens cremated. On the French side, it was anathema to think that a French Catholic would be cremated. So the body bags were divided, and obviously not everyone in one body bag being burned was a Shinto, and everybody in the ones that were being buried was a French Catholic. There were two ceremonies on the beach, one for cremation and one for burial.

Q: How about relatives?

PIERCE: Yes. There was one I knew well who was waiting at the airport in Denpasar and she wanted to visit the site. She never did. You couldn't get to the site. Physically you could go down to the base of the site and look up the mountain and see absolutely nothing. But she stayed for quite a long time. It was very hard to go out and go up to the site and spend six hours on the road and two or three hours talking to people at the base next to the mountain. At the end of that day you would come back and you'd talk to one another. Nothing much to say, but you'd have to.

Q: Sometimes you get repercussions from those who expect you to do more than maybe is physically possible; they complain to their congress people and congressmen.

PIERCE: Not at that time. Not in 1974. I think it was in April of '74. I'm not sure. Not at that time. The major victory that I think my colleague and I got was the death certificates which enabled us to write an honest report on death of American citizens – an actual one as opposed to a presumptive one – which certainly facilitated inheritance issues, insurance issues, which I think at least was able to help some of the families. It was not a pleasant time.

Q: No, of course not. You said there was another thing.

PIERCE: Well the other thing was the travel. Two parts to the travel. My boss loved to travel in Java, which was nice. So my colleague and I, the econ/commercial officer, spent a lot of time traveling on the small islands jetting out toward West Timor: Lombok, the next island over from Bali which has turned into sort of a tourist destination now; Sumba, which is an island somewhat remote southwest of Timor; and Timor itself. And then I

took two other types of trips – one with Howland, who was the other consul, to then Portuguese Timor.

Q: What was that like at the time?

PIERCE: Portuguese Timor at the time – this was just after Caetano fell, which you may recall was Salazar's successor. He didn't last that long. Then when the whole colonial empire began to fall apart, with the Portuguese giving its blessing and basically they were ending up going into some self-determination mode. So in Timor you had sort of the beginning of an emergence of, number one, not chaos in a physical sense, but certainly a political chaos. The emergence of political parties. And you had three: FRETILIN, which has become the ultimate successor today; something called a UDT which was primarily a bunch of Portuguese and Timorese, sort of conservative with ties to the military; and then another party which was for integration with Indonesia. I don't want to say that it was simply straight absolutely a tool of Indonesia; there might have been some Timorese who actually wanted to integrate with Indonesia. I talked to them all. Firstly with my econ/commercial colleague, and secondly when I went with Dick Howland the second time.

The most reassuring at the time, in the sense of politics – saying we want a stable relationship with Portugal, we want to maintain our ties, we want constitutional democracy – very vague and not very substantive, but just reassuring – was the UDT. FRETILIN, at the time was led by Ramos Horta who won the Nobel Prize three years ago. In my day he was thinner, much younger obviously. The first time I met him he was in a sarong on a porch in the outskirts of Dili. There was a Marxist twinge to the language. I don't recall exactly – again it was vague and very, very unsubstantive, but a lot of accent on what the people desire and what the people need and the people need to own. But not much beyond that. And the guy who was in charge of the other party seemed just to be reading a script. I think it was just sort of like – it would be very naïve to say – very naïve potential leaders who were suddenly given an option, "You can do anything you want. This country is yours; it's not ours." After 400 and however many years the Portuguese basically just walked away. And they didn't have a lot to work with. I'm not very familiar with just how much education and whether they were members of the group who had any great amount of scholastic study of politics. Practically, it seemed that there was none. We saw them twice. It was after the last trip which was probably about May of 1975 maybe, and then November of 1975 was when the whole thing collapsed. A lot of struggle. The Indonesian invasion in November and the events that just deteriorated after that.

Q: Was there any precursor to the Indonesians moving in? Was this when you were down there?

PIERCE: When I went down there, there were none. I do not know. I guess if you started analyzing it – I haven't – the events that occurred, the coups, the counter-coups that occurred amongst these political groupings, with the Portuguese governor still there, and

before the Indonesian invasion, you may have seen the precursors. As I recall from the historical record, the UDTers, or whatever their reincarnation was, first tried to take over. FRETILIN was in a position to counter that and the UDT types with some – I'm not sure, I wasn't there when this occurred – the UDT types, a large number of them, ran to the border of Indonesia and were not allowed in until they agreed to seek an alliance with the Indonesian military. That's a conventional reading of it beyond where I was. And this was the pretext under which the military along with the Indonesians – I am under the impression – were able to first go in. Again, I don't know the answer to that.

Q: As you were traveling around and looking at things, were you looking at how the system worked? There had been these allegations of these tremendous slaughters of Chinese and all. I'm talking about earlier on.

PIERCE: I'm not aware of that.

Q: This was back in the '60s. I'm talking about in Surabaya and were you looking at how the government was settling in?

PIERCE: Again, I didn't have a brief or any direct information. In fact, had I done it I don't think it would've been well-received. This is the Java area, which was where most of this started. As I understand it, the slaughtering of Communists began in Surabaya. In fact, one of my contacts in Surabaya told me about the bodies piling up in Surabaya for weeks. Dick Howland, who was political officer in Jakarta at the time this occurred, did exhaustive reporting on it. So I think the issue was a current one in the Surabaya portfolio. As I recall, the types of things he wrote were more looking at development. One of the things he impressed upon me is that when he first made the trip from Jakarta to Surabaya as political officer in the mid '60s before Sukarno was out, he'd count dead bodies on the road – dead from starvation – two or three, just abandoned corpses lying in the road. You could see naked people walking everywhere. People were dirt poor. He told me in '74, '75, it doesn't happen anymore. The progress was immense since the people were not starving to death, and people did have clothes.

Q: Did the collapse…there was half being kind of while you were towards the end of your time in Surabaya in South Vietnam. Did it have any repercussions?

PIERCE: Obviously it did, but nothing had any grave effect on us. I think one of the things which I can go back to, my last tour in Surabaya and also a few nuggets of my first tour, is this ingrained suspicion, mistrustfulness, deep – like a battle to the death – with communism that occupied Indonesia and it had been ascribed in one way for their occupation of East Timor because of the FRETILIN coup. Although they may say that they had no intention of Marxism as a doctrine, I think the Indonesians rightfully could fear that was a possibility. You had Wetar which was the last sort of stronghold of the Indonesian Communist Party, where there was still some anti-government activity and I think it was aggressive, perhaps as late as the late '60s. Wetar was in East Java. It's also where President Sukarno is buried. So the collapse in Vietnam was of immense interest to

them, but from my vantage point I didn't see it in any concrete, direct way. It just wasn't what I was studying and it did not come up in the political reporting that I did when I traveled outside of Java.

I also traveled outside the consular district. I just went to isolated, remote places in the country. The one that's worth noting is I went to the island of Ambon. I'm trying to think, I did this just as a tourist and it would've been perhaps in '74. Ambon has a very interesting history in the sense of its differentness from the rest of the country. The Ambonese were far more inclined toward the Dutch in the revolution and were in fact used by the Dutch, which is not unusual, during the period of colonialization. Also in the revolution as auxiliaries.

Q: There are always favorite tribes you might say that may be picked upon by others. You know, Montagnards (in Vietnam) and certain troops in Algeria.

PIERCE: It's a very beautiful place. I stayed there about 48 hours. It was just casual visiting. Within five hours I had made three contacts. Their explanations of the disgust and hatred of the Ambonese against the Javanese was just palpable – very visible, very prominent. They said several things about them. The first one is that transmigration was bringing in the beginnings of Javanese colonies. The Javanese eat rice, we don't eat rice. So they begin to build rice paddies which our terrain doesn't accommodate, and import immense amounts of rice. Where does the money for that rice come from? It comes from our budget so we end up subsidizing these Javanese. And there was the Golkar indoctrination. It was an overall tone of being anti-Javanese. At the time, and you could see this later, Ambon and that part of the Malukus always prided itself on religious harmony. Ambonese were in part Muslim and part Christian, irrespective of Javanese or other transmigrants. They had superimposed on their society, because apparently much earlier in the past there was antagonism of a religious nature, something called "pela". Pela was the relationship between one village and another village. As I recall, and I could be mistaken. The pela was a special relationship that they had of cooperation, where at specific times the villages from one group would go and assist villages of another group in a communal project and the bond was increased. And they would have, from time to time, pela warming ceremonies. I'm not sure if per force the villages were of different religions, but by and large they were. And this synopsis increased the inter-religious harmony. People, whenever you talked to them, talked about the island, and this is what they would raise about the harmony in Amba. And it was true up until two years ago.

Q: Were you wanting to stay in the area or was Southeast Asia attracting you particularly?

PIERCE: Yes it was. I enjoyed it. I had three years in Thailand and then I had two years in Indonesia. I had a decent MLAT…

Q: That's the Modern Language Aptitude Test.

PIERCE: And with that I had a good shot at getting into a two-year language program. And I fished around with the possibility of trying to get Chinese. At the end of that tour I also went back and finished my law school career which was two-and-a-half months. It was no big deal. But I finished my law degree. I never practiced, I never even took the bar, but I had the degree.

But I found out that I just didn't get a warm reception at the time for going into Chinese, which I wanted to do. I figured that Southeast Asia and Asia in general were attractive to me. I enjoyed them and I moved around well in the area. I just liked it. But I just didn't get the green lights that I wanted. And I was talking to somebody in Personnel and they had a list of places that I could go and Beirut was starting to get nasty in '75. For some reason I didn't try. These were admin spots. GSO (General Services Officer) Damascus came up and I said I'd like to go there. I had no clue, nothing, but I was assigned and went to become GSO in Damascus, perhaps in July of '75.

Q: Bill, you were in Damascus from when to when?

PIERCE: I need to correct that. In the summer of '76.

Q: Summer of '76, okay. You were there from '76 to when?

PIERCE: Until '78.

Q: What was the situation with Syria when you arrived in '76?

PIERCE: In '76 the relationship had taken a turn for the good. Kissinger had been through I think in the year previous, or perhaps earlier, doing a lot of shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East and had agreed to restore a full embassy. Ambassador Richard Murphy had gotten there just before I had, and we had the beginnings of a rather, for Syria, large AID (Agency for International Development) mission. Well, relatively large – maybe 20 people ultimately. So the relationship was on an upswing when I got there.

Q: What was Damascus like? How did you observe the Syrian role in all of that when you arrived there?

PIERCE: I was struck by two things. Firstly, so much of the city, which is quite beautifully set, was surrounded by Socialist architecture buildings – rather non-descript, very grey. The other thing is the extensive, pervasive presence of what people there call "G2," in other words the internal security agency. I think there must've been about four. But you're first taken aback by their presence on street corners and in front of houses of prominent people and offices. Armed thugs basically. Not in uniform but sporting what always looked like submachine guns.

Q: Were there a lot of pictures of Hafez al-Assad around?

PIERCE: I never noticed any great degree. I mean, yes, of course there were, but it didn't seem as pervasive as it might have. Every office building, from time to time, on streets, but not, going to my mind, a real glorification cult. There were occasional incidents where you could learn of violence in the city: assassinations, bombing attempts, and also reported examples of internal security getting rid of people. It was unusual seeing all the embassies of countries that we have no relations with there: the Cubans, the North Koreans.

Q: The North Vietnamese probably at that time.

PIERCE: I don't recall. They must've been, but I'm not aware of them. And the East Bloc in profusion.

Q: Yes. What was life like there? I mean just sort of personal life at this point.

PIERCE: I didn't have much; as GSO I worked quite hard. We were in the midst of expanding at a time in which the economy was just starting to have a construction boom and one of my main jobs was finding housing leases; negotiating leases with landlords mainly for the AID mission. There was, in that sense, sort of an economic boom, although in reality the economy never was much of anything. Of course the currency was controlled and the rate of exchange artificially high.

Q: Did you find that you or members of the embassy were particularly harassed or given a difficult time by the security people?

PIERCE: It's my impression that the security people, the G-2, had extreme interest in us. They were always on the lookout for Americans in the embassy or any hint of behavior they didn't like, for any indication of any type of conduct that would be considered unsavory. Sexual deviancy was seen to be a preoccupation of theirs. I in GSO had probably the best contact with the local FSNs in the embassy. They were required every four years, I believe, to go to G-2 and get cleared to work for us and during this process they were always interrogated or asked questions. One of them was bold enough to tell me what happened when he went. Basically what they would do was list to him all the single members in the embassy and say, "What do you know about them?" and in this particular conversation he told me he didn't know anything untoward about them, but they were always listed. As for myself, I'm aware that my apartment was entered by G-2.

Q: You were a bachelor at the time?

PIERCE: I was a bachelor at the time.

My apartment was entered by G-2 when I had a maid there. She was taken out – this happened probably twice – for one or two hours, how long I don't know, and obviously they had free run of my apartment. I found this out several months after this occurred. This was a time I began dating the person who I was to marry.

Q: This was?

PIERCE: My wife, Daad.

Q: And her background…

PIERCE: She was Lebanese. She worked at the embassy in Beirut and when the embassy went down to a skeleton crew with no outside operations, she was given the option either of going back home near Sidon on leave without pay until further notice, or working TDY (Temporary Duty) for the embassy in Damascus – and that's where we met. The internal security picked up on our meetings and began harassing her. It may have been at that time that they began harassing me through my apartment, I don't know. When the harassment against her became direct, she quit and went back to Lebanon.

Q: You know, one is so used to the Soviet style thing where a bachelor or a married man would be…you know ladies would show up at the door and ring the doorbell and say, "Could you help me?" or something like that. Was there any of this sort of "honey trap," I think the term is?

PIERCE: Not that I'm aware of. She was interviewed by internal security and it was a quite difficult, extremely tedious task for her. It frightened her very severely.

Q: I'm just trying to pick up the different styles. This was not a Soviet style thing of trying to hand off documents or things. In other words, to compromise you and then to…

PIERCE: No. Not that I'm aware of.

Q: You were working with AID rather closely. How did they find working in Syria?

PIERCE: Again, the conversations I had with AID on how they worked didn't reveal any great different style. I mean I wasn't interested in what they were doing. It was a third-world country; it had an awful lot in terms of economic development needs. Our program was modest although the personnel resources AID put there were large. I don't have any idea of what precisely they were doing.

Q: During your time there were you able to get out and travel around much or were you pretty well kept in Damascus by your work?

PIERCE: I traveled quite a lot on the weekends, doing a lot of what tourists do. Indeed Syria is very beautiful, even day trips out of Damascus. You could go to the north and over toward the coast there's a crusader castle, Krak des Chevaliers. Actually it's not on the coast but it's maybe within 15 miles of the coast. You could go down south to As Suwayda where there is a coliseum. Basra, which was extremely attractive. The town of Homs had reasonably good diversions, nothing much there. It's sort of famous for being a

town of dunces.

You can take a trip, which I did, across the desert to Palmyra. The conventional way was too long, but I tried the short cut and we made it there. The Palmyra ruins of – I'm trying to think of the name of the kingdom – Queen Zenobia. Basically 4th-century A.D., subdued by the Romans. I took longer trips to Aleppo, once on official business to survey our burned-out consulate there. The Syrian mobs burned that out in 1967. I also took a trip over to Deir ez-Zor on the Euphrates, about a three-and-a-half, four hour drive east of Aleppo. It is an old archeological site, the Kingdom of Mari, I think. That was the one that was being excavated. Extremely interesting, just very, very deserty. On the coast Al Hamidiyah. Aleppo also is inland. On the coast the cities of Latakia, Banias, and Tartus. Very, very interesting. Very pretty places. Extremely green and filled with archeological treasures. Very nice place.

Q: Did the fact that Syria and Iraq had poor relations reflect itself while you were there?

PIERCE: It goes up and it goes down. At the time I was there it was down. Not to any great degree as I recall. There are a couple of things perhaps in the back of my memory suggesting that yes, you were aware of it but it was not as though it was a hot topic amongst people. It was all sort of rivalry within the Baath Party and whose Baath leader was following which line of Baathism at the time. Sure, it always pervaded the atmosphere, but it wasn't a day to day problem, or of interest to me.

Q: What about the situation in Lebanon? What was it at that time?

PIERCE: Lebanon had fallen into chaos or was beginning to fall into that long, long period of what they used to call "igar rabat," the troubles. When I first got there, or shortly after I got there, was when our ambassador there and econ counselor were murdered. And that's when the embassy closed its operations, leaving a skeleton crew. They no longer used any form of exit out of Lebanon except for Damascus, so therefore over the next six months or so we became their logistics pipeline. The bodies of our two dead diplomats were carried out to Damascus and put on aircraft – I think they were C-130s – which we had arranged to come in on special dispensation into the airport to take them out. I stand corrected. I'm not sure about that. The two aircraft did come in bringing armored cars and we used them to pull out household effects that had been left in Beirut when the evacuation occurred out of the embassy, which was just prior to that. The only problem with the armored cars was there was absolutely no clearance into Syria for them and we had to keep them in Damascus for eight or nine months, I believe, before we could get enough documentation to move them into Beirut. The cars were Ford LTDs and heavily armored. The irony of it was that they were so quickly assembled, or quickly prepared, that they didn't even have sufficient brakes to stop with all of the extra weight they had. When they finally went to Beirut over the mountain, it severely hampered their ability just to get through safely.

We went to Beirut or into Lebanon twice, once through the embassy and once in an

attempt to get some equipment that we needed commercially. On the first occasion we had maybe 20 people there overnighted. The second time when I went into a different part of Beirut – the outskirts of Beirut – I was very impressed. Always you had Syrian checkpoints at that time; Syria had begun occupying the place more extensively. On one occasion I was stopped by a Syrian and asked where I was going and I told him, and he said, "Well, there's going to be a battle there in about a half an hour."

I felt that was very nice of him to tell me that and I didn't go. *(laughs)* On another occasion we were allowed from time to time to go into Shatura, just across the border in Lebanon, to buy foodstuffs since we couldn't get a lot in Damascus. Again, we had a few Syrian checkpoints and at one occasion came to a Syrian checkpoint just on the other side of the border into Lebanon and there was this sort of typical Syrian guard who looked like, "What the hell am I here for stopping cars?" We came up to him, and he was one of my FSNs who had been dragooned into the military four months earlier and there he was in the middle of nowhere, stopping cars.

Also at the time, as I got to know my wife better and we became more involved, she would frequently go home to Lebanon and she lived in the south not too far from Sidon. To me it was always aggravating and very disturbing that she would take these trips by taxi – there was a very good taxi network between Sidon and Damascus – and she always said it was no problem. And even the days that Beirut was closed, the taxis would veer off through the mountains in the southern part of Lebanon to get to Sidon. She convinced me – this was after our Damascus tour, we did visit her family in the south – aside from that, the situation in Damascus was driven by the situation in Beirut. The hotels and houses were rented by Lebanese trying to take refuge in Damascus. Hotels were full of Lebanese who had fled. Obviously the richer would go to Europe or elsewhere, but a large number were in Damascus. Our consular section was inundated by Lebanese trying to get visas to America, which was very hard for them – as were the consulates in Amman and Nicosia and Athens.

Q: You mentioned the burning out of our consulate in Aleppo. Were we thinking of opening it up or…

PIERCE: I don't think we ever were. The Syrians, at least as far as I could tell, were very interested in seeing us return. On my visit to Aleppo, I had frequently expressed to me their desire to see us return. What we were interested in mainly was obviously to get recompense for the damage that was done to the consulate. One of the interesting things was when we closed relations in '67, or when the Syrians truncated relations, most of our FSNs went on leave without pay until further notice; very few were left as caretakers in Damascus. Since our consulate in Aleppo was destroyed – burned out – I don't believe anybody who was there was left to look over our interests. When I came there we hired two or three FSNs from Aleppo – not in Aleppo, but they had to work for us in Damascus. One of them told me a very interesting story; he was in B & F.

Q: Budget and Fiscal.

PIERCE: Yes, in Damascus. I'm not sure what he was in Aleppo. He said that in Aleppo the day of the burning all the FSNs worked on the first floor, all of the Americans worked on the second floor. When the mobs came out in front it got very, very tense. And then he told me, "All you Americans scooted out the back," through a special ladder or a rope down the window, "We FSNs on the first floor," when they started throwing the gasoline bombs in the windows, "we had to go out front and meet the crowds." There was a certain amount of bitterness on the part of how FSNs were treated and what the U.S. was doing to help them in a situation which they, with justification, believe was not of their own making but was because of their ties to America.

Another FSN in our customs office – our customs clearances guy – he was in Damascus and when the embassy was closed, he was taken and beaten severely about the head to the point that he lost much of his hearing. A lot of them suffered a lot because of Syria-America relations.

Q: You were there when the Carter administration was coming in. Were there any high-level visits?

PIERCE: We had one Vance visit and I guess it would be pre-Camp David. The most interesting thing in respect to the Middle East peace that I recall – and again, not being in the political section – is the Egyptian ambassador's residence was not too far from our office, and where our office still is today. And shortly before Sadat went to Camp David – is my guess – he came to Damascus and Assad tried to convince him to do otherwise. Obviously Assad failed. Within an hour after Sadat had left, a bomb exploded on the front door of the Egyptian residence which unfortunately for us is in the area in which we had a lot of houses. In fact one man in particular had just missed being in the pathway of the bomb by five minutes.

Q: How was morale in the embassy and how was Ambassador Murphy?

PIERCE: Ambassador Murphy is an extremely unified person. He had, obviously, great experience, and I think he was esteemed by the people in the embassy – the Americans and the FSNs. He was just a very towering man, very impressive. That was always conveyed to me. His DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was Robert Pelletreau at the time. Again, both extremely nuanced, experienced Arabists. As DCM he was an exemplary leader of Americans and I think in charge of making sure morale of Americans and FSNs was kept as high as possible. I think he did a very good job at that.

Q: You left there in '78.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: Did you get any feel about Israel and relations with Israel and all; I mean the lack thereof, or what have you?

PIERCE: No. It was interesting in the sense of the two passport policy. We've had a two passport policy that was extremely important, I think in terms of how we related to Damascus. The Syrian immigration is very nuanced on checking on our passports to see if we traveled to Israel a lot. On one occasion a person in the embassy who went to Cyprus then went to Israel for personal reasons. Although the Israelis, if asked, would not chop our passports in or out, the Syrians, when you returned, were able to figure this out, and they would not let him back in. This was just one day to day aspect of the relationship. I'm not aware of any deeper currents at the time.

Q: What about the military presence while you were there; was there an obvious Syrian army and Soviet connection?

PIERCE: Only in internal security. When we had Vance come – and I noticed it when other dignitaries would come –the road to the airport is maybe 20 kilometers, maybe not that long – it's quite interesting when you drive out to the airport two hours before a VIP (Very Important Person) is coming you begin to see along this stretch of several kilometers the emplacement of internal security about every quarter mile. They had an awful lot of manpower devoted to this. Syrian military units were not pervasive, did not seem to be omnipresent there, except for internal security. The farther away from Damascus you would get, the less security would be visibly present. In Aleppo, yes you would see them from time to time, but you wouldn't have that every street corner presence of a goon with a submachine gun.

Q: What was your impression – being GSO you'd be probably more aware of this than most – of the Syrian economy? I mean how did the average Syrian do there?

PIERCE: It would be my impression that it wasn't very well. I mean the average Syrian was poor in the sense of being unable to buy an awful lot of foodstuffs. The average Syrian, as well as Lebanese as I found, did not have adequate heat; the price of "mazut," diesel, the price of heating equipment was too high. Clothes were reasonably cheap, primarily, as I recall, imported from Eastern Europe. Medicines, were reasonably cheap although perhaps not for their income. At the same time you had a very visible strata of well-heeled Syrians: Mercedes, luxurious houses, exorbitant cost of land. Land was about the only thing that was left in the economy that the government didn't regulate or own. Consequently speculation on land and building apartments was a major occupation of people who had Syrian pounds.

Q: You left there in '78.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

PIERCE: I went to language school at FSI one year and then the second year in Tunis.

This was the Arabic program.

Q: What prompted you to…I mean you had obviously been there, but did it take? Sometimes the experience in the Arab world does not encourage one to keep going.

PIERCE: It's flukish the way I opted for Arabic. As I've said earlier, I toyed with getting into Chinese. I didn't get that much of a positive response from EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs) at the time. It was possible but it was going to take a lot of hard work. I made intimations of interest in Arabic; my bureau was very, very interested and immediately moved to try to get me to propose that I go into Arabic language school. I made a signal that I was interested and almost immediately I was assigned.

Q: Yes. One goes where one is wanted. (laughs)

PIERCE: I had no appreciation of the history of the Middle East, very little interest in the Middle East, but now I found myself in Arabic.

Q: How did things progress with you and Daad? Daad worked for the Association for Diplomatic Studies in its earliest days so we're old friends. But how did that go?

PIERCE: Shortly after she left Damascus we did get married. We had one marriage ceremony in Beirut with her family in accord with the way one gets married as a Shiite Islam in Lebanon, and then in 1977 we had a civil ceremony in America. So for the last year of my assignment we were married. We got the impression that the Syrians were no longer interested in harassing her or me.

Q: When you came here to Washington, how did you find the Arabic training?

PIERCE: At FSI in Washington I felt that the Arabic training was mismanaged. I always think of it as probably two months of instruction compacted into 10 months. It was a waste eight months of my time. I found it very, very substandard.

Q: What was the problem?

PIERCE: One of the problems, which I'd encountered earlier in Indonesia, is that in classroom settings the lowest common denominator generally runs the class.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: The one who wants to do less work, the one who is not interested in following the structure. Inculcated within the teachers was a philosophy that the student is always right, never correct a student. One of the oddest things I found out at the end of my 10 months here – it's only a 10-month course – was that I had been going through 10 months with a basic assumption that was totally wrong, in basic Arabic, a totally wrong assumption, and it was only my last week here that one of the teachers dared to correct

this basic mistake that I had been making throughout the entire class.

Q: Was this FSI or was this Arabic Culture?

PIERCE: This was FSI. Area studies I found very, very good.

Q: No, but I'm just talking about the lack of correction.

PIERCE: As far as I could tell it may well have been something easily graspable by the Arabic teachers here, but it was guidance from management. Another thing I disliked about this, which I did not know at the time, but certainly found out in my subsequent Arab tours, most of the teachers – and this goes to the dynamic of how teachers are chosen or were chosen at the time – were Christian. Well, as you know, the majority of Arabic countries are pervasively Islamic.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: And Islam, while you may to some degree separate the religion from the language, you can't do it in a real sense. It pervades the language. It is totally within the language. Words are blurted out, responses are made based on Islamic values. It had none of that.

Q: Well, this is of course true not as much now but certainly earlier in American thinking. If you didn't know the Bible, a lot of expressions and all just didn't make sense. When I was a youth you pretty well knew you had to know the Bible because everyday expressions were based on the Bible.

PIERCE: That's right. Much the same issue here.

Q: "Patience of Job" or what have you.

Did you find it helpful having an Arabic speaking wife? Did she add her bit? I assume she spoke Arabic around you?

PIERCE: She did. She does speak Arabic. She did to a degree, but primarily most of my concentration was on the academic part. Obviously when you are a native speaker and Lebanese, while it's not a dialect certainly is a version of Arabic with a lot of expressions and peculiarities in terms of sound that are not mainstream Arabic. She did to some degree but we never went intensively through Arabic. When I went to Tunisia, however…

Q: You were in Tunisia from '79 to '80?

PIERCE: To '80, yes. The language school there was in my impression a much better example of how to teach a language and I learned a lot more. I felt that my time was much more usefully spent.

Q: While you were getting Area Studies at FSI, this was the post Camp David time and all. Did you find that there was a pretty good look on the Area Studies at the Islamic world, Arab world, or not? How did you feel?

PIERCE: I thought the Area Studies at the time – and this was in '78 – gave a pretty good critique of Camp David; pointing out its advantages and its disadvantages, its defects. Iran obviously had just come into the news and at the time our Area Studies was less aware and was scrapping around to find good academic expertise on Shia Islam. Iran we had to handle historically or as an economic issue. It was very ample expertise, but particularly with respect to the religion there was little and it wasn't particularly good at the time. But by and large I was very impressed by the caliber, which as far as I can tell, is maintained by what FSI Area Studies has been doing in terms of the Middle East.

Q: Well when you got to Tunisia…in the first place you were with a class, I take it.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: What was your class; I mean sort of the background? The Arabists have always been pointed to as – there's been a certain amount of, I would say, really basically disinformation trying to make the Arabists into a class of people apart or something like that. How would you describe your class?

PIERCE: I'm trying to remember how many we had. The State Department people at FSI in Tunisia, there were not a lot of us. It was a mish-mash. Most of the State Department people were there because they just wanted the language. And I think any sort of bent towards great interest in the Arab world was probably not a major factor in the selection process that put these people at FSI in Tunisia. I'd say by far we were a minority although we probably were more than anyone else. But we had other agencies, most particularly the military that were interested in using FSI.

Q: I had a series of interviews with Hume Horan who is one of our top Arabists and he was saying, you know, this idea that somehow everyone fell in love with the Arab world and all of this, he said, "After all, when you think about it, if you're working in an Arab world these people, for the most part, are insulting you most of the time and they're trying to kill you." It's not the friendliest area to go to. It's a challenge. It's unlike some of the romance…some of the Brits at least in the olden time, you know, got out there with the Bedouin out in the desert in the starry sky and all that. That's not an American trait.

PIERCE: There are a few people I know to do that, but not by virtue of, or because of, their experience at FSI.

Q: (laughs) You were in Tunis at a difficult time, particularly in the Islamic world because we're talking about the period of the takeover of our embassy in Tehran. How did you find Tunis?

PIERCE: To me, again whatever happened at the political level, government to government, I'm not aware of. This was the waning – I presume it's the waning, I forgot – while Bourguiba certainly was in the waning period of his career.

Q: Yes, yes. He was almost senile.

PIERCE: "Almost?" He was senile at the time. Still he had a very tight control over what was put in the press and over dissent. He didn't care an awful lot. Certainly you could see a very large number of unemployed youth. I didn't notice any great political preoccupation by them, or any great amount of religious fervor coming out from any real direction in the city of Tunis. It just did not seem to be very consequential. Consistently, over and over again, in Tunisia, it was made clear to us that they did not consider themselves in any great form to be part of the Arab world. The language there is different from standard Arabic and when we would speak to them quite often they would not understand. We certainly couldn't understand their Arabic. Sometimes they would ask us to speak French. On one occasion, one Tunisian shopkeeper said, "What is this tongue? We do not speak this tongue here." The food was different. Couscous pervades North Africa; it's a far cry from Arabic cuisine. I had a real sense that their Arabness was really not of seminal import to them.

Q: Were there demonstrations or were there any problems during the time you were doing this, particularly after Tehran and the burning of our embassy in Islamabad? You know, general unrest in the Islamic world.

PIERCE: I do not recall any tension coming out of those events in Tunisia. The Tehran incident occurred just as I was leaving, I think. I don't remember the exact month it occurred in. It had no effect in Tunisia that I'm aware of.

Q: Qadhafi, was he a presence at all there?

PIERCE: No, he was not. When I first got there FSI was basically taking tours to Ghadames; I unfortunately did not take the one tour that went there early in my tour in Tunisia, but I was going to take the second one. Well, between the first and the second one our embassy was sacked and our relations went through a low ebb. We no longer had a presence there. I seem to recall that tension between the two countries geared up at that time and the border was closed anyway.

Q: What about Egypt? Was Egypt the place you went to to get a different view or not?

PIERCE: I'm sorry, your meaning?

Q: Well I was just wondering whether if you were going to go try your Arabic out you'd go to Egypt or where. Where did you go on your trips?

PIERCE: Well, the year before I was there each student was given a stipend and told you had to travel in the Arab world to acclimatize. The year I was there we went through a budget exercise at State and all of that was withdrawn, so therefore I had no area training. I was considering going through Egypt, probably into Yemen – this was before Tehran – and perhaps over trying to get into Iran, but all of that became academic. There were no official trips; I took no trips in the Arab world. I went around Tunisia quite a lot and also to Malta. That's the extent of the Middle East that I visited during my stay in Tunisia.

Q: Were you getting much advantage then? I mean if the Tunisians said, you know, "Your Arabic is not our Arabic," and you couldn't get out and around, was there much advantage to being trained in Tunisia?

PIERCE: Tunisia, as I recall, was selected because there was no alternate elsewhere in the Arab world. Once Beirut fell a decision was made to transfer the institute somewhere else in the Arab world. The best candidate at the time was Cairo, but Ambassador Eilts did not want to see an expanded presence there anymore than it was, because it had ballooned at the time in Cairo, and there were no other options. Tunisia was better than Washington. That's really about it.

Q: We were getting nervous about the Arab world, particularly after the Tehran business although it wasn't an Arab country, but I mean it was still in the Middle East. Was there a problem in assignments when you came out?

PIERCE: No. I was assigned when I was in Washington for my first year of Arabic and was assigned to be the political-military officer at the embassy in Jeddah. That assignment was not broken, nor was there any attempt to get dependents out of Saudi Arabia, while at the same time the rest of the Gulf, after the Tehran incident and the reaction in Islamabad, I believe every Gulf state had to evacuate its dependents.

Q: Yes, with great screams. I've talked to people who were in the Trucial states or in Oman or something, saying there was really no threat but this was just Washington covering its ass in a way.

PIERCE: This was not an unusual situation. That was exactly the impression we got in Jeddah at the time. There was an attempt to do it in Jeddah. The Saudis let it be known, as I understand it, that they would greatly appreciate it if we did not do that and that security in the Kingdom was at an all time high. Our ambassador there was John West whom I'm sure made the case articulately in Washington, and Saudi Arabia was not evacuated.

Q: Well then you went to Saudi Arabia in 1980?

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: You were there from 1980 to when?

PIERCE: 1983.

Q: What was the situation in – it was Jeddah then?

PIERCE: Yes it was.

Q: When you arrived there? I mean the situation in Iran was still very hot, at least from our point of view, and I guess from the Saudis' point of view, too. You had a Shia revolution of considerable magnitude boiling off on its eastern border, or almost border, and all that.

PIERCE: There were a couple of things. Firstly, although assigned as a political-military officer, that slot was abolished and I became political officer at the embassy. My specialty was internal affairs. The events that you suggest, especially the Shia incidents in the eastern province, but more importantly in late '79 the armed takeover of the mosque in Mecca.

Q: Yes. When did this happen?

PIERCE: I think it was in late '79. It had caused an extreme amount of tension and concern in Washington.

Q: This was before your time?

PIERCE: Yes, just before my time. And the primary concern outside of the fact that it was such a tremendously staggering event – this is what triggered the reaction in Islamabad that you mentioned earlier – was that the accusations against the royal family seemed to make them very vulnerable: corruption, siding with the West, and basically not being good Muslims. And it caused an immense amount of concern over their stability and the regime's stability.

One of my jobs was to travel to various provinces and to see what I could as to how stability was, whether there was an economic largess or economic gains that were being made outside the glossier big cities where people almost always focused. So this is what I did for most of my three years there. Take forays primarily into the north, north of Riyadh and north of Jeddah. Also some into the south. Number one, to look for signs of progress, and, number two, progress economically, commercially, and socially. And whatever suggestion about the politics of the place. The other job that I had, in that sense, was to follow, to the degree you could, the royal family and to try to get some idea as to just how cohesive or not, uncohesive, a fuse they were.

Q: For me, I had a little time in Saudi Arabia – two-and-a-half years in Dhahran, but this goes back to '58 to '60 so things have changed. But also the people I've talked to really talk about Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dhahran and that's it. The fact that you got out and around – let's talk about the north. What were you seeing up there, because I'm not even

aware of any particular cities or settlements up there.

PIERCE: Well, it's easier to go into Riyadh and go north of Riyadh. The first place you look at is the province of Al Qassim, the towns of Buraydah and Unayzah. This is the area which in the past, in the '20s, spawned a group of Islamic fanatics called the "Iquan muslimin," Saudi version, which in essence ultimately revolted against King Abdul Aziz and were crushed. This is the area that we had the riots against television in the early '60s, I think. A prince was involved in this and was shot and killed. Ultimately his brother ended up being the one who assassinated King Faisal. It's the most conservative, most extreme area in the kingdom. It is the area also that the plotters of the assault on the mosque in Mecca in '79, were from. That area I went to a few times. Just north of that is Hail, which is at the base of the great Nafud Desert which stretches northward towards Jordan. I went there a few times. There was an interesting prince who was governor there and I found him a very captivating man. Trying to see what he was doing in that place. This was the competitor of King Abdul Aziz. Ha'il was the capital of the Al Rashid family that in essence ruled Saudi Arabia – or what is now Saudi Arabia – until Abdul Aziz was able to take it back from them. I went there several times. And just a little bit farther north on the other side of the Nafud is Al Jawf which is in the Hinterlands; this is more traditional, ruled by a Sudairi at the time – I think his son still rules – held much like a chieftan. And just to the north of that on the border with Jordan and Iraq was the northern province, northern borders, Al Hudud ash Shamaliyah, and it also had a prince from a cadet branch of the royal family ruling there. And it's the long stretch of province that borders Iraq and Jordan going down towards the gulf. The capital there is Ar Ar. Always trying to find out just visually what was going on. The Saudis were extremely mistrustful of foreigners. They did not like us to travel, they would never talk politics to us. I just tried to see how grandiose the projects were, what were the schemes, what were the programs. Trying to travel as much as possible, sometimes with minders, sometimes without minders.

Q: "Minders" being somebody to help you.

PIERCE: From the governor's office to help you. Yes. I found out from time to time that they were quite good. You'd get them to start gossiping about their work and you learn a lot about what's going on in their family history.

Q: Oh, it's much better than just being by yourself.

PIERCE: Sometimes it was.

Q: In the first place, what about accommodations there? I mean this is not a place where tourists go or foreigners go.

PIERCE: No. There are no tourists in Saudi Arabia, or there weren't at that time.

Q: How would you be received? Would it be sort of hotels or what have you?

PIERCE: Buraydah had a decent international style hotel with a decent buffet and decent central air conditioning. Ha'il was a little bit more primitive. Jawf you stayed at the guest house of the governor, and in Ar Ar you stayed at a substandard hotel. The farther north you went out of Riyadh, the lower your accommodations became. Khasid was going through a tremendous amount of prosperity. This was at a time that the Saudis were subsidizing wheat to an extreme degree and farmers in Khasid, through government loans and giveaways, were able to extract fossil water and were producing wheat in tremendous qualities. I think Saudi Arabia was in the top five in terms of wheat production in the world by the time I left in '83. The policies continued on into the '90s and I don't know what's happened to it. It was very wasteful; the water was just being frittered away. The wheat produced was several multiples higher in terms of cost than wheat in a wheat-producing country would be. But it was part of Crown Prince Fahd's desire to see Saudi Arabia self-producing in food, which is an immediate spring-off of the '73 OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) freeze of oil and the occasional threats that came out of this country. Out of America in terms of, "Well, they cut off our oil, we'll cut off their food."

Q: You had these schemes, but some of the other places weren't producing wheat. How was money distributed? My impression is in the old days the king would come by, hand the ruling sheik, or whatever it is, so much money or marry a daughter or something like that and drift away, and then that sheik would then distribute the money.

PIERCE: You've got two things here. Firstly you've got a bureaucracy that makes sure that the king's word gets promulgated. It's not only in the interest of trying to help parts of these isolated pockets of the country, but also to promulgate your own profession as a bureaucrat. One of the things you just said is very interesting – I've always thought this – is that in the old days we did have a king, Abdul Aziz. He owned everything and he gave things away to people. The country didn't own anything. There was no real sovereignty invested in the people. That concept continued. You could see it simply in the way the press reported that grants would occur if something happened. If there were a flood, the king would give money to the victims of the flood. If there were a project, the king would announce the granting of money for this project. Continually everything was phrased and thought of as coming from the king. Now behind the king obviously you have the consensual family, and the king's authority. It's not solely vested in the king, but the king as selected by perhaps the ruling elders of the family, who are looked upon with great veneration or as having authority by the rest of the family. In other words, always an attempt to maintain the cohesion of the "Al Saud," the family of Saud. That began to have holes in it over this period of time, but it still was an institution, which I imagine it is with a lot more holes in it today, that was cohesive enough, and revered enough, that it would succeed. When King Khalid died in 1982, I believe, and Crown Prince Fahd became king, the more traditional way of selecting the monarch through more consultation and consensus was in part short-circuited. This suggests, perhaps, the beginning of an erosion of reinforcing the institution.

Q: Let's talk about the north? What was sustaining them?

PIERCE: Basically major grants from the central government. Each region had a budget and then I think above and beyond the budget you had a lot of special programs where you could get loans, where you could get land. Through the provincial government and through the central government, individuals could do that. One of the things that you continually hear is the holding of the "majlis". You know what the majlis is.

Q: Basically it's a tribal council.

PIERCE: Where you've got the ruler; the local potentate opened to anyone of his subjects, male, who could come in and make petition of him. This is a major way in which funds are doled out. But in other ways it's always a constant, entreaty, of the man who holds the keys – in other words, who holds the revenues – be it a local level, be it official, be it unofficial, at a national level. There's this constant barraging of requests through to the man and it's doled out that way. Plus you had the regular programs. You have five-year plans that are announced, you have annual budgets that are announced, and you have we are going to build a massive health system. You might even identify the more isolated areas of Ha'il Province, for example, that are going to get their new hospitals.

The same thing is going to be true of communications, of roads. I found out, by and large, that roads were there throughout the north, that communications were good – good telephone facilities in isolated villages in which not much existed. They were just there and you saw no signs of economic activity coming out of these places. The dusty roads between Riyadh and Jeddah, for example. Or going up fifty or a hundred miles outside of Ha'il. Water was available. Massive conversion was underway – although at that time it wasn't even close to completion – of desalted water being provided to the country. Ten or fifteen years later it was a much more visible presence throughout the kingdom. But I think there was a very, very pointed attempt by the Saudis to assure that the fruits of largess were being dispersed to Saudi nationals. That said, of course the royal family and those closest to them were several tiers higher than the average Saudi. You looked constantly for poverty and yes, you can see signs of it, but it's very difficult to put your finger on. You also looked very carefully at how nomads are being treated, and by the time I was there the institution of nomad was just about coming to a close except perhaps for the Al Murrah in the empty quarter of the southeast.

Q: The Rub al Khali.

PIERCE: Yes. Although the problem with nomads is the government had tried very specifically to settle them, because settling, in the government's mind, was a way to civilize them and give them prosperity. This had begun several years prior to my coming and it was an open question as to how successful that would be, although there were beginning to be signs that it wasn't working well; that you had people who lost their anchor, so to speak. Who did nothing gainful, who were even more on the dole than they

would've been had they lived independently out on the deserts. Ultimately, they were just basically losing their sense of local identity.

Q: There's always a problem when you've got wealth and you're raising a sort of new bureaucracy – that it's damned hard to get doctors and other professional people to go beyond the capital or the commercial centers. Did you get any impression of how in these places out in the middle of nowhere or up in the north they got competent professionals up there?

PIERCE: No, I didn't. In the capitals you always had them. Beyond the capitals I think it was a hit or miss situation. It was very difficult. You never could get good reliable medical statistics; you never could get – and I don't know if you can today even – solid statistics on population. I think the Saudi government failed several times to conduct an honest census. So you never really could get a feeling as to exactly what kind of medical attention you would get if you were 200 miles from Ar Ar. I daresay you wouldn't get much. It just wasn't there.

Q: Well, what about labor? During the time you were there, they had the great infusion of Koreans, Indonesians and Pakistani come. Who was doing the grunt work?

PIERCE: When I was there, what was the nationality of choice? They were beginning to look at Pakistanis; the Thai had out-priced themselves, the Koreans had out-priced themselves, certainly the Turks and other Arab countries like the Sudanese had out-priced themselves. What the Saudis would do is they would go into tapping through labor contracts from various countries. And once you got the group in there, and as their price went higher, then you would look elsewhere. I think the Pakistanis, at that time, were on the favored list. The Indians had lost out. The Pakistanis were always viewed despicably, by the way – looked upon in extreme distaste. And the feeling was reciprocal. They were later to be replaced by Bangladeshis and Indonesians. Filipinos also were in there somewhere. It just depends; it depends on what period of time as you go through. We tried to get estimates of just how many were around. I don't even remember what our estimates were – not as much as the Saudi population, but not insignificant.

Q: Would these foreign workers be apparent when you got away from the major population centers?

PIERCE: Rarely. Foreign workers mainly lived in compounds. They were bussed to the site of whatever construction or whatever plant they were in. They would be pervasive in the cities on Fridays, market days, where they had nothing to do and the employer would let them go. They were not visible, not much sign of them outside the major cities, with some exceptions where you have particularly large projects. When you go to the special industrial cities like Yanbu, you see foreign workers. They're quite visible. But 10 or 15 miles away you don't.

Q: In the north, which had been the seat of a lot of fundamentalism and problems for the

Saudis, was there much of a military presence there?

PIERCE: There was never any visible military presence in the kingdom unless you specifically went to places where they were positioned. In other words, this is in the case of two tours of mine. My first tour I went to no places like that.

Q: Okay, let's go down to the south. There had been sort of a recurring problem with Yemen. Did you get that close to Yemen?

PIERCE: I did not. The southeast was not an area that I was responsible for. Did I ever go down at all? That was an area that we split off and gave to another officer. Jizan, Najran, and the Asir, although I did go to the Asir. That issue was one that made its way into my focus on my return to Saudi Arabia.

Q: Well let's stick to this '80 to '83 period. What about the eastern province and that area?

PIERCE: Again this was covered by our consulate in Dhahran, although I made a trip out there once or twice.

Q: How about – was it the Hijaz?

PIERCE: The Hijaz is where my focus of concentration was.

Q: This would be the Red Sea area?

PIERCE: Yes, with the exception of the south end.

Q: What about that?

PIERCE: In what sense?

Q: In your observation of how things were – the rule of the Saudis and their internal problems.

PIERCE: The problem with looking at potential internal problems is that you tend to take what you get and magnify it too much. There was always a dichotomy between the Hijaz and the Nejd between Riyadh and Jeddah.

Q: The Nejd being the central part.

PIERCE: The central part where the Saudis are from. People in the Hijaz felt themselves more sophisticated, were far more civilized, and basically dispossessed by the Saudis.

Q: They were a lot of the major merchant families.

PIERCE: Merchant families and people of great religious background coming from Mecca and Medina. As you might recall, many of the merchant families are either Yemeni or from Persia four or five, 10 generations ago, and mixed in with the Hijaz which always has been a sort of an open door for access to Mecca and consequently has a hodgepodge of ethnicity to it. But there was a dichotomy. You could feel it. You could sense it. And resentment. Now to say that this was really a major focal point of contention that would split the kingdom would be ridiculous, but it was there.

Jeddah has always been a prime focal point of Crown Prince and King Fahd, who made palaces there. A lot of corruption was there as well. But it enjoyed a prosperity commensurate with its tradition, its past. It was the preferred place of residence for most Saudis who had education and could afford to stay there professionally, although Riyadh outdistanced it, I think, ultimately. There wasn't a great feeling of, again, political tension there. You'd get problems in Mecca and Medina, and why you do is that over the years, prior to '83, the Saudis allowed Islamic dissidents to stay in these cities. And as long as they kept their noses clean they were tolerated and accepted there. I always felt that there may be a certain sort of potentiality although you never could see it, never could sense it coming out of the Hijaz because of this. Refugees from the Muslim brotherhood in Syria, from Yemen, and from Egypt were basically allowed to live rather freely in Mecca and Medina. In Mecca primarily, but also in Medina, you had large numbers of illegal immigrants who lived there for years and from time to time you get Saudi officials saying, "Well we're going to clean up the immigrant problem in Mecca [or Medina]," and from time to time they might even try to do so, especially around hajj, but ultimately it never worked. They were primarily Africans.

Q: Were the Africans used as workers?

PIERCE: Most Africans were overstays from the hajj, and not to any great degree. Chadians hajj for some reason – thousands of them. Medina has since the early '80s up through the mid-'90s, been a major construction site. It always had in it apparently a Shia population, but trying to fight it was very difficult. Between Shias and Sunni Muslins ultimately you got an intimation that they had ties to Iran. The problems in Medina were exacerbated by the Iranians over the years, but starting that early.

Iranian Shia always trying to politicize the hajj, ended up finding Medina a place more convenient for incidents. In the mosque in Medina you have the Prophets' tomb and traditionally the Iranian Shia wished to venerate tombs and graves. There is a grave site, cemetery, in Medina called the Ka, I think. On it is a great sign that said, "Do not venerate these graves," and you could not get in to the cemetery. When you would have visiting Iranians on hajj, they would also go to Medina and many of them would attempt to venerate the Prophets' tomb.

In all mosques, especially in the prominent ones for tourism or for religious pilgrimage, you have a bureaucracy of very large unhappy looking Saudi bureaucratic religious

officials. Their job is to make sure that the proper tenets of Islam are followed. Whenever these Iranians were there during hajj – this is always what happened – they would begin to be perceived as venerated prophets too and it would become a great fight. And this would constantly happen in Medina. It wouldn't happen to any great extent in Mecca. Mecca was a place where Iranians would try to demonstrate for the Islamic revolution and the Saudis continually tried to suppress these so-called demonstrations. This also occasioned an incident or two. At the mosque in Mecca, when you do "kaulof" – circumambulate the Kaaba – you look at people from a whole variety of nationalities and many of them are in extreme ecstasy.

There was once one – a very black African – who, in part of his ritual small pilgrimage, the "umma," he went close to "Kiswa," which is the black drape around the Kaaba, and he basically was flat up against it in its embrace. This is duplicated in the hundreds of thousands of people. It's very difficult to turn a group of people who speak no common tongue and who are there to go through the peak of their spiritual and physical lives; it's very difficult to politicize that. And when you have a thousand or five thousand Iranians committed to a political demonstration, it gets lost in all of that when you have another two hundred thousand people who are not interested in that at all and very easy to contain.

Q: I assume during the pilgrimage season you would want to monitor what was going on, if there were going to be any problems, and both Medina and Mecca were forbidden to you.

PIERCE: Yes, but they weren't forbidden to me.

Q: Oh, they weren't?

PIERCE: No. I became Muslim when I married my wife.

Q: Oh, I see. Okay. Did you have any problem with that?

PIERCE: No. What do you mean?

Q: No, I'm talking about the problem with the Saudi authorities. Would they accept the fact that you were Muslim?

PIERCE: I had never had any problem with that. Almost always I went to Medina or Mecca with an Arab – sometimes my wife, sometimes an FSN, and sometimes a friend. The one time that I went alone I was stopped on the way into Mecca. I was carrying a message from President Reagan to Crown Prince Fahd and he looked at me and he said, "Are you Muslim?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "Okay," and that was the only so-called problem I ever had. I went in to Mecca. When the hajj takes on full force the city ultimately closes down. The Saudis attempt to limit the number of cars there and you end up finding yourself parked several miles out and being bussed in unless you are really a

super VIP. I never went in beyond during that period of closure. It becomes a monstrous mass of people and you're in there for religious purposes only. I did go in the day before, once, before it did close, and walk through the mosque and around the city, observing, and this was a time when the Iranians would try hard for a political demonstration. The conclusions I gave you before about people in ecstasy, people who speak no common tongue, or people who were there simply for this peak of their religious life, I concluded then that the potential for major disruption or for making contagious the political message of Iran was very, very low.

Q: Going back to before you were at the takeover of the center of Mecca, was this done by the Iranians? These were not Iranians who did this; these were…

PIERCE: No, as I made allusion to earlier, these were primarily a group spearheaded by an Islamic group with ties into Kassi, into the very tribes that revolted against Abdul Aziz in the '20s for being un-Islamic. Who really thought that the Mahdi had returned in the form of this person and that the age of their version of Armageddon was coming. It's a very abhorrent form of Islam. And I think extensive research into the background of these people and whatever ties they may or may not have had revealed nothing. It was a home-grown group of abhorrent cultists.

Q: Yes. In the area you were covering in the North and the Hijaz and the Nejd, what was your impression of the Saudi family presence. How they were dealing with the people and the stability of it?

PIERCE: I thought that the family, during this time in which they had unbounded revenues, made a very conscious effort to distribute wealth and to deal with problems. Unfortunately most of that was throwing money at them and throwing money away, but it was still there. At the same time corruption was pervasive.

Q: How would corruption manifest itself?

PIERCE: Corruption manifested itself in the skimming of profits. Corruption manifested itself in payment of bribes, and in the commissions that invariably went along with all major projects in one form or another that were accomplished primarily by foreign business. Invariably a foreign company or a Saudi company will not have a contract with the Saudi government without sponsorship and someone close to, or a member of, the royal family.

Q: Yes. And so there's not room for…there is the payoff to the member of the royal family.

PIERCE: There is the payoff. The payoff can be 10, 15, 20 percent; when you're talking about a $10 million project that gets to be enough money probably.

Q: You know, one always hears about these palaces that are around there.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: What is the role of the palace? You would think one or two would take care of a person.

PIERCE: I found it was an exorbitant fascination, particularly on the part of Kind Fahd at the time, to have palaces. When you burst into this valley that Medina is in – it's in a beautiful valley – and you come over a ridge, it's sort of a hill that you can go over, going up the coast you're slowly elevating until you get to the altitude of Medina. So this valley appears and off to the distance on the left side is this tremendous mountain and at the top of that mountain is this construction and it looks like a palace that you could see in Cinderella. Walt Disney's Cinderella sort of stuck on the top of this mountain. That's King Fahd's palace.

It has this road winding up it and on top of that is a helipad. It's a very impressive palace. One of his multibillion dollar palaces. Tracking where Crown Prince Fahd was over the three-year period I was there, he spent a total of perhaps six days in that palace in three years.

Q: Did these contribute anything outside into the pockets of the contractors and all that or…

PIERCE: I don't know the answer to that question. You'd have to presume that, given the way business is conducted.

Q: But I was just thinking that, you know, you have these palaces – I suppose there's a retinue that lives there or something like that.

PIERCE: One of the interesting things I found out about another prince, whom I will not name, is that he had on his payroll 12,000 people. Now, what this meant – this was his personal payroll, his personal retinues. I'm trying to remember if they were being salaried by the ministry or not. He provides the wherewithal for 12,000 people, and were he to stop the phenomenon, he had 12,000 people out of work.

Q: Yes. And of course in a country like Saudi Arabia where the population is small, this is not an inconsiderable number of people.

PIERCE: It is not an inconsiderable number of people. I think you could see this duplicated across the board. It is a form of subvention and monumental entitlement that becomes part of how things work. Trying to convert that into a system of modern bureaucracy or trying to clean it up you would produce an awful lot of fissures, social fissures, as you did that.

Q: Speaking of contractors, right now one of our major problems in the United States is

Osama bin Laden.

PIERCE: Yes, I know.

Q: The bin Laden family was a major family, wasn't it?

PIERCE: The bin Laden family is a major family. Ever since the first king, King Abdul Aziz, began building his kingdom, he's always had around him contractors or people who will build for him that he trusts. The monarch had always done this, and normally it's a good relationship between the two. As I understand it, bin Laden, the father, was in this position and was, in essence, the major contractor for the modernization of the city of Medina – a multibillion dollar contract – one of King Fahd's pet projects.

Q: Did the Iran-Iraq War have any particular resonance when you were there from '80 to '83?

PIERCE: Yes it did. It was quite a disturbing development. One in which the Saudis were fully supportive of our initiatives. As you can guess, or you might know, the Iran-Iraq War was one which did not directly affect the Saudis, but Gulf security was of extreme importance. They were highly supportive of our attempts to keep the Gulf secure and safe for the egress of oil, and for commercial traffic.

Q: Did you get any feel for the new breed of Saudi who were coming out, particularly out of American universities and all? You know getting trained in the United States and getting quite respectable educations and coming back. Did you find that the system was absorbing them in a fairly efficient manner or were they building up a problem?

PIERCE: From what I could tell, the system absorbed them in a fairly effective manner. You could find them in all sorts of positions – high positions in ministries as well as in commerce. The fear or the hope at the time was that this liberal education that these Saudis would receive would in part have a positive effect on the more rigid, conservative approach found there. I did not find this to be the case. In most cases when a Saudi returned to the kingdom, he, or in some cases she, would immediately revert to and be a staunch upholder of traditional values, a staunch defender of the Saudi model of social and economic development. The Saudis, over the period of the '80s, had begun constructing many universities. They did this in the '70's. It was in the '80s that they began to cut down on scholarships and approvals for study overseas, since "we have our own perfect system." Ultimately it would be a major negative. Yes, they could hire the best educators in the world for the universities, but you would always question their standards simply because it's very difficult to have a Saudi fail. Secondly the positive aspects of education overseas, while it did not have a major impact on social policy, ultimately you would think that it would. Therefore, this sort of containment of education was seen as a negative.

Q: What about the treatment of women by the Saudis? Was this sort of a burr under the

Saudi-American relationship at that time?

PIERCE: No. I don't think so. There was always a tendency on the part of westerners to presume that women in Saudi Arabia are in extreme distress over their second-class status. And indeed it is quite confining, yet from what I could see during that period of time, the women in Saudi Arabia, by and large, in large measure, did not feel the need for greater freedom in the kingdom – I just don't think so. Most women – we're talking about women of means – got their frustrations out or got their freedom to the degree they wanted it by extensive travel abroad. Yet at the same time I didn't sense that people who were sequestered in Riyadh felt any great sense of freedom when they went to Jeddah. It just wasn't part of the culture.

Q: Was your wife, Daad, a good source for you for sampling how things were going on the distaff side?

PIERCE: Not really. She was a good source for observations about Saudi society. She had some contacts that were immeasurably interesting and useful to me, and extremely nice. There was a very good female Foreign Service Officer (FSO) in Jeddah when I was there.

Q: Who was that?

PIERCE: Audrey Farsa.

Q: What's she doing now?

PIERCE: She is OIG (Office of the Inspector General).

And we knew particularly one Saudi who was extremely distressed over what she had been educated in the West and did not get on well when she returned to Jeddah. Of course you got other examples of this happening during my second tour.

Q: I was wondering whether…of course this would be a consular matter, of an American woman who marries a Saudi student and comes back, has children, and then says, "I've had enough."

PIERCE: A major problem. I didn't know all the details; I knew enough about the situation to be happy I wasn't in the consular section.

Q: Yes. There's no real answer for this.

PIERCE: No, there's not.

Q: How about the Afghan war? It later became both a positive and very much a negative as far as terrorism went. The recruitment from the Islamic world, including Saudi Arabia, of what you want to call freedom fighters, "mujaheddin," or what have you,

against the Soviets. Was this apparent to you at that time?

PIERCE: Very insignificantly. Obviously the Saudis were wholeheartedly behind our policy in stopping the Soviet Union. Very prominent was the gathering of private funds under official auspices to aid the mujaheddin fighters in Afghanistan. Beyond that, in the early '80s, there was no overt sign of much beyond that. I mean the Saudis were strongly committed towards stopping Communists. That's what this was all about. In that period of time the fear of communism, which was a fear inculcated mainly by King Faisal to a tremendous degree, but even earlier than King Faisal, and it was still very, very strong in the Saudi mindset. Consequently, it was then natural for them to be very supportive of our policy of trying to kick out the Soviets, and also to do their own thing from a religious side to the degree they could.

Q: Your ambassador while you were there – you probably had two from '80 to '83 because you were there at the end of the Carter administration and the beginning of the Reagan. Who were your ambassadors?

PIERCE: John West was the first ambassador.

Q: He was from North Carolina, was it?

PIERCE: South Carolina. A former governor from South Carolina. He stayed around several months into the Reagan administration. He was replaced by nominated Ambassador Robert Neumann, who had this unfortunate run-in with Secretary Haig and I don't know if he ever presented his credentials. And then he was replaced by Richard Murphy, whom I had already known in Damascus.

Q: How was West? I mean he seems of sort of unlikely type of person to end up in the Middle East – the governor of South Carolina.

PIERCE: It's my impression that the Saudis let it be known – this is hearsay, but I think it's reasonable – to President Carter that they wanted someone who they could trust had the ear of the president, and that's the reason why Ambassador West came there.

Q: Because Carter of course had been the governor of Georgia and they both talk southern.

PIERCE: They both talk southern and West was a very sort of traditional man, very country gentleman, filled with anecdotes. He constantly liked saying that we've got the same traditional values – they revere family values just like we do; they're just like people at home.

Q: Well, in a way there was at a certain level a concurrence. You know, I mean two greatly different cultures but…

PIERCE: No, I agree. Being from Georgia I can understand the point and I can understand the message behind it.

Q: Well, what was the feeling? You were there for a while with West. Was he getting the message across?

PIERCE: He was getting the message across. He had very good contacts. One of the things I used to do was translate presidential correspondence – letters from the king to the president. I wouldn't presume to translate English into Arabic – but one of my jobs was whenever we had to get in touch with the king, we'd use a man in the palace in Jeddah. That always worked well. Then whenever I had to get in touch with the crown prince, the ambassador had a very special relationship with the crown prince through his office, through his special assistant, and the crown prince was always available. The oil minister was always available. Other key ministries were always available and it was a constant, I think, back and forth dialogue which continues. It was very obvious during the Gulf War and during the war with Iraq and when I was there in the '90s, but I think we've never had a communications problem with the Saudis.

Q: Who was the Saudi ambassador in the United States at the time?

PIERCE: The man's name was Faisal Alhegelan.

Q: He was later replaced by Prince Bandar.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: But that was later on.

PIERCE: I don't remember exactly when Bandar took over. Maybe by '83, I'm not sure.

Q: Yes. Well, we can talk about that the next time around because at least my interview with Hume Horan was that he felt that Bandar was not a positive influence. I don't know.

PIERCE: Bandar, before being ambassador, and certainly while ambassador, was readily available here in Washington, and before, in Saudi Arabia. Although – I've met Bandar once – he had a habit of disappearing for long periods of time whenever. *(laughs)* I mean for whatever reason; sometimes it seemed politic as far as he was concerned.

Q: How did a female officer work within that society? Because I would think this would be a great problem.

PIERCE: I had more experience in dealing with that when I was the political-military counselor in Riyadh.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up the next time.

Was there much social intercourse with the Saudis during off-duty hours and that sort of thing?

PIERCE: Not really. I was able to develop social ties with about two or three. Other people who had served in the kingdom 10, 15 years earlier, used to speak of how easy it was to have social intercourse with Saudis and to meet their Saudi wives. I knew one Saudi family – an entrepreneur – met his father. I may have met his wife, I don't remember. For some reason I got attached to him. He was trying to convince the kingdom to build a state-of-the-art oil spill containment operation. A very impressive man. I also knew another Saudi who was a businessman – met his Egyptian wife and his family and had several contacts with him. These are the only two that I knew in a more relaxed, just social, environment. Although you would meet young Saudis from time to time, you would meet Saudis at official functions, and I also had a different set of contacts or approaches in Riyadh during the Gulf War, during the war with Iraq.

Q: In 1983 is there anything else we should discuss do you think?

PIERCE: About the kingdom?

Q: Yes, at that time.

PIERCE: One other thing – and this is just an observation – I studied very carefully the royal family and I also studied, to the degree I could, the religious establishment. One of the things we were interested in there was an upsurge – the beginning upsurge at the time – as King Khalid was an interim king anyway. He was there to be supplanted by King Fahd – Fahd did a lot of the decision making for Khalid. But there was an upswing of religious strength – hardcore, Wahhabi strength – in the kingdom, which had persisted although I don't know what the state of it is today.

It was my theory – and I could see this happening – that when you had a king who was strong in religious values, who had a good religious education and was incorruptible, or could make the case that he was incorruptible, he was in a position to subvert, to twist, and to dominate the religious side. King Abdul Aziz, the founder of the kingdom, was that way. When you had a king who was overtly corrupt, pliant, and not religiously educated, the religious people took a swing up and became more present in terms of policy making, which you could see happen under King Saud. When King Faisal took over from King Saud, he had more of the qualities of King Abdul Aziz and the religious leadership went into eclipse. King Faisal was assassinated and King Khalid came in. Khalid was not particularly corrupt in the real sense of the word, nor do I recall him being any great Islamic scholar, but Crown Prince Fahd certainly had an image more closely resembling Saud, I think, in the common view of things, than say Faisal. And you could see the religious infrastructure beginning to take more control over social policy.

Q: Was this "alumna" or whatever you pronounce it?

PIERCE: Well we worried more on the upswing which is always the foreign preoccupation in Riyadh, or in Saudi Arabia, of the "mutaween," the volunteers, the religious believers. But also the sense of the steps taken to curtail girls' education, the steps taken to assure that women remain in a secluded place, the steps taken to make it more difficult for expatriates to live, in terms of fasting during Ramadan, basically just hardening of religious attitudes. And these things seemed to get stronger when Fahd took over.

Q: Were you able to monitor this? I'm just wondering how as a political officer, would one monitor?

PIERCE: I had some very good contacts – not Saudis – who followed the religious leadership very closely. And one monitors this by paying attention to the promotion list or who is promoted into what positions in the Ministry of Justice.

Q: Sort of criminology in a way. (laughs)

PIERCE: More or less. Then you find out where this fellow fits in, the approach and the attitude, or you find out what he's spearheading in terms of trying to get through certain policies, or how he participated in a certain "fatwa" (religious edict). You might recall that when the Saudi military did assault the mosque in Mecca to get rid of the abhorrent takers of the mosque, they had a fatwa.

Q: That's a religious…

PIERCE: That's an opinion issued by prestigious religious leadership, most prestigious. And you look at who signs these things.

Q: Sort of like a Papal bill in a way.

PIERCE: More or less.

Q: Well, of a different nature, but the basic thing is this is…

PIERCE: When I was in Jeddah before there was a religious moderate of immense learning who had been promoted highly by King Faisal, and then under King Khalid he had been shunted off into a sinecure and his position had been supplanted. His successor, in terms of religious influence, had a more conservative bent. He was a very interesting man.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll put at the end in 1983 you were where?

PIERCE: Sudan.

Q: Sudan. So you were known as a hot weather man. (laughs)

PIERCE: *(laughs)* I was known for someone whose assignment sheet went to hell. Khartoum kept coming up as empty and I wanted a place to go. I didn't know what the hell I was getting into.

Q: So we're off to Khartoum in 1983.

PIERCE: Yes. I left Jeddah in 1983 and was transferred to Sudan.

Q: You were in Sudan until when?

PIERCE: 1985.

Q: When you went to Sudan the embassy was located in Khartoum, is that right?

PIERCE: Yes it is.

Q: Was there any problem getting the assignment, or was this sort of here you are an Arabist and you'd obviously played with the desert and so you were acclimated and all that.

PIERCE: At the time the political section chief position in Sudan was not being filled. It was an O-1 position, I was an O-3 at the time. It was continually advertised.

Q: When you say "advertised"?

PIERCE: For assignments. No one was interested in it. When my original bid list, which certainly did not include Sudan, fell apart, in a peak of frustration I let it be known, after seeing Sudan open, was there any interest in me and I was assigned there within 24 hours.

Q: In the corridors and in the Arab circuit did Sudan have a reputation, or a plus, minus, anything like that?

PIERCE: Over the years that I've been associated with NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs), countries along the fringe of the Arab world are hard to fill. There's always a tendency on the part of the desk to say, "Well it will hold you in good stead. This is an Arabic assignment," etcetera, etcetera, and, "It will increase and broaden your experience." Well it certainly does that from a straight functional aspect. Learning about Sudan certainly helps you understand more about the Arab world to a degree, but in the sense of bolstering your credentials or giving you a broader sort of portfolio, in mainstream NEA it never really had any effect at all.

Q: So Sudan was somewhat on the periphery of NEA?

PIERCE: It wasn't even on the periphery. It was barely on the scope. One of the key issues that you can see in Sudan, in respect to Egypt primarily, is that Sudan is not the source of most of the Nile water, but most of it is coming out of Ethiopia through the Blue Nile. But it has a tremendous impact on the water downstream. Therefore in the long run it is a critical issue for Egypt's survival. Yet, in looking at the cable traffic over those two years and from what I could glean in terms of attitudes in Egypt, as far as NEA was concerned, yes, it was an important issue but not anywhere close to driving the NEA list of priorities for Egypt or North Africa.

Q: Well now Sudan fell into the AF Bureau – the African Bureau?

PIERCE: Yes it did. Always was.

Q: So you went out there in 1983. What was the situation both internally in the Sudan and then we'll talk about relations with the United States. But first internally.

PIERCE: Internally. Those two questions are intertwined.

Q: Okay.

PIERCE: The key issue for Sudan at the time, although there were a lot of side issues that seemed to be more important, was internal stability. In the summer of 1983, Nimeiry, who had been in since the '70s, maybe even earlier, had over the years slowly corrupted the system which started out in a so-called semi-democratic mode, so that he became the autocrat in charge of government. He had been in position to co-opt and to divide, to segregate, sometimes arrest and fire, people who earlier on were seen as his equal. He behaved as a primus inter pares, to the effect that he alone made decisions. And he made some very bad ones.

Basically his actions had alienated the south starting a few years earlier. It had always seemed to have been in his mind ultimately to utilize resources from the south for the good of the north, which is basically the Arab north versus the black south. He had begun to take these steps. Most notably he had incurred sufficient anger amongst southern soldiers in the military, that in the person of John Garang they began a small movement known as the SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Army), which ultimately was to take on extreme significance in the south as an insurrection or resistance movement. Just as I had come there it was not quite so obvious how that was going to work. Ultimately it worked quite well for the resistance in the south. Also, shortly after I got there, he began his long and somewhat twisted enamorment with Islam to the effect that he began a series of steps making Sudan an Islamic state, the effect of which is still quite visible today.

The country was economically a basket case and, as I recall – I'm not an economist – there was no positive forecast when I got there, and it worsened as I continued on, through mismanagement and extreme Sudanese cultural policy from the very beginning.

Whenever you think of Sudan today, as well as then, its grinding poverty, natural disasters, political disasters, military disasters always beset the country. When you would think that Sudan couldn't get any worse, it did. And this apparently continues.

Q: Let's talk a little about the internal structure. In the first place what interest did we have there?

PIERCE: We had a very close, strong relationship with the Nimeiry government. The official approach that the embassy had adopted, and was adopted in Washington, was that Sudan, being so large, so mammoth, was key to stability across a significant portion of Africa. Looking at every country that Sudan touches, you take in a large part of the land area of Africa. Consequently, were it to turn unstable, it could be seen as a source of ready instability that could affect other countries. It was looked upon as having the potential of great agricultural prosperity. It reminds one of the turn of phrase – Sudan is a country of the future, it was always a country of the future, and it always will be a country of the future. But we had a very strong interest. We were very close to the government in all aspects. We had a close military relationship, modest given the state of security assistance worldwide, but close. And there was also ready access to the highest circles of government.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

PIERCE: Hume Horan had gotten there shortly before I did.

Q: How did he run the embassy?

PIERCE: He was a strong proponent of the American-Sudanese tie, and was keenly interested in giving as much support to an obviously weakening central government as possible, simply because I think the cost of it failing was very difficult to comprehend on our part. He was very proactive, which I think is his reputation, and looked for a constant need for trying to find ways to bolster it politically and economically, and through a large aid program.

Q: What was your job?

PIERCE: I was the political section chief. We would answer the mail. In essence, of course, most foreign policy initiatives – almost all of them – were under the ambassador. The bilateral dialogue with the head of government with the various ministers was very, very closely followed and spearheaded by the ambassador, which is as it should be. I was in charge mainly of looking at internal stability, cultivating disparate views, and there were beginning to emerge more outspoken personalities at the time, and also doing the day to day foreign affairs work that embassies do.

Q: Well, Hume Horan was an Arabist, too, wasn't he?

PIERCE: Yes he was.

Q: Who was the DCM?

PIERCE: The first DCM was Jack Davison who later went on to be ambassador in an AF country I forget. He was replaced shortly after I got there by David Shinn.

Q: What was his background?

PIERCE: David was an Africanist. I think Jack was as well. David went on to be ambassador in a couple of places – I think most recently Ethiopia and he's just retired.

The other side of the story – the international aspects of this at the time – which helped obviously solidify our approach to Sudan is that it was reamed with difficulties. Reamed may be too big a word. There was the very strong resistance in Ethiopia, especially the Eritrean resistance movement. On the other side there was the Chadian war, the Chadian rebellion, which was on and off all the time, and then of course Libya with its long-time extreme fascination with Sudan. Oftentimes Libyan attempts to undermine stability there, to create national resistance movements within Sudan and in effect to try to bring off as much instability in the country as possible.

Q: When you look at the Sudan it's got nine neighbors.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: It's the African equivalent to Brazil really.

PIERCE: Absolutely.

Q: Big and all these neighbors, and of course a lot of them are not the most easy to deal with. You were dealing with the internal side. How did you deal with, in the first place, the North – the Arab portion? I mean these are the ruling people.

PIERCE: Well, firstly, there's a qualification here. The so-called Arab portion is mainly Arab oriented. They are of mixed descent and as it came to be known to me over a period of time, they thought of themselves as being looked down upon by Arabs because they were Africans, although so-called mainstream Africa – black Africans – tended to see them as Arabs. They were a mixture. While Arabic was the lingua franca of the north, and to some degree in the south, almost always as far as I can recall, North Sudanese were not raised initially on Arabic, but on a local dialect which I don't believe there were a lot of Semitic features to. You had ethnic groups cross the north, but they all had a common bond of being so-called Arabs, of speaking Arabic in great degree, and of being Muslim which set them off from the south, which, although there's a tendency to look upon the south as Christian to a degree, to a large extent was animist, and very definitely part of black Africa. Several, several linguistic groups there – many of them mutually

antagonistic.

And then, geographically, topologically, the south had a distinct, decidedly different aspect. The north was dry, the north was quite arid, not unlike the Sahel, basically desert and rock. The south was in large degree a slough, the point where the White Nile river basin and adjoining rivers ran through a large flat plain and created a tremendous swamp. That's the reason why it was so hard for European explorers to penetrate the source of the Nile from that direction. And with the very tip of it, southern Sudan, being very verdant, not unlike Uganda in some way – a very, very beautiful lush area; equatorial.

Q: In this '83 to '85 period, was there an actual war going on between the north and the south or was it a subliminal level of violence?

PIERCE: Shortly before I got there, as I said, a colonel of some stature in the Sudanese military was so alienated by Nimeiry's policies in the south that he basically deserted and began forming the SPLA. I think prior to that the south was always permeated and penetrated by local gangs, and weapons were increasingly easy to obtain. Suddenly the SPLA became first among equals amongst these gangs; and with an announced political position was in a position to capitalize on Nimeiry's stumbles. Most notably the announcement of the beginning of implementing Islamic law in Sudan.

Q: Sharia law.

PIERCE: Sharia law. Their version of it; it's not Sharia law. It was certainly a tremendous boon to the growth of the SPLA. Within a very short time the SPLA or related gangs, with very, very quick ease, cut off two of Khartoum's major initiatives in the south. There was an attempt to straighten the White Nile with a gigantic cutting wheel that was going to vastly increase the amount of water going up north, ultimately into Egypt, and bring about – in somewhat perhaps questionable forecasts – an agricultural revolution in the south. It was a gigantic wheel under contract of a French firm but it was attacked. As I recall perhaps several people were killed. The Europeans were able to get out safely after a lot of close brushes, but the project was in effect dead.

Farther north on the border between South and North Sudan on another river – again an area of the White Nile – Chevron was in beginning exploration mode for oil drilling in the area. A very sensitive issue since earlier attempts by the Khartoum government, i.e. Nimeiry, to take the area affected and redraw the map making it part of the north. They had a large ferry positioned on the river which was their base camp, and in the middle of the night a group of armed resistance leaders, or gang, got onto the boat, killed several of the expatriates there and basically shut down the operation. So very quickly two promising projects for the future were put on hold. Indefinitely in the South, more likely forever; and in the North, temporarily, which was to last two years.

Q: Was this sort of "Damn you up in the north, no matter what you do," or was there a purpose in these attacks?

PIERCE: That's hard to say. Whether at the time there was enough cohesion within southern resistance to see a grand design. Following, over the two years, the ebbing and flowing of combat, of attacks, sometimes you'd get the impression of cohesion, other times you didn't. Certainly over the years it's obvious that the SPLA had primarily Dinka tribesmen at its head, although it reached out and sought to embrace other significant tribes. Nuer and Shilluk which were closer to Ethiopia and farther north than Dinka. You never got the impression of how totally cohesive they were within the SPLA cause, simply because of the ethnic issue of Dinka versus other significant tribes. It was very difficult to put a finger on it. There were Nuer and Shilluk that you could meet in Khartoum, but the predominant Africans that were there that were political contacts were either Dinka or, on the other side of the coin, from the far South. From Equatoria. The equatorial area was filled with large numbers of tribes – several – and there was no predominating people from Equatoria.

In large part, Nimeiry co-opted southerners in the '70s to become part of his regime and was oftentimes in position to use them to give his regime a sort of legitimacy throughout Sudan. By and large, by the time I got there in '83, the vast majority of these co-opted southerners who were still within the government were equatorial. Very few from the heartland of South Sudan, very few Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, although they were significantly seen throughout the city. One of the things I did in cultivating the opposition, or in trying to talk with people holding disparate views, was to cultivate ties to ex-politicians, mostly southerners at the time. I found very attractive, very articulate people with, in many cases, a very broad view of what the problem was in Sudan. Most preeminent amongst them was a man named Abel Alier who had been Sudan's vice president at one time. He just had extremely good vision about the problems that Sudan was going to face. At the time it was more difficult to find northerners who were outspoken about Nimeiry with the ambassador. Ambassador Horan wanted very much to cultivate other political types who were in or just around the government, or who was in opposition to it. And with his name I would set up meetings which he and I would go to, most notably with Hassan Turabi who at the time was not in government and was reasonably sharp and critical of Nimeiry.

Q: Were we trying to act as an intermediary in maybe an informal way between the north and the south and trying to say, "Come on fellows, get your act together" or…

PIERCE: That's a hard question to answer. I did not have any dialogues with Gaafar Nimeiry and you know our policy in Khartoum in terms of its internal affairs was set by Gaafar Nimeiry and no one else. His vice president, the deputy prime minister Omar al-Tayib, had little influence, as far as I could tell, over how he managed internal affairs. We – again, I never did – had frequent meetings with him. I'm not sure how much of an impact any dialogue that we had with him made on the overall approach. But I think there were some attempts to steer Nimeiry or to question him, to probe the wisdom of his policy, but he was hell bent. Also he was a survivor essentially. He had gone through the revolutionary councils and one by one the other partners were weeded out and he had

twisted and turned and shaped personalities within his government so that he was the one who knew how to handle things in Sudan. It was very difficult, I think, for anyone to convince him of anything regarding the wisdom of how he ran the internal politics of the country.

Q: Later we were inundated by pictures of tremendous starvation. Was that happening at that time, which seemed to be a result of the war?

PIERCE: Two different starvation situations. The first one, which is the inundation, was the Eritrean problem where you had the Eritrean refugees coming out and setting up camps all along the eastern side, primarily along the Red Sea coast.

Q: Was this during your period?

PIERCE: Yes it was. And the second one, which was happening just as I was leaving, was a massive shortage of food mainly in central West Sudan, across Sudan, which was internal. And as I was leaving, AID was in the process of setting up massive supplies of food. Now the Eritrean refugee issue – the one that got all the prominence – we had an awful lot of special delegations, primarily from Congress, coming in essence to look at the Eritrean imbroglio. But it had little effect on stability or on politics. I do know something about it because we did have a refugee officer who later got into some notoriety as I was leaving and my wife worked for him during the Eritrean crisis in the refugee office. They also had a number of refugee officers on TDY who came out and stayed in Khartoum for long periods of time. People were dying; it was a tremendous tragedy. But it was not a focus that I had. It had really no political effect except along the immediate border, and also obviously our relationship with Sudan and with Ethiopia at the time.

Q: What about along the Red Sea and towards that area of Sudan, what was happening there?

PIERCE: Well, this again was near the border with the Eritrean homeland and a favorite point of where refugees came out, where many of the groups who were interested in kicking Ethiopia out of Eritrea had contacts and some supplies. So that was the main issue along the Red Sea, south of Port Sudan.

Q: Was the Sudanese government playing any role in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war?

PIERCE: I touched on that very slightly. There was some support that was allowed by the Sudanese, but it was an issue more associated with Ethiopia than it was with Sudan.

Q: You mentioned that the head of refugee operations for us gained some notoriety. What happened there?

PIERCE: This is the famous evacuation of Falasha Jews out of Ethiopia and the use of

Sudanese airfields to cart them off, which occurred in April or May, of 1983 and was done apparently with the okay of Gaafar Nimeiry and was facilitated in large part by the refugee officer in concert with other offices.

Q: Did this cause any political ripples within Sudan when it became known?

PIERCE: Ultimately it did. In the waning days as Nimeiry began to get weaker and weaker, this issue was just one more that his critics used to make the case that he was unable to rule and was erratic. It was also seen as making more obvious what had always been the case – you always heard Sudanese say this – that he was a tool of the U.S., and of Israel, and therefore no longer should be running the country. I think it also had the effect of making it more difficult for Nimeiry's friends in the Arab world to come to his defense.

Q: What about relations with Egypt at this time? Is this something that we were watching?

PIERCE: We always watched it, especially from Sudan. It was quite obvious to me over the years that Egypt has always been the Sudanese big brother, has always been in a position to try to guide Sudan – from time to time perhaps not so skillfully and looking awfully clumsy in trying to impose its guidance on Sudan. Then at other times to be more cautious when some of their actions look excessive and they run the risk of hurting the relationship. It struck me shortly after I got there, once when Mubarak came to visit Nimeiry, Nimeiry gave an address to the speaker of the house in Khartoum – the legislative body – and it was interesting because you saw Nimeiry giving the speech and behind him, one step up on the podium, was a place where other people were sitting and behind Nimeiry, almost immediately over his head, was the big, large face of Mubarak. It seemed to me to sort of tell it all. The relationship went up and down, and the Egyptians quite often were very cautious and worried that they would strain the relationship too much.

Q: What about Libya? I mean this must have been something everybody was looking at.

PIERCE: From time to time, there would be so-called Sudanese resistance, or Sudanese opposition to Nimeiry, who, because they had no other way of expressing their opposition, ended up in Libya and were trained, funded, and ultimately came back to carry out whatever wicked plans they had cooked up. Quite obviously these were purely initiatives funded by Qadhafi, even to the degree in many cases that the so-called formation of these groups was not spontaneous at all. I am not aware of how close any of these so-called operations might have come to success. There were a couple of attempts against our embassy – ultimately they were basically neutralized. It didn't seem that it was a very competent group of people.

This whole intrigue issue with Libya started off much earlier. Libya had always been seen as a source of refuge – Sadiq al-Mahdi, who was president in the mid-'60s and deposed,

used Libya as a refuge for a long period of time. This is one reason why Sadiq, who was certainly around when I was there, was looked upon with great suspicion by Nimeiry and for most of the time was in jail.

Q: What was your impression and maybe the embassy impression of Nimeiry at that time?

PIERCE: That's an interesting question. I think the embassy was interested primarily in assuring our continued relationship with Nimeiry because the consequences of his elimination were difficult to envision. At the same time it became increasingly apparent that Nimeiry was more and more erratic and losing touch with reality. Furthermore, that this was being reflected by most Sudanese. That attitude was just very pervasive. You could see in this in terms of looking at Nimeiry and his characteristics. His fascination with Islam persisted throughout the two years that I was there until he was toppled in, I think, May of '85.

He began to embrace a form of Sufism. Sufism is very strong in Sudanese Islam and that began to invade and taint his policies. He elevated a number of so-called Sufi leaders of not great repute in local circles to become his palace advisors. They had little or no political imagination whatsoever. He instituted a new constitution for the country in which he calls himself – the term in Arabic is "Ameer El Mo'omineem" – the prince of the believers, which is a title more relevant to the 7th-century than it is to the modern world. In essence, despite his protestation that the south had nothing to worry about in terms of Islam, he began a step-by-step process of making them worry even more about what the position of the south would be under Islamic Sudan, and also making more people worried about his sanity.

The other thing he did was his so-called implementation of Sharia law, which to him was Islamic punishments, most notably, the cutting off hands for thievery. Shortly after I'd gotten there he'd outlawed alcohol, had a big ceremony throwing several hundred bottles of booze into the Nile River. And indeed it dried up. Then he began to study and ultimately implement the Islamic Sharia law. Once it was fully implemented it was taken on with a real passion. There is a major prison just on the outskirts of Khartoum, which I seem to recall was circular or it might've been square, in a plain area, and in the middle of that there's a yard and they constructed a large platform and off the top of the platform was going to be the place that you would implement Sharia law. This came to be ultimately a Friday showplace, where anyone who had been caught and sentenced under Islamic court which he had set up, by Islamic judges that he had set up with a little training in Islam, where the hands would be severed. On Fridays you would have thousands of people gather around the prison to view the severing of hands. And it got to the point that the platform had to be raised higher so that the more people who came in on Fridays to watch could have the view. And at least on one or two occasions, if not more, every Friday as the hands would be severed, the severer or a functionary in that group of office would take the severed hand and parade it around the wall. This was an extreme great sport for people who came to watch on Friday.

Another interesting part of this was the execution of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha who was called an Islamic brother. He had been a thorn in Nimeiry's side since even before Nimeiry took over in his coup. He's always been an Islamic revolutionary who was interested in seeing more of the ecumenical aspects of Islam, looking at greater toleration, and over the course of years had developed a theology of Islam that was not mainstream. He was always a sharp critic. At the time he was 70-years-old there was a decision made that he had to be arrested, and he was, and charged with apostasy and convicted in one of these special courts in Khartoum. A 70-year-old man for his apostasy and his heresy was convicted and sentenced to death – that was death by crucifixion – and the saving grace under this Sudanese criminal process at the time is that they were not going to crucify Mohammad Taha, the 70-year-old man, at Kober Prison. What they did was they took him out and they hung him and after that they were supposed to hang him on a cross and let his body stay there for a period of time. Apparently Nimeiry wasn't, as I recall, in the city at the time – he might not have been in the country – and after they hung him some of his two Sufi presidential advisers were there and the prison warden was going to bury him and the little Sufi advisors came up and said, "But you can't do that; you have to hang him on the cross," and to his credit the warden said, "No, we've done enough to Mr. Taha. We don't need to do any more." And he was not left hanging for a while on the cross.

The human rights situation in Sudan, specifically, was unimaginable. I had done human rights reports in Saudi Arabia and at the time just shortly after they were implemented I felt they were a waste and a bother and a nuisance, and put myself in a reasonably good position to defend the way the Saudis approached their version of human rights at the time. But it was looking at these excesses and just the sheer disregard for human dignity that changed my entire attitude on human rights. The human rights movement was not sufficiently advanced enough to make this a strong source of pressure.

Q: While this was going on was there any diminution of our contacts with the Nimeiry government? I'm thinking particularly from Washington or anything like that.

PIERCE: Not that I'm aware of. Ironically our long dialogue with Nimeiry culminated with his visit to Washington for a Reagan meeting just as he was losing power. In fact the day he fell he was on his way back from that Washington visit. Again, I think throughout this time there was pressure, on Nimeiry, in dealing with the South, and to some degree in terms of human rights. But we were always met with, "I know what I'm doing," and "I've been around." It seemed his emphasis on Islam was a pretext to cover his human rights violations so he would just move on to something else. And we did have a busy bilateral relationship with him in respect to what we would like to see with Egypt, to the general Arab agenda, to Chad, and to Eritrea-Ethiopia, and to Libya.

Q: I remember around 1948 or so Sudan was the crown jewel in the British colonial system. Really the top colonial officers went there. The Sudanese people responded. I mean it wasn't all British; it was the fact that they had a very receptive group of leaders

and all that. By the time you got there in '83, had that all collapsed?

PIERCE: The erosion of all of that began in the '50s, after Sudan became independent and it was just a very slow grind down farther and farther; political ineptitude, economic grand schemes that never worked – the gigantic cotton schemes that never worked. The horrific amount of world bank loans that had been given to Sudan were obviously part of all of this. By the time I had gotten there, and for some years before, Sudan had been seen as basically down at the bottom. The infrastructure that the British had built up as late as '56, well, after 25 years you've got to do something to it to keep it running. In essence there wasn't a lot of it.

Q: Well, what about the people? Was there an educated class there – maybe European educated or American educated – that one could deal with, and did they have any role?

PIERCE: Oh, in the sense of my contacts, the opposition – that's what you first look for. You look for the educated southerner who is a lawyer, you look for the guys who spent time in Saudi Arabia or in Egypt and had been educated there, the politician who was a grantee three years previously in America. These are the people you find. Some of them move very educated, yet there was no sense of common purpose in toppling Nimeiry. The way he ultimately fell was through a combination of economic mistakes and riling up sectors in both labor and students at the same time; ultimately as he was just collapsing.

It was very strange because the day that he left to go to America the ambassador had already gone back – as all ambassadors will – for a presidential visit. I went out with the chargé, David Shinn, to go to the airport to see Nimeiry off. I was going to stand in back and Nimeiry was going to go shake hands with all the ambassadors and with his ministers and leave. Well, the city had already started having problems. The students were in the streets, and there were labor problems. The airport is sufficiently close to town, not that far away. I'm standing near our car while all of the ambassadors line up and the ministers are out there, and Nimeiry drives up. In the background you can see puffs of smoke coming from the city where cars are burning in the streets. And they stand around and then Nimeiry comes up. He comes out in dark sunglasses with a turtleneck sweater on, goes and jokes with all of his ministers, and this smoke is coming up behind him, and then he finally gets on the plane and flies off – never to come back.

It was just a very, very stark, unimaginable situation to me. Then we drove back into the city, which was slipping farther and farther into a ruinous situation. The telling event was when the electrical workers struck, consequently shutting off Khartoum's sporadic electrical supply. When the judges announced that they, too, would join the electrical workers in a massive demonstration in the middle of town immediately other groups joined the opposition, which was growing by the day, announcing that they, too, would join in the demonstration. This was to happen on a Friday. It was on a Wednesday, I believe, when it became obvious that this was going to occur. And Nimeiry's vice president had already announced that he would shoot them all in the streets. There was a parallel between this strike situation and the situation in 1958 where the then elected

president was toppled – almost an exact replication. We sent a cable in saying that Nimeiry's chances of containing his government looked very slim.

Q: And he was meeting with President Reagan?

PIERCE: The cable was received two hours before his meeting with the president.

Q: President Reagan, yes.

PIERCE: *(laughs)* It didn't matter. I think my cable would not have affected anything. The situation had changed so dramatically when the massive amount of people went on strike, and were determined to have the demonstration. When that all coalesced within three days before the event announced for Friday, the coalescence was so pervasive, we knew it was not going to be a typical crisis like those Nimeiry had weathered in the past. There's been some speculation, I think, that had Nimeiry been there he might've been in a position to save himself – to save the regime – but he lost power because he wasn't there, and his vice president had not been chosen because he was a leader. Nimeiry had basically weeded efficiency out of government, so there was really no one of sufficient skill to manage such a situation. Now, as you might know, on the Friday, that night basically, there was an in-house coup. A revolutionary command council – I seem to recall five top generals – had decided to take over the government. There was no demonstration the next day. The city was dead. Nimeiry tried to get back and was stopped by Mubarak in Cairo and has never set foot in the country again.

Q: When you say the military could stop it – you know once you crank up a demonstration, I mean were they able to go out and say, "We've done it?"

PIERCE: Nimeiry's gone. You don't need to demonstrate. I think there was some popular uproar in the city, but no massive protests. It wasn't that difficult, I think, to get the leaderships of these various groups to agree that the reason why they were demonstrating was Gaafar Nimeiry, and Gaafar Nimeiry was no longer there.

Q: Well now, you were there – just to set the framework – this disposition of Nimeiry happened when? And when did you leave?

PIERCE: It happened, as I recall, in May. I could be off a month. It might've been in June, but I think it was May. I left in July.

Q: You had been looking, as one does, I suppose, particularly in a country where you've got a one man government, you take a look at the military to figure out who these guys are and if you can get to them – because they're the most likely people to knock a guy off. Did we have any feel for who these people were, where they were going?

PIERCE: It's a very slow road, obviously, building up contacts that can give you insights into an issue like that. I think I had a reasonably good appreciation of what every element

of the embassy was thinking in this respect, but I also was in a position to develop my own outside capabilities. But the answer is we didn't know that concretely. I think by and large what you had – the CINC, or their version of the CINC, the commander-in-chief, the head of military there, Suar-el-Dahab, who had no ambitions whatsoever. That was a reasonably sure thing. In that country just like with every other position, Suar-el-Dahab got his position not because he was a dynamic leader; he got it because Nimeiry thought he was malleable. A lot of the other senior military had the same qualities. In other words, that's why they were put into their positions. But you had some indications that there may be some undercurrents or different agendas. At the time the general consensus was that these guys were in a tight spot and didn't know what to do. They could see the entire country falling into chaos – certainly the city – and the city was the country in the sheer sense of politics. They moved to stop that from happening.

It's a pretty reasonable assumption that the threat to shoot down the demonstrators on that Friday by the number two, Oman al-Tayib, would not have been carried out. There was a big question as to whether he even had the resolve to see it happen. But if he had done it, it would've produced chaos and I think the military leaders moved to forestall the chaos. Over the two months, and even afterward as I recall, they gave no impression of having their own agenda. What they were looking at was moving towards transitional rule. The other thing was that they didn't have a nuanced grasp of foreign affairs or an estimation of the threats around them. Their letting Libya open a new page in the relationship – in other words, get close to them – was an extremely difficult issue and one that destabilized the city, destabilized certainly our relationship with Khartoum. Ultimately, as you might remember, it led to the installation of a little Libyan friendship society in North Khartoum, I think, and ultimately into the shooting of one of our employees at the embassy on the streets of Khartoum in the middle of the night. And the evacuation.

Q: But that was after you left?

PIERCE: Just after I had left.

Q: While you were there, what about security? I mean we had had the killing by the PLO of Curt Moore and Cleo Noel. That was when?

PIERCE: I have to look it up.

Q: Yes. But that was some years before.

PIERCE: Much earlier.

Q: I remember, just as a Foreign Service Officer, sitting off God-knows-where, feeling no great love for Nimeiry because he let the assassins leave.

PIERCE: Nimeiry's international approach had changed by the time I got there from having a leftist tinge when he first took over and then he became allied with more radical

Islamic causes. He then evolved into being a close friend of America, which he was at that time, with a demonstrated desire to stop Qadhafi – a common bond with us. So we had a very different attitude. This earlier history was always a sore spot, but the bilateral relationship had moved much farther beyond his espousal of radical causes. He was very, very helpful and supportive of us, and saw us as central to Sudan's future. Sudan is not unlike a lot of countries, except that its size is so large and diverse. Not just the south, but also the west, and the east, and the central south. All these areas, some with a greater history of autonomy than others, had their own sense of identity.

Q: What about personal security while you were there? Was this a consideration?

PIERCE: I felt no problems at all in Sudan, never. Except in the south, which I visited in a UN (United Nations) plane three times, I think. And that was a problem simply because the SPLA riddled the towns – especially the town of Wau, which I visited twice – with its own people and you just didn't feel overly secure there in the middle of what's called the "tweesh" which is the flat slough of the White Nile there. In a more professional sense, we were all very much worried about security. There were, as I suggested, Libyan-trained Sudanese who were avowedly planning to commit violence in Sudan against Sudanese targets as well as American targets. So, yes, there was a security issue, but personally I did not feel a problem.

Q: Then you left there in '85.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: To go where?

PIERCE: I went back to the State Department and stayed at the State Department for four years.

Q: So that would be '85 to '89?

PIERCE: '89, yes.

Q: What were you doing?

PIERCE: I had two assignments. The first was s the desk officer for Oman and Qatar in NEA Arabian Peninsula Affairs.

Q: So '85 to '87?

PIERCE: Yes. And then early '87 I transferred out a little bit early and became the deputy in the NEA Public Affairs Office, which was a specific office under NEA which managed the approach to MidEast issues for the Department: the public approach.

Q: Let's start with '85 to '87. Oman and Qatar.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: Why not the UAE (United Arab Emirates), too?

PIERCE: Just the way it worked out.

Q: Because Qatar sort of sticks up there and its next door neighbor is the UAE and then…

PIERCE: Quite frankly the next door neighbor that it loves to hate is Bahrain. Always.

Q: Yes. So you almost have to treat them separately, don't you?

PIERCE: You do treat them separately.

Q: I go back to my time in the late '50s when I covered Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States as the consular officer there and we did that out of Tehran. Well let's talk about Qatar first. What was the situation in Qatar in this period and what were we up to?

PIERCE: Qatar at the time was seen simply as a backwater in the Arab world and in the Gulf. It had potential natural gas resources. I believe at the time its oil was beginning to level off or go down. It certainly was not seen as a place of the future for oil. Natural gas, on the other hand was different. You had extremely rich fields. But at the time natural gas was not a problem, not a crisis, and our interest in their natural gas exploitation, was not very high. It was sort of a non-descript member of the GCC (Gulf Cooperative Council), and of the Gulf community and the Arab world. It was just a member of the GCC.

Q: What was the situation on the Iran-Iraq War? Had that stopped by this time?

PIERCE: Not at all, but again, it was not of major consequence. It was a major concern to any Arab government in the Gulf, but not a major topic in our conversations with the Qataris.

Q: Did the tanker flagging and that sort of thing enter into anything there?

PIERCE: I think the tank flagging became more of an issue when I moved into my new position. I'm sure it did.

Q: Moving over to Oman, which of course is a bigger area, were we in the process of trying to turn it into a supply depot?

PIERCE: The Omanis certainly thought so. As you know, Oman is not a member of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and its oil production was

limited at the time and had little potential. It did not have the economic base of the other Gulf states; it did not have the same Arabic identity as the other Gulf states. It was trying to create an Arabic identity, which only began with the accession of Sultan Qaboos in '69. A significant number of Omanis did not use Arabic as their major language, their first language. That included the sultan as well as the minister of state for foreign affairs who was one of our closer colleagues. The use by President Carter of Omani landing fields for the botched attempt to rescue our hostages in Iran without informing the Omanis had caused a great crimp in our relationship. They also feared that our agreements to upgrade their military bases for our use would ultimately turn them into a parking lot for CENTCOM (U.S. Army Central Command), Tampa East.

When I got in, we saw Oman as critical – and our access agreement with them as a key to Gulf security, given our limited ability to get into the Gulf or use the facilities in the Gulf in the event of a crisis. What we were trying to do was to broaden the political relationship above and beyond simply a military one. We had been viewing the bilateral relationship almost entirely in military terms; we had no political dialogue with Oman beyond simply briefing them on what we were doing on other issues in the Middle East, mainly Iran and Iraq, or the Middle East peace process. The Omanis were very supportive of our attempts in the Middle East, and more hesitant, but at bottom supportive, of our approach to Israel-Palestine.

Q: The other huge war that was going on was the Iran-Iraq one.

PIERCE: They were most interested in that, but I think they were more cautious in approaching us over that.

Q: Well we had no role. What I'm saying is we were messing around and being kind of nice to Iraq and giving information and that sort of stuff.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: But I mean there wasn't a peace process as far as the United States was concerned.

PIERCE: No. The peace process I'm talking about is the Israeli issue, and they were very supportive of our efforts there. They never posed any of the great objections that you would see in any of the other Gulf States as to how we conducted the peace process. On the Iran-Iraq War they were much more interested in our assessment; they were far more guarded, I think, in the sense of what they believed, simply because they felt under the thumb of threat with either of the two sides.

We had almost no economic relationship with Oman except an oil one, and no assistance relationship. We had already begun certain things in trying to broaden our relationship, and one of them was that we started a very modest AID program – economic support funds (ESF). In essence we tried to modernize various parts of their society, but it's very difficult to sustain that, and at the time we were going through constant pressure to

change priorities in terms of security assistance as well as to cut. We'd also had earlier some military assistance loans, but the Omanis were hesitant to accept more of those simply because they were loans. While they weren't officially tied to the renewal of our access agreements, they were always, by implication, tied to them. Consequently, if we were to help more in terms of security assistance – economic support in this case, which does not have a military aspect – or with military grants, it was never spoken, but it was always difficult trying to work out all of the details in terms of access agreements – just what we were supposed to do to help upgrade their military facilities and what they were supposed to do in allowing us the actual access into their military bases. That was a very touchy issue. And basically less than two years into that job, I saw continued pressure to reduce the ESF. In essence we were able to keep reductions down from 20 to 15 million, not a lot of money, but it was a victory even keeping that and not getting it further cut. Ultimately I believe ESF was lost to Oman but then the whole situation in the Gulf changed.

Q: What about relations with Saudi Arabia, because back in my time the Saudis were not a very nice neighbor.

PIERCE: Well, no one is really a nice neighbor to anyone else on the peninsula. I mean Saudi Arabia had quarrels and quibbles with virtually every one of its neighbors in the peninsula. I'm trying to think if it had some with Bahrain. It's kind of hard maybe where that border is in the middle of the strait. I'm not aware of any with Kuwait, but certainly with the UAE (United Arab Emirates), with Qatar, with Oman, and with Yemen and PDRY (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) at the time. Yes, they always had problems. But there were also always problems among the others. There was some confusion over the Omani-UAE border and the fate of the Musandam Peninsula. The border between Dhofar, western Oman, and PDRY had been worked out as I recall but still obviously big questions remained between Oman and Saudi Arabia. But you'd get into that tremendous "little war that wasn't" between Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar Island and the future of that relationship. And the constant lambasting of the Al-Thani family in Qatar as being a bunch of nouveaus. Gangsters that the British had insinuated into Qatar in the 1880s, 1890s – very nouveau. Then a recollection by the Al-Thanis that the Bahrainis and the Al-Khalifahs used to be in Qatar until they were so weak that the Al-Thanis were able to kick them out 70 years before the Al-Thanis even came to power under the Brits. It's the nature of the beast there.

Q: And of course I don't know, but until about your time anyway the succession usually was doomed by assassination, usually by nephews knocking off uncles and that sort of thing. I mean in the Gulf area.

PIERCE: Well, yes. I mean Qaboos came in because his father was removed; because his father was a man of the 14th-century and was going to stay that way and the country needed to move on, apparently with the help of the British. The Al-Thani, was it Khalifa I forget, who was in Qatar was ultimately removed by his son. [Inaudible] keeps chugging along in Bahrain; you know the old belief had just died. The situation I think has

dramatically changed today.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: There are some very positive aspects, at least in Bahrain and in Qatar.

Q: The Yemen that bordered on Oman was a Marxist regime, wasn't it?

PIERCE: On and off, yes, it was. I mean historically it was. It became milder over the years. The Dhofari rebellion – and I would have to check my history books to see when the Dhofari rebellion occurred – the Dhofar being the most western part of Oman, basically it had a pretty good chance of moving along because that was the border adjacent to the PDRY.

Q: PDRY being?

PIERCE: The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen).

I'm trying to put the date on the Dhofar rebellion; it probably was just before Qaboos and just after Qaboos was in a position to resolve it. Qaboos' mother was from Dhofar, he had a number of ministers from Dhofar. There was great interest in Dhofar.

Q: Did we get involved at that time with looking at the Omanis? I'm talking about that time when you were dealing with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

PIERCE: I wasn't dealing with that.

Q: No, but I was wondering whether, on the Oman side, there was any concern during the time you were there?

PIERCE: I think they frequently had contacts with the PDRY, on a regular basis in trying to make sure that the border stabilized and stayed stable. As far as I know there was always a great concern, given the history of the PDRY and its total instability and radical bent. But I don't think there was any sign that it was exploiting instability into Dhofar or intended to do that. This was just before the PDRY became more seriously engaged in on-again, off-again talks across the border with North Yemen, and there was a lot of pressure from Saudi Arabia. This was just before the flirtation about reunification, leading up to what actually occurred over the next several years.

Q: You moved over to Public Affairs.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: PA (Public Affairs) and NEA, from '87 to '89. Were you sort of the peninsula man?

PIERCE: No. In that office there was a public affairs adviser and I was the deputy and there was one more Foreign Service Officer. There were three of us; we covered the entire gamut of NEA affairs. I was more comfortable with the Gulf and my boss was certainly more comfortable with the peace process.

Q: Who was that?

PIERCE: Arthur Berger, who had just come from being press officer in the embassy in Tel Aviv, so he certainly knew a lot about the situation. I was more comfortable with Iran-Iraq and didn't feel quite as comfortable about South Asia – Afghanistan and Pakistan nuclear issue. Regarding Libya we had an anti-terrorist approach. We all were responsible for knowing sufficiently enough about the bureau's issues that we could talk cogently and persuasively or write about our policy, as well as give background to press queries from anybody on any topic that we covered.

The way the daily process works is that the Department press spokesman's office would task the individual area bureaus to get answers to questions for the daily briefing. Those taskings would come at about seven in the morning, and you needed to develop guidances for the spokesman by eleven, eleven-thirty, or twelve – whatever the deadline is. It's a very, very tightly-packed day. Many of the public affairs bureaus would task these guidances out to the various offices in their bureau. If it happened to concern something about Japan you would send it to the Japan Desk and say, "Please give us an answer for it in Public Affairs."

We, by and large, wrote our own public affairs guidances and then let the appropriate office in the bureau clear it, to make sure we hadn't missed a nuance that they wanted to underline. Then it had to go through a rigorous series of clearances up to the deputy assistant secretary level, sometimes in various other bureaus, but certainly in our own bureau. That's a very tight schedule, and deadlines in public affairs are quite strong deadlines. The press spokesman can delay his briefing, but that is rare. The press spokesman would review every tasking that we had. He or his deputy would hold meetings with the deputy secretary of state who would put the final imprimatur on a piece of U.S. policy on whatever issue was pertinent on that day. Then they would hold the daily briefing. It makes for a very compacted and oftentimes frenetic day.

Q: Can you think of any particular issues that particularly got you engaged? I mean I'm sure there were issues every day. Were there ones that show the process?

PIERCE: That's hard to do. When the Intifada began in '88 or '89…

Q: This was the first stone throwing, particularly of young people, against Israeli troops within the Palestinian area.

PIERCE: That's correct. The problem with the Intifada was stones being thrown and the response by Israeli troops first with live ammunition, then with rubber ammunition.

Frequently we would try not to become involved in condemning one side or the other, or in a human rights situation or in response to specific situations. In other words, we didn't want to condemn Israel for excesses, but at the same time, as the Palestinian side became more and more amenable to peace and was more interested in taking constructive approaches, we did not want to condemn that side on its own. It's a complicated issue. Generally there was the perception that we were reluctant to push Israel in a public way.

With the Intifada we would try, when it became obvious that hard ammunition was being used against what, in essence, amounted to teenagers throwing rocks, we started pushing for guidances indicating that there was something wrong with using live ammunition in these instances. Our language would get neutralized but we kept pushing and ultimately I think it was obvious that we became far stronger in our public affairs pronouncements on the use of live fire, and also of time to time arbitrary use of rubber bullets, which also can kill.

One of the things that we had to do was to look at the media all of the time. We had CNN (Cable News Network) in our offices. One day at about four-thirty in the afternoon CNN broadcast the story of Iraqi gas attacks against the Kurds in Irbid and there were bodies in the middle of town. After we looked at that it took us a while to get across to a very preoccupied level above us in the hierarchy that this was important. Ultimately – it took some time – by seven o'clock that night we had begun to fashion our guidance basically expressing our extremely strong reaction against the use of gas on the Kurds. When something like that happens you're responsible to make sure it gets to the front office; you're responsible to make sure they, who are normally preoccupied with a host of other issues, know that this is a cutting issue and that we need to respond quickly and decisively in reacting to it. You'd get to the front office and you'd get the statement cleared there. Then you'd get that up to the press spokesman, even at seven o'clock at night. You'd do that.

Q: Well now, going back to the Intifada, this was in a way the first time I suppose you were up against I don't want to use the pejorative term but, basically the influence of the Israeli lobby on our policy wars.

PIERCE: No. It's not the Israeli lobby so much, but understandably when you're involved in promoting dialogue and trying to move towards some type of negotiation between two sides, you don't castigate one side and not the other. You castigate both of them equally – that's the cycle of violence argument – or you are more muted. Given our relationship with Israel there was always a predilection to give the benefit of the doubt in terms of Israelis on the ground calling the shots, or to look carefully when the facts suggested there was some egregious issue that our attention needed to be called to. A good example of that is the Security Assistance Act, where the issue of self-defense was always a factor in what we supplied people or foreign countries. Whenever Israel would make aircraft raids into Lebanon, by and large with our aircraft…

Q: And with our bombs.

PIERCE: And with our bombs, the question that would always come to the press spokesman was, isn't this a violation of the…

Tape 5, Side A

Q: It was an obvious violation, wasn't it?

PIERCE: I'm not going to make a judgment.

Q: Okay. (laughs)

PIERCE: That was not an issue that we had to work during my time in Public Affairs. Those issues happened primarily in the early '80s.

Another interesting area was Lebanon; I worked very closely with the Lebanese desk. In terms of internal Lebanese politics, one side or the other – mainly on the Lebanese Christian side – will always attempt to show themselves close to the Americans. This is a prominent political dynamic in Lebanon. Quite often we would learn about manipulation involving one side or the other, each trying to position oneself to become president or to have a better policy or to gain an advantage over an opposing side. Quite often I, with the Lebanese desk officer, would work up guidance which did not address a specific issue, but which would emphasize our position of basic neutrality and that we supported no one parenthetically; lack of preference for any simple person or group – like this guy who is exaggerating his ties with us. Now this type of guidance would never be asked for, so what you would do is call up one of your favorite Lebanese journalists and you would say, "If the question, whatever it is, were to be asked today, I think you might have a story."

Q: Yes. (laughs)

How about the tanker business – was that during your time?

PIERCE: Yes. This was one of the first times that we started a program of trying to bring out a public affairs policy that could be endorsed wholeheartedly by the front office, by the U.S. government, well in advance of actual events. We had very close coordination with DOD and worked out strategies to advance our views.

Q: Was the Stark incident?

PIERCE: Yes, it was. *(laughs)*

Q: How did that hit us? Could you explain what I meant by saying "the Stark" and its repercussions?

PIERCE: The Stark, as you know, was an American ship that was patrolling…

Q: A destroyer.

PIERCE: A destroyer that was patrolling in the Gulf. We got word of the Iraqi planes dropping a bomb that hit the Stark on a Sunday…

Q: Actually it was a missile.

PIERCE: Oh, yes. It was an Exocet. We got word of the incident on Sunday, and I was called in to the task force, starting I guess about seven o'clock that night. We worked for the next 18 hours on Stark, in essence trying to craft a public affairs strategy to use on Monday morning as well as to field queries. Information was quite sparse throughout the early part of the night – well, quite sparse throughout the whole night. At around two or three in the morning I was able to begin to craft what we needed to say to answer press queries and to have a framework for dealing with this. I'm an FSO-2 at the time, thinking about what we ought to say and what the people who will review it will accept. By say six-thirty in the morning someone – Chuck Redman for example, who was the spokesman at the time, or the deputy assistant secretary - will wander in to the task force and ask what's up. You'll have this in front of them so that they can begin to consider what other aspects to this issue, or other approaches, you need to take into consideration. You make changes, so that by seven or eight o'clock in the morning you have something fresh that the spokesman can begin using, though not in any official briefing. Later in the day, you're going to have official policy that addresses the issue.

Q: Well, I think it points out one of the interesting and often overlooked things about American policy. I mean long-term policy is long-term policy, but so much of what we're doing is reacting.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: And you're really at the raw cutting-edge of starting the policy process in Public Affairs.

PIERCE: That's true. The interesting thing is that you start with the short-term but you always have a long-term premise in mind. Now that long-term premise may be one that you inherited from statements that go back into time. Our approach to Jerusalem, our basic idea of dialogue in the Israeli-Arab peace issue. Or one that is just beginning, but will have a long future – and that could be our two flag policy, that could be our approach to the Iran-Iraq War. Often you will begin to think these things through and then you'd go and talk to the deputy assistant secretary involved in the issue, or the desk director, or the person you think has the initiative. You began to get maybe a different nuance and incorporate that into the way you want to work things. But yes, you'd begin to slowly evolve the policy, in a way that interacts, obviously, with how the principals want to deal with the issue.

In terms of producing a long-term policy I got the impression that it's very difficult to say on any given day what our policy is on anything. You've got a good feel for it, but until someone in authority actually says it, that's not our policy of the day, because there may be a nuance change.

Q: Just the way that we were sitting around reading who was standing where in the Kremlin and so on in the announcements in the Soviet newspapers, I mean it's got to be quite hard to figure out what the Soviets were up to, but there were other people who were looking at us trying to figure out what we're saying about things.

PIERCE: You have a general idea. The advantage of our approach is that we're consistent; we don't change.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: I mean, over a period of time you can begin to inject a nuance or the deputy secretary can inject a nuance, or you can have an event that will change things dramatically, but our blessing here is that there is a basic consistency, a basic tenet, in almost all aspects of policy. It will change visibly if it's going to change. I mean it's not going to be subtle – sometimes it happens that way, but…And then the nuance issue or how things develop, as in the Intifada, or as in the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) becoming more and more open to dialogue and ultimately a partner in the peace process in the late '80s – I saw that happen. These are significant shifts, but they're all grounded in the continuity of our policy in supporting peace, in trying to get a dialogue going and in trying to get terrorism out of the equation.

Q: Now again going back to the Stark, as I recall we more or less came down that this was an error rather than a deliberate policy. It made sense.

PIERCE: That's correct. It was an error. There was no other reason.

Q: It didn't make any sense at all; some Iraqi pilot had gone nuts.

PIERCE: We've got several things we would approach on that issue, but it's not a very complicated issue. Tragic, yes. Complicated, no. Number one, it's an error; number two, the Iraqis have apologized; number three, they had promised to pay for the damages; and number four, our position on the war between Iran and Iraq is unchanged. Those would be, as I recall, the tenets of the guidance. A number of variations would be applied, but those are your basic tenets. They've apologized, they will pay the damages, we're investigating obviously, our view on the Iran-Iraq War is unchanged. This is what you stick with. And you can answer just about any questions the press is going to come up with.

Q: How about India-Pakistan; what was happening there during this time?

PIERCE: At the time I don't recall anything happening there. The question about Pakistan and India – Pakistan primarily – which always came up was one of the issues we left to our experts, the nuclear capability issue. I think there were three pieces of legislation on the nuclear capability of Pakistan and presidential certification of continued assistance. Also, the Afghan war was winding down so that was a major factor. We had so many offices in the State Department and outside of it involved in the Afghan war that it was oftentimes difficult to get every clearance you might want. The other thing that did occur – and I'm trying to think exactly when it did, but I was in charge that day – was the crashing of the Zia ul-Haq's aircraft with our ambassador Arnold Raphel on it.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIERCE: I was on a task force and also was available for overnighting on that one. I think we were tentative on the reason for the crash. Ultimately, I seem to recall, it was proven that it was not sabotage.

Q: Yes. It was not.

PIERCE: I don't remember personally. The thing about incidents like this is that you never have a conclusion. The best investigations go on and on and you never know with precision how they turn out. Obviously there was an extreme amount of regret over the incident, and great sadness over Raphel. And there was the SAO, the security assistance officer, who was also on the plane, I seem to recall.

The core of our guidance was to emphasize the stability and continuation of our policy and strong relationship with Pakistan. There were variations, but that was the general thrust.

Q: Did you find a difference in dealing say with the relationship of the India-Pakistan side of NEA, which has now been split off, and the other part of it? Because I've heard that there's been problems with dealing with Iran-Iraq because so much of NEA has concentrated on the Israeli situation.

PIERCE: That's wrong, I think.

Q: And so when you get to Iran and Iraq and the Gulf, that's kind of out there; and then you move over to India-Pakistan. Did you find in getting clearances that the Indian-Pakistani people were saying, "Hey, pay some attention to us?"

PIERCE: No, on a daily basis Afghanistan, primarily, was an issue that always came up and it had very high visibility. Then the Pakistan issue was a constant one. One of the things you've got to look at is how we are driven. How does the press spokesman get these questions that he gives us everyday? Well, obviously if something major happened, he's going to want to know about it. But the way he usually does it is he has a corps of

press officers who've come in earlier in the morning and gone through every newspaper. From those newspapers and wire services they have come up with a host of tentative questions. Then the press spokesman looks at what they have produced, eliminates some, adds some, and then they're given to us. He basically is giving us questions based on what is happening in the world. If there is nothing that the media is concentrating on happening in India, we're not going to write guidances about India.

Q: You're not going to stir things up. (laughs)

PIERCE: No. Of course if a major event occurs like the gassing of the Kurds, is it our job to write press guidance? Or do we wait? Not at all. We have press guidance immediately written down. If something happens in a place in our region, it is part of our job is to find out what the issues are and to make sure that the State Department, up to the press spokesman and in the bureau, is aware of this before they're called and surprised by someone from the New York Times. We found at the time that when you took the Department press spokesman's hour-long briefing you could break it down by questions from the news media or by the amount of time that the spokesman would devote to topic "A" or "B," and oftentimes well over half the spokesman's time was devoted to Middle East issues – our issues.

Q: In a way because it's a nasty neighborhood; there are people beating up on each other.

PIERCE: Something happens; it's not boring.

Q: I mean in Europe things are generally settled; either that or all hell's going to break loose, which it hadn't for 50 years.

PIERCE: Absent something like Tiananmen Square, we have, usually, center stage on the news.

Q: Which is both enviable and not. Well I think this probably is a good place to stop and we'll pick this up the next time; 1989 you were?

PIERCE: Political-military. In Riyadh.

Q: You were a political-military officer in Saudi Arabia, that's right?

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: I'd just like to set the framework. Bill, you were in Riyadh from '89 to when?

PIERCE: I was in Riyadh for four years.

Q: So about '93.

PIERCE: ’93.

Q: Okay. Had Saudi Arabia changed much since you were there last?

PIERCE: The first issue of that nature that my family and I confronted was Riyadh. We had always nursed the vision of it being such a primitive outpost in the middle of the desert, with far more “Wahhabi,” or more puritanical sensitivities, and not a very fun place – even somewhat primitive. It was surprising to see the amount of progress that had occurred in Riyadh in the eight years that I had been away from the kingdom, especially in the diplomatic quarter (DQ) where we would be living. The DQ is an area adjacent to Riyadh just on the outskirts and had been beautifully planned and landscaped. The new embassy building and embassy housing were there.

The city itself had been well-funded by the Saudis and had been made into a rather dramatic town – I wouldn’t say beautiful, but not unattractive – with a very good infrastructure of roads and communications. The desert air was, as always, an extremely different experience from the humid, languid atmosphere that always was in Jeddah. Quite refreshing, and the winters were extremely mild, but again they did not have the languishing atmosphere on the coast – the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf. So it had some attractions. It was still, and it remains as far as I can tell, sort of the capitol of puritanical Islam that dominates Saudi politics and religion, and your liberties were somewhat restrained by that. Being a diplomat did make that bearable. Living in the quarter, which you might think was being sequestered, was in fact more liberating in the sense that there was more of a toleration – less of a feeling of being observed and being…

Q: You could have a swimming pool and that sort of thing.

PIERCE: You could. And the religious police, from time to time, would frequent the diplomatic quarter, but it was not often. Incidents were rare there, and involved cases where religious police would encounter people and warn them or apprehend them for violating rules on modesty, conduct or dress. Women were just a bit freer there. I don’t think you would find women riding bicycles outside of the DQ; you would find them there. The social events were just a bit freer there and it was quite beautiful. The embassy itself was an extremely attractive place, inside and out. And again, the housing, although there were many complaints of it being too small, seemed quite functional and especially because it was new it was very workable and had minimal problems.

Q: Who was your ambassador? You must’ve probably had a couple, didn’t you?

PIERCE: No I didn’t, actually. Chas Freeman had gotten there just before I did and he left three years later after the war with Iraq, and the chargé afterwards, David Welch, those were the COMs (Chiefs of Mission) during the time I was in Riyadh.

Q: First let’s look at the Saudi form of government. I mean it had eight years or so to

absorb more money and all. Did you see a difference in the Saudi government and society? I'm talking about at the time you arrived.

PIERCE: I can't think of any great change. When I left Jeddah in '83 Fahd was king, and when I got to Riyadh he was still king and operating as king. I don't think his position had been consolidated that much. More or less it seems the system just kept moving. There were no big changes, as I recall, in the system that I noticed when I first got there.

While I was in Riyadh there was an economic downturn and the Saudis were beginning to cut back on subsidies. You began to have questions about real poverty among Saudis in Riyadh in certain areas. It was a hard question to answer. Certainly they were no longer getting what they had been getting ten years earlier. Still, it was obvious that the dole for the royal family and those in the elites hadn't stopped. In fact, it might've expanded. This would in turn cause, along with the introduction of western influences by the American troops – these two factors would begin to call into question the family's authority, the family's adherence to religious tenets in the kingdom. A number of factors would contribute to that questioning. This was political work and I wasn't doing political work but you began to get in the street tapes, some pamphlets, some sermons at mosques that were not exactly in accord with the established party line. People were talking more about a renaissance, talking more of the good 'ole times, their paradisiacal version of the values that the Prophet had brought to the peninsula in the 7th-century. That was a veiled reference to the lack of corruption in those earlier days, and that became more worrisome to the authorities. In some cases certain preachers who were giving these types of sermons were observed or perhaps taken away for a period of time. Again, it was not an area that I focused on, but it was a time of questioning, one in which you saw more of a general rumbling.

There have always been, from time to time, calls by commercial types for greater participation; very, very subtle calls for the kingdom to begin to accommodate itself to getting more participation of groups in the society. This was a call that began when Fahd – I think it was in '79 or '80 – began to talk about the creation of Majlis al-Shura, which was the consultative council made up of key elements in society. This tapped into an interest of certain circles, but not knowing what it really meant because Fahd never would explain it to any great degree. Those currents had gone up and down while I had been away and you could still hear them from time to time when I was there. I believe ultimately the body was created, but that was after I left. What it does and how suitable it is is a question that I can't answer. It happened after I was gone.

Q: You were the political-military officer. Where did that position fit within the embassy? You had the ambassador, Chas Freeman, his deputy…

PIERCE: David Dunford at the time.

Q: David Dunford.

PIERCE: He went on to be ambassador in Oman.

Q: And then the political counselor?

PIERCE: No. In Riyadh, given the import of our military relationship, we had our own political-military section which was headed by a counselor who was a member of the Country Team. There were a number of reasons for that, primarily simply because of the amount of foreign military sales and the programs that we had with the kingdom – also because of the significant coordination that the embassy felt important with the American military regarding how they viewed Saudi Arabia and how they wanted to try to heighten political-military cooperation. We were a section in and of ourselves. There were three officers and a secretary, as well as the head. In Saudi Arabia we had a very complicated system of SAO, security assistance offices. At the time two officers of general rank, one who was a two-star officer in charge of something called USMTM, the military training mission. Traditionally this was an Air Force position. There were several hundred U.S. military involved in advising and contributing to U.S. military programs for the Saudi military. There was also a one-star general who was Army and he was in charge of something called the OPM-SANG, which was a separate advisory group working for the Saudi National Guard to help modernize that institution. The USMTM had a relationship with the Ministry of Defense. The Minister of Defense was Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the brother of the king. The Saudi National Guard was under the supervision and leadership of Crown Prince Abdullah and was a totally separate entity. The OPM-SANG had a relationship solely with the Saudi National Guard.

There was another small group there which was the Corps of Engineers which ten years earlier had been involved in massive construction and modernization, building infrastructure for the Saudi military for the Ministry of Defense airbases primarily. That program, as these facilities had been completed, was pared down and during the time I was there it was a very small group that still had an ordnance supportive role with some aspects of the Saudi military under the Ministry of Defense. So there were three groups primarily involved in security assistance programs, and one of the primary roles that my section had was to interact, to coordinate, to keep updated on the programs of our military assistance with the kingdom. The job required intensive building of relationships and maintaining them with the individual U.S. military groups.

Q: When you got there in '89 what were you getting from your own personal observation, the other officers in the political-military section, and from your American military counterparts? What was the sense of the Saudi military establishment?

PIERCE: By "sense" what do you mean?

Q: Effectiveness. Your eyebrows went up. (laughs)

PIERCE: *(laughs)* No they didn't. You just think you saw that. The Saudi military, depending on the units, would have varying degrees of effectiveness. One of the primary

goals of our military groups there was to enhance that ability and to try to make them as capable as possible through a modernization program. In some areas they were extremely good. As I recall – this is anecdotal; I have no way of knowing this – the Saudi pilots, for example, were very good at flying and in combat. In fact during the war with Iraq they flew the second largest number of sorties of any of the nations – we being first – against Iraq. But you had significant shortcomings. I think the farther away from the Air Force you got, for example, there were a lot of questions on the Saudi army side – in terms of systems that would have to be adopted as they were moving into modernization. At the time we were in the middle of beginning a program for their purchase of Abrams heavy tanks, and this was an area where they were going to have a lot of work to do.

Q: Again dates become important. In '89 how were those involved with looking at Saudi national defense looking at the threat, the situation around them?

PIERCE: I'm sorry. You mean "those" who? Those Americans or?

Q: Americans and others. There may have been divergent views, but what was the feeling?

PIERCE: I think one of the issues that you could see affecting the kingdom was a tendency often in the comprehensive U.S. policy to lump the Middle East together and to view the Arab-Israeli issue as the primary one that colored all. This was a major problem in the sense of trying to modernize the Saudi defense requirements. The result was a very, very tortured, very, very slow proceeding on the part of administrations in proposing arms sales and giving congressional notification, sometimes significantly resulting in failure. The Arab-Israeli issue always seemed to become interjected into Saudi Arabia's defense requirements.

If you looked at the kingdom, on the other hand, you could see surrounding it were a host of countries that were well constituted threats, or were unstable. You could look at the time at South Yemen, which constituted a threat of some sort, and because hostilities had broken out along the border there. North Yemen, at the time, was unstable and had that potential. Iraq at the time was blatantly a threat and proved absolutely to be one. Iran, especially after the Iranian revolution, there were very purposeful attacks on the kingdom's legitimacy and stability coming out of Tehran. Across the Red Sea you had an unsettled Sudan. And while Egypt was stable, I think the Saudis could view Egypt from the point of history as a place from which invaders came, although the relationships were always quite good with Egypt during the modern era. It was over a longer view of history – which the Saudis always took – though I'm not trying to say that Egypt was a threat. In essence Saudi Arabia had a history of borders that were unsettled, and then you had some very direct – not overt, but very strong – threats coming mainly from the Gulf on the Iran side.

And so you had legitimate defense requirements, and the question was how much do we want to help the Saudis gain capabilities to be a deterrent or to contain the minor

incidents that might occur along their borders – perhaps in the south or on the eastern side. Also, greater security assistance programs would make potentially greater military cooperation, if and when the time arose that we might need to become more active militarily in the region. If you have no security assistance programs and suddenly a threat emerges that is extreme and pressing, the ability to suddenly have military cooperation is severely constrained, because you simply do not have, on the ground, an awareness of their capability, an interaction with them, or the personal ties that you simply have to have in order to get cooperation, in order to get exchange, in order to immediately get the benefits of an alliance or a partnership. That was what was needed in 1990 when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Q: Again, when you arrived, was the embassy, our military, and also on the Saudi defense side, looking at Iraq or looking at Iran? Which one were they looking at?

PIERCE: That's a very difficult question. For the Arab world, Iran at the time was always the most visible threat. The Iran-Iraq War had wound down and Iran had suffered a major military defeat, yet their stridency, their belligerency and their reported desire to stir up religious minorities, Shias, in the eastern province, which is a long-term situation – also Shia in Bahrain – was always a fear that the Saudis had. So that was the first threat that they would always mention. When you got to talking about Iraq, the public position was that there was no threat there. It was very difficult for them to make the case in the public domain, but you could always tell that there was one and in private they would allude to the Iraqi threat. This was the main threat, but you would never say it, simply because of this concept of Arab unity, this concept of "my brother Arab" which is honored publicly, though often not in private circles or amongst themselves.

Q: Well what about at the embassy with Chas Freeman as the ambassador? Would there be any sort of look at the situation from time to time, particularly by those involved in the military efforts as you were, where you would sit around and say, "Well, what happens here," or "We could do this?" I mean were we writing out contingency papers or brainstorming or anything of that nature?

PIERCE: One of the primary jobs of the political-military section is always to promote or to react to ambassadorial front office queries along those lines. This is a constant. Saudi Arabia was one of the few places in which to me at the time a political-military section was justified – in the sense of really needing to think very carefully through our approaches, how we could foster and advance military cooperation, how we had to take into consideration Saudi sensitivities in trying to promote closer cooperation. This was a very, very important factor. It was very difficult– and you can see it today as it has spun out – for the Saudis to accept the presence of foreign soldiers on Saudi territory after the invasion of Kuwait. And it did produce a public reaction.

It was very difficult for the Saudis to reconcile what they considered our biased approach to the Middle East peace process, and their closer cooperation with us, and doing it in a way that appeared overt. It opened them up to accusations by, primarily, Iran, but also by

Libya from time to time. There was sometimes sniping from other Arab governments accusing them of hypocrisy or taking positions that were not supportive of Palestine or the Arab goals in Jerusalem. Those were very touchy issues that still have to play themselves out. At the time it was a very difficult question. They wanted the cooperation but the difficulty was how open it could be without leaving them susceptible to attacks by Iran and others.

Q: In a way you in your position were having to look at both sides. If we did too much for the Saudis we'd get hit by the pro-Israeli forces in the United States. And the Saudis on the other hand had a worry about both internally and externally getting too close with the United States.

PIERCE: Exactly.

Q: Again, coming back to the embassy and this time, you had Central Command down there. Were you asking where is the threat coming from or what do we do about it?

PIERCE: We were mainly defining the threat. Obviously we had a very active Defense Attaché Office (DAO) in Riyadh, as well as the USMTM security advisors. Their primary job wasn't to analyze threats, but at the same time it was. Primarily because if you advance military programs, or try to get the U.S. government into new military programs, you have to define the threat. Threat analysis on the part of all of us was a continuing process; trying to analyze it and also trying to devise – and especially with the militaries (our military with theirs) – trying to come up with programs that in the long-term would be suitable to redress or to counter individual threats from the military or political side. This was a constant issue that you always deal with.

The Defense Attachés' Office would submit reports through their channels; the USMTM mainly in concert with us, because we both had to work carefully when we were into proposed arm sales. We would analyze the threats; they would have the most direct link with CENTCOM. Then, of course, we had our exchange programs with the Saudis. We had a very close relationship with them in terms of threat analysis.

Q: How about you and your office? Were you getting pretty good reports about what was happening in Iran and Iraq, particularly?

PIERCE: One of the things that Ambassador Freeman did was to encourage, and would organize, weekly political-military meetings in which all of the major military players as well as those players on the rest of the Country Team who were involved in the military and issues of general stability would get together and exchange views. This was at a supervisory level. At the working level one of the things you've got to do in the Political-Military Section is to assure that you are up to speed on virtually anything that has an impact on the threat against the kingdom. And we had access to anything everyone else had.

Q: Yes. Was there some reservation in the beginning? I mean here you were an Arabist and a lot of others were Arabists there and all of a sudden you get a Chinese language officer as ambassador.

PIERCE: No. We had no thoughts along that line. I was impressed by the way Freeman would take issues and basically refocus them. It was very interesting to see. He had vision, which again, in terms of the military side was to have stronger political military cooperation, but to do it in a way that wouldn't severely strain the Saudi-American relationship. And ultimately we were thinking that once you begin to have a relationship you can expand it as they get more comfortable with it.

One of the things we had always done is have a very good relationship with their navy. It's easy to have a relationship with the navy, because the navy doesn't operate on Saudi territory. They were very interested in having exchanges with us in various operations. The problem with the navy is that it was not a significant branch in the Saudi military. We had the same type of approach with the air force, but it was a little bit more standoffish because their air force requirements or interests, they wanted aircraft sometimes from us that it was difficult to be responsive to. These were the F-15 issues.

The army, on the other hand, was where you needed the strongest type of military cooperation, because that would be the force that would be the main threat repellant. It was more difficult simply because the army is on Saudi territory and you've got to figure out ways in which you can slowly build up a relationship and a trust that might move into further military cooperation.

Q: What was your impression of Prince Sultan? What you were getting both you and your colleagues. Again your eyebrows have gone up.

PIERCE: No they weren't.

Q: (laughs)

PIERCE: I had the opportunity to be in many meetings with Prince Sultan and looked at him for a very long time. He's a very, very interesting fellow. Now this is a difficult question to answer. I think overall he saw that the kingdom could have greater security through a relationship with the U.S. And he saw it manifested, not surprisingly, in more and more arms sales. He was very effective in articulating that. He was also very effective in making the rounds. Many of the Saudi military installations are in the middle of nowhere – way out – and he would, once or twice a year, make the rounds to all of these places and to basically warm up the esprit. He did that very well.

The problem he had was that he had been minister of defense since 1970 or something. He had seen come and go six or seven secretaries of defense, and over that period of time had heard our promises, our statements of policy, our views toward the Gulf, our views toward the Arab-Israeli process – views he would always ask about. He would hear one

from one and a totally different version from another, and it would go up and down, and up and down. Our policy would not be a straight, solid, unwavering, direct policy. It would wax and wane. And I know he'd notice this because in every meeting he had a scribe who would write down exactly everything everyone said, so he had access to everything any secretary of defense ever told him. So I'm not so sure he had any great faith in our constancy. And that made him standoffish to a degree, I think, which is understandable.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: He was more skeptical, but I don't mean to say very skeptical, because there's no alternative for the Saudis and they've had a good relationship with us. He was less accepting than King Fahd, for example, who probably didn't have his experience of the history of ups and downs in this specific aspect of our policy.

Q: Well of course our people all came in full of enthusiasm or whatever you want to say about what the latest policy was.

PIERCE: There's nuance change; there always is.

Q: Yes. I would think the Yemen threat was basically a border guerrilla type war, but with Iran and Iraq you're looking at two large countries. The demographics of that are such that they've got big populations and Saudi Arabia is a small population.

PIERCE: There you go.

Q: So that when you're talking about an army, if anything goes overland…I mean air force, yes, a small, elite air force can take care of a large, not-so-elite air force, but when you're talking about land stuff there must've been implicit in some of the planning that sometime we're going to have to put troops down here.

PIERCE: This goes into a CENTCOM planning issue which we had to deal with ultimately, and it's always in the back of your mind. That would really depend on what the threat was. I'm talking pre-invasion. But that would depend on what the threat was and how you would respond, and how good your rapport was with Saudi leaders, which was the key factor that did help us when it finally happened. How good your cooperation was on the ground. I made the argument for more sophisticated fire power. There are not a lot of Saudi military; therefore they need weapons systems that have more lethality and operate in greater concentration. This was an argument we'd frequently use as we would provide arm sales proposals to SECSTATE (Secretary of State) for coordination and ultimately White House approval, and if and when they would be notified in Congress.

Q: Were we getting anywhere with this?

PIERCE: It was a fight, but I think the Abrams tanks happened just as I got there. In other

words the work had already been done. One of the long-smoldering issues was F-15 E's…

Q: Could you explain this for somebody who doesn't know what we're talking about?

PIERCE: The Saudis had already purchased a number of F-15 series aircraft.

Q: This was really our mainline fighter, wasn't it?

PIERCE: It was at the time, yes. I guess it still is. I've forgotten most of my POL/MIL (Political/Military Section) stuff, but in essence these were primarily designed for air defense and air fighting. Among many strengths the F-15 version had a ground attack capability. For several years the Saudis had made repeated requests for them, and these had been basically postponed because of its ground attack capability. When you would make a proposal of that nature, it would trigger alarm bells amongst some members of Congress as to its potential for use in a war with Israel in the future. That argument would ignore the fact that the Saudis did need to have a ground attack capability by their aircraft because of the threats that they were facing, just using common sense from Iran or Iraq.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: Now you said earlier that and objectively speaking you're right – that Yemen would be minor border irritations, but I think the Saudis always nursed a greater fear simply because that Yemen border area was the focus of a conflict in the '30s, and it still is in the back of their minds.

Q: You say so much depended on relations with the Saudis. At your level, how did you work?

PIERCE: Relations in the sense of you're talking primarily military to military contacts here. Not relations through the embassy. One of the hardest things was for embassy personnel to have direct contact with Saudi military. Entering the Ministry of Defense required permission; you had to get permission to enter and to go see someone. It was very difficult. When you tried to do that the answer would come back, "We deal with USMTM; we don't deal with embassy people," or, "We will see you, but with a USMTM person available." It was very difficult to do. We were able to get some contacts, but not very many. And they were not very productive, in a direct sense, with Saudi military in their settings. More successful was seeing heads of certain groups with a security assistance adviser's presence; such as the upper tiers of the National Guard through our brigadier general there. Also going out with the ambassador to pay calls on people like Prince Khalid bin Sultan who was the son of a minister and at the time was the head of the Saudi Air Defense Force, which ultimately moved into the Patriot issue. As you might recall, during the war with Iraq he became the overall commander-in-chief of the Saudi forces.

The other way you made contacts, was through American Defense contractors. There were a host of them there, mainly involved in direct programs with the Saudis, but also trying to get the Saudis to want certain systems – and then trying to get the U.S. government to support the Saudi desire. Also with Saudi military contractors. This would be a good way to get impressions, to find out what Saudi thinking was in a more informal way. You could find out more or less what was going on below the surface. When you did that, for example, you found that the Saudi Ministry of the Interior had an intense interest in upgraded communications systems, mainly security warning systems and other infrastructure around the borders.

You also ended up running in the great game of competition with defense firms from other nationalities – mainly French and British – which was an interesting side show to the political military situation in the kingdom.

Q: Were you given the brief to make sure to do whatever you could to push American products? Were you pretty well constrained by your lack of direct contact with the military?

PIERCE: That's an interesting question and it's basically one that you had to approach on an ad hoc basis. There are certain areas which just simply are not doable from the standpoint of what Saudis may want and what the U.S. is going to allow. It's a sensitivity issue. If you had a question about certain systems, you could always find someone at USMTM and say, "Well, what about this [or that]?" One of them was a system where that aircraft could identify friend or foe (IFF). It was a very sensitive issue, one very difficult for us to touch in concrete ways. Whether there was a competitor in that I don't remember.

Q: I might say for the person who is reading this, IFF has been done for a long time. How do you tell that things are moving very rapidly and is it a friend or a foe? Usually it's an electronic response.

PIERCE: But mainly between aircraft.

Q: But it can also be with tanks and aircraft and all of that.

PIERCE: This was mainly an aircraft issue. That issue was very difficult. I mean there were some systems that were usable, but the more advanced ones raised touchy issues. Sometimes there were areas in which the French were going to win. They were just going to win. And the British were going to win. One area where we were trying was the navy. The navy was predominantly using French material. I think the British were coming in second; maybe we were. But we were saying, when you look ahead to the time you will need to replace your naval ships, you should look at American sources. It was a difficult issue, but we tried, though there didn't seem to be much potential. But this was ten years ago.

The British challenge was most dramatically seen in the Al-Yamamah barter deal with weapons in exchange for oil. The British provided Tornado aircraft and a host of other aircraft, and built a large airbase in the kingdom. This was under Prince Sultan and that was going to happen – whether you would question its ethics, whether it's efficient. There were a host of questions that came up about it, but this was going to happen in the kingdom. The kingdom was very interested in this type of exchange, one that was quite difficult for us to do just by the mechanism of how our sales occur. Still, in terms of actual programs we did have the most significant relationship with the kingdom, which was as it should've been and how it should be.

Q: You mentioned the National Guard. I think I raised the subject before, but back in my time – we're talking about the 1950s – the National Guard, or I guess it was then called the White Army, was kept as sort of a counterpoint to the regular army, being seen as a little more loyal to the king or something. It was a time when all of the other Arab countries were being taken over by their military and all. Was this still sort of in the backs of people's minds?

PIERCE: I don't think so. When the National Guard was first formed shortly thereafter, maybe as late as '62, when King Faisal came in officially and Saud was deposed as king, most of the current leaders came in. Prince Sultan, King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah. This type of desert politics that you're suggesting – desert political military stuff – has always remained in the backs of the minds of the Saudis, but it has been proven it's not really the role of the National Guard today. They performed admirably in the invasion; they were extremely good. And they had modernized. We started a relationship with them, maybe in '74, and had an agreement supporting the crown prince's desire to see it modernized, while at the same time be recognized as more of a relic of the past.

Q: It had been considered almost a tribal levy or something like that.

PIERCE: Yes it was. A bunch of guys with guns who sit up there in the mountains and repel any of the invaders; good medieval stuff.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: But he wanted to see it modernized and become a secondary backup force with some internal security responsibilities and also border responsibilities. That's what spawned this very productive relationship that our army has had with the National Guard. And it also solidified – contrary to what many pundits suggest – Abdullah's strong appreciation of, and tie to, the United States. He had always been thought of as being just a bit more standoffish, and not as close to the United States as perhaps Fahd. While he has a different attitude and a different approach – I sat in several meetings with him and followed his thinking quite closely – I never detected that at all. I think you get into the same sort of reservations that Prince Sultan had, where he might question our constancy and perhaps even the wisdom of our approach to the Arab-Israeli question, which is a dominant one for any Arab.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: But in the sense of our partnership with the kingdom and its utility for both, I think that's unwavering and it's far more dramatically expressed by him than perhaps by any other prominent Saudi that I've encountered.

Q: Were the Gulf states a factor at all – either a support or a problem?

PIERCE: There was always an interest that we had, since the early '80s when the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) was formed, as to whether it could take on a military component; in other words have a united GCC force. There was some attention given to that. Yet I think the governments of those countries were – and again, I don't know what the relationship is now – the GCC evolved politically. It evolved economically in certain ways and in certain other forms of day to day cooperation. The military aspect of it was slower to evolve. The issue begins to boil around how much of your military capability do you want to cede to GCC, and can the GCC be seen as taking part of yours away or making you stronger. That's a difficult question and it never was fully answered. You still had the beginnings of adopting political positions that had effects on their military approaches, but ultimately each country was going to set its own military priorities. The GCC was not going to produce a military position at variance with them. So it was an evolving situation.

Q: Well, talking about evolving situations, can we talk about your personal experience of events that led up to the Gulf War, were we seeing clouds, or when did the adrenaline start to flow?

PIERCE: That's a question that you can find in books better than you can from me. When you're working an issue on a day to day basis, the issue was the tension between Kuwait and Iraq. You'd read the traffic; you'd read the cables coming out of Iraq, coming out of Kuwait. You could see a lot of parrying, manipulating, backing-and-forthing – also from the UAE at the time. And you always get into this question of well, we've done this. We've been here before. Is this the time or isn't it the time? It boils down to are you taking every crisis like this seriously – I mean to the extreme – or are you just trying to work it to pull back the brinkmanship? I think it was an issue that was in the back of my mind but it wasn't the primary one on which we were focused.

I do remember the night before August 1, I went out – my family was not in the country at the time – with a friend of mine and the next morning I woke up at about 7:30, turned on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), and I heard the news and I said, "This is going to be a very bad day." *(laughs)*

Q: (laughs) Well Chas Freeman I think was up in Newport, Rhode Island, or someplace like that.

PIERCE: He was not in the kingdom.

Q: No. There were a lot of people that were saying this was not going to be a good day. (laughs)

PIERCE: *(laughs)* And it wasn't.

Q: So just to give a person who doesn't understand this an idea, what did you do that day?

PIERCE: Okay, we did a couple of things. Firstly, you get into the embassy and you try to get some sense of what's going on. You don't get an awful lot; you get more from the radio than you do from our traffic, simply because the issue is so inchoate and so unknown. You begin to call around and try to find out from your military contacts where their people are. Because some of the security assistance officers were in Kuwait at the time. Then you call a number of bases closer to the Kuwait border and see where we have military programmers who are visiting and see if you could find out what's going on from them. You check very carefully and make sure of what you're doing with both of your consulates. By noon you're beginning to have a very, very vague picture as to what's going on, and begin sending in some cables – very, very sparse cables – about the situation.

I don't recall an awful lot of information that we had. The situation was just very vague and very unknown. It stayed that way for a few days; the joy being that Saddam Hussein decided to stop on the Kuwaiti border. By then things had developed to the degree that Secretary Cheney was en route to the kingdom.

Q: Was there the feeling when you started hearing this to say, "Oh my God, they may come all the way." Were you talking particularly about Saddam Hussein as being really a loose cannon?

PIERCE: Oh certainly. I just remembered this. On Sunday, my family was coming back into the kingdom and arriving at the Riyadh airport Sunday morning. I remember going out to the Riyadh airport and there was this great big window there looking out to the east and I just kept looking up there wondering, "Are the planes coming over?" *(laughs)*

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: It was nothing, of course, but you've got a lot of apprehension. You began to ask for information like if you came to the Kuwait border with Saudi Arabia and decided to barrel down to Riyadh, how many hours would it take to get here? You want to know what Saudi units might be in real force between here and the border. You also ask the same question about Dhahran. You begin to think about where the desal plants are.

Q: Desalinization plants.

PIERCE: Desalinization, which is ninety percent of the water in Riyadh, for example. You have an awful lot of questions, which thank God I didn't have to worry that much about, but questions from the American community. Another ramification was that the American community primarily was there for contracts. The expertise in the desal plants. Significant expertise in the oil infrastructure. Expertise in defense programs. They were quite predominant and you were very interested in keeping in touch with them. I kept in touch with the ones involved in the military programs, but the embassy did it at large. Great consternation and a great sense of, not anxiety – I wouldn't say that, but just an unknown feeling.

Q: Secretary of Defense Cheney came and had a very important meeting with King Fahd.

PIERCE: Yes he did.

Q: What task was laid upon you all?

PIERCE: Our ambassador came with Cheney for that meeting, and, in essence, at that time our main focus – which is normally what you do – was to provide the infrastructure to coordinate with the Saudi side – knowing what Mr. Cheney wanted to do, who he wanted to meet with, when he wanted to do it, and who else would be with him. It was primarily who he wanted to see, and that was the king. Basically it's a coordination issue where you are trying to set up the infrastructure and work with the Saudis so that this group will have a place for accommodation and sufficient transportation, and have a schedule laid out that will identify when and where he might see the king. You would also provide – which is always what you do, even in a situation like this – some background as to where we think the Saudis are coming from. Which in this sense was kind of vague simply because the situation was so murky. Prince Sultan was not – I forget where he was; he might've been out of the country at the time – so he was not a factor. He did arrive during the visit, but after the meeting with the king as I recall, and had a separate meeting with Cheney. I could be mistaken about that. So that's what you do. We had about 36 hours notice to do all that.

That is being helped on the other side, as I recall – but this might be just logic and not actuality – by the Saudi embassy here in Washington through Prince Bandar who facilitates all that. But the actual working out the schedule, getting it all together and making it happen, rests with the embassy and with USMTM. Mainly when you're going into political issues, which meeting with the king perforce not a military one, the embassy takes the lead and the military people on the ground are in support of you. Now obviously when Cheney came he had an intensive relationship with our military on the ground in Saudi Arabia, but when he interacts with the political leaders, the embassy normally is the one that orchestrates that event. And that's what we did.

Q: After the meeting were the Saudis, "Alright, this is the big time now." Was this pretty apparent?

PIERCE: Yes. It's not like immediately you go up and here are the F-15s, but within say 24 hours or so they began to arrive. What you'd had initially was the SAOs on the ground. The SAOs are security advisers, they're not military combatants.

Q: SAO being?

PIERCE: Security Assistance Officers. They're not their advisers. They're not here to fight a war. So then you began to move in the actual CENTCOM deployed troops from the various units in the States or from elsewhere, and you began to get ranking officers setting up CENTCOM forward headquarters. This is when the embassy begins to coordinate very carefully with the CENTCOM elements. Freeman was very good at this. He recognized immediately that this is a military operation; they are independent of the chief of mission. But his intent, which one of my main charges and he very carefully did it as well, was to get a cooperative bond with the CENTCOM headquarters, with CENTCOM, and to keep that in a constantly updated, coordinated way, so that we and they would always have a position in respect to what we needed to do in the kingdom that was cohesive. He worked very hard at that and it was one of the jobs that my section was charged with doing. On a day to day basis this is what you did. And we, over the period of time that they were there, developed a tremendously close, coordinated role mainly with their J-5, their planners. But also with their J-4…

Q: "J-4" being?

PIERCE: Supply. Those were the main two, but we would have coordination on other matters. They would want to write manuals, for example. This was very day to day stuff. Manuals or little pamphlets for introducing troops on how to survive in the kingdom in public places. We would basically give our very heavy guidances as to what was right. They would want to know how to interact. We would be in close contact with them. They had a daily staff meeting and somebody from my office was always there at CENTCOM headquarters. The ambassador quickly invited them into our coordinated POL/MIL meeting that I mentioned to you. Then the ambassador and Schwarzkopf, when he got there, began having a close relationship of sharing, and we were able to get our DCM to have the same type of meeting with his chief of staff. As you know, the DCM is sort of an executive officer; the chief of staff is sort of an executive officer. At both of these meetings they had things to talk about, but we would always make sure their agendas were filled with issues that we felt were worth bringing up. This was a relationship that persisted throughout their presence. Almost as soon as the first group came in – it might've been a full-bird colonel in charge of it then – we were down there meeting. After that General Horner came in when we were there. When Schwarzkopf came the situation solidified. And then with their J-5 and then their POLAD. Their POLAD (State Department political adviser to CENTCOM) was their major information conveyor.

Q: What's his name?

PIERCE: Gordon Brown.

Q: Gordon Brown, whom I have interviewed.

I think it's interesting to look at this closely, because here was an operation which was both successful and started off right from the ground being cooperative. Because normally we, the embassy type people, say, "Well, you can't do this and that," and the military says, "Get out of my way; we're going to do it our way." Would you say lessons had been learned on both sides or was it the people who were directing it? What caused this close, effective relationship?

PIERCE: I can't speak from the military's side, but I would say that Freeman made it clear that this is what we were going to do, and it did not take my section any great period of time to figure that out. And that's when we began to move. But he began straight off the bat making the overtures, making sure that the CINC was aware of what our attitude was, and then we solidified it on a day to day basis.

Now another thing that goes back to that point is when General Horner flew in…

Q: Horner being?

PIERCE: The head of the Air Force. When he flew in to that airbase in Riyadh, Horner already knew the Saudi general who went out to meet him. They had a long fruitful relationship. Horner and the people he flew in with already knew what that base was because we had had programs in position there. This was the result of the military cooperation, the military programs. We already knew what their capabilities were in terms of their aircraft, what they could do with them and what those aircraft could do. We knew we could work with them. This was true in Dhahran when we came in; this was true in Riyadh when we came in. We knew where the administrative defense offices were; we knew the people in there. All of our U.S. military officers had had relationships. That was one of the most significant reasons why we were able to forge a working relationship with the Saudi military on the ground almost immediately.

Q: Obviously the pace of life moved up, but here you were with your family arriving in the middle of…

PIERCE: They had just been on vacation.

Q: Did they stay or did they leave?

PIERCE: Everybody stayed.

Q: This must've put a certain strain on everyone, didn't it?

PIERCE: Some people it did, some people it didn't. There were a number of questions

and problems that spread throughout the community in Dhahran and in Riyadh. First was the poison gas fear, and the rush by the Saudi government to provide gas masks to their citizens and by several embassies to do so as well – and our slowness in doing that. Then, ultimately, there was the Scud issue which happened after combat began. Obviously it was an extremely difficult time, with the evacuation that we put into place just before hostilities broke out.

One of the important things – in a subjective sense – was a time when all commercial aircraft into the kingdom stopped. In essence you couldn't get out anymore, and the way people did get out was using U.S. military aircraft to evacuate if they wanted to leave. I felt at that time like there had just been a big lid put over the sky in Riyadh and here we were. And when the whole situation had become resolved, that lid would come off and the stars would come out again.

I remember after the invasion in Kuwait, and after we introduced our troops there, I always had a sense that ultimately we would move into combat. As events progressed through the later part of '90, inevitably Saddam Hussein, by his ineptness, put himself in a position where he could only be attacked by the allied forces. I remember meeting with Dave Ottaway from the Washington Post, whom I had known from an earlier job, and he said, "Doesn't this seem like a Greek play to you? In essence you have this tragedy out at the end – this terrible thing that's going to happen – and all of these players are trying to avoid it, yet they move closer and closer to it and ultimately it's going to happen." I didn't want to feed him, but I thought that was a very interesting observation, because it's exactly what I felt was happening. And it's what did happen.

Yes, there was a lot of tension felt by a number of people and it got worse when the Scuds starting falling.

Q: Yes. One of the obvious factors was that whereas in the normal course of a war situation coming up, we've got to get all of the American civilians and everything out and move the embassy down and all, in this case we really, for very practical reasons, wanted to keep American civilian personnel and non-embassy people working in oil fields, the desalination plants, on and on and on, because they had to be there in order for the machine to work.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: And this was a reversal of almost everything all of us have been trained to do, which is really to get the non-combatants out of the playing field.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: Did you get involved in any of this outside of making appropriate noises at home or something like that?

PIERCE: We never had any personal reservations about staying. There were voluntary evacuations and a few people in the embassy took advantage of that, but not a lot. When the Scuds started falling, significant numbers of dependents – especially from commercial installations – moved out; and many of the commercial operations as well as commercial military relations, went to skeleton operations. Overnight this happened. I remember I had a friend in a big compound filled with military contractors. The Scuds fell not too far from there and overnight the houses were evacuated. They all got in their cars and scrammed – went down to Jeddah – which was a safe place to go. The International School of Riyadh went from, as I recall, a population of 2,000 to 200 within a week. Teachers there were given options to leave and to come back in the future if it should prove that they could. My kids stayed. There were all sorts of rumors about potential terrorist attacks; our kids got instructions on what to do in the event of a bomb near the school. They were very small at the time. It was kind of dramatic but we had never any question about leaving.

When the Scuds began to fall, my office was in very close contact with the CENTCOM headquarters and would be alerted when there had been a Scud shot out from Iraq. It wouldn't be much. Basically, at any time day or night, we would just know within two minutes that a Scud was going to probably fall somewhere in the Riyadh area. You could confirm it and then sometimes see if the Patriot would hit it, which they would do from time to time, and then check with the CENTCOM headquarters to see, as it developed, what the situation was – where it hit and whether there might be any ramifications. You would always keep in touch with the ambassador or the DCM about this if it was a significant development. Mostly Scuds were aimed in Riyadh at the Riyadh air base. The problem with the Scuds is that their – to use the technical term; I don't know the acronym – CIP, the focus range of the Scud was so erratic that it wouldn't hit the Riyadh air base, it would hit something else outside of it. It just wouldn't hit what it was targeted at. Mainly that was an area that was filled with many expatriate defense contractors and they began to get very rattled about the Scud attacks. The Scuds would normally attack about – would hit, if they were going to hit at all – they would hit maybe early evening, late evening – elevenish – and early morning. Two of those three times. As the hostilities or combat progressed, they became more erratic, suggesting that they were being coordinated even less professionally than they were initially. They became more random as to where they hit.

Q: Sort of hasty firing really.

PIERCE: Yes. I think the reason being is they were afraid that as soon as a launch was detected they would be zeroed in on by our Air Force. I think that's what happened. But we were living on the fringe of Riyadh in the diplomatic quarter and we were not close to the Riyadh air base, so we did not have the same sense of apprehension that many of the USMTM people who were living near the base, as well as many of the defense contractors. A defense contractor friend said, "We used to have Scud parties." Yes, they had Scud parties. What they would do is since Scuds only shot at night they would all leave – these guys, a lot of them bachelors now, with all of their families being evacuated,

working for the defense companies – would leave and go to the desert and sit around and watch to see if a Scud was coming in and whether a Patriot would come up and hit it. He explained it to me; he was laughing but it was kind of a "funny, ha ha ha, I'm scared to death," laugh.

Q: During this time, let's say up to the buildup before January 17th or 19th, were you pretty well working out of Riyadh or were you going off to Dhahran and other places?

PIERCE: Pretty much out of Riyadh. The most important touch-base for us was the CENCOM headquarters. I would often find myself with the ambassador going down to Jeddah because the king – and I don't remember the precise dates – liked to be in Jeddah a lot. This was leading up to the hostilities. I don't remember when he came back to Riyadh. And then Prince Sultan would more often than not be down there. So whenever the ambassador went down to see Prince Sultan, I would go. And that was quite frequently. Over the period of a year Secretary of Defense Cheney, almost always accompanied by General Powell, visited Sultan eight or nine times. And we were always working that political aspect of his visit. Cheney would also go and consult with CENTCOM and that was totally under CENTCOM's venue. In terms of orchestrating the political leaders meetings, we would take the lead there and also obviously coordinate very closely with CENTCOM. It was very much focused on travel to Jeddah. I went to Dhahran I think once; and I went up to the border with a VIP (Very Important Person) once. That's after our marines had just gotten up there.

Q: According to Chas Freeman, he spent an inordinate amount of time escorting VIPs, many Congress people who wanted to see the troops and all. Did you get involved in much of this?

PIERCE: Yes. In this orchestration you've got a CODEL (Congressional Delegation) who wants to come to the kingdom and the major focus here is to meet the troops. But he's coming to the kingdom and so he, or they, will also meet with the Saudi leadership. This is more of a political issue than it is a political/military issue. That will be the portion of the trip that the embassy will work and that will be done by another section, the Political Section. *(laughs)* And then they will be taken over by the CENTCOM people who will move them into the troop inspection and the photo opportunities and address their keen interests. This is what Ambassador Freeman was talking about. It was a constant. I think the embassy wanted to make sure that these congressional leaders knew, number one, what the role of the kingdom was and how vital its partnership was, and also to underline to the Saudis the importance by having so many visitors come. It culminated of course with the president's visit out there.

Q: The time before the actual war, which really didn't last that long, while the troops were building up there, did you get involved in working with our military to tell them how the troops should behave and then working on this? Because even in the nicest, easy areas putting half a million American young boys and women into an area is upsetting.

PIERCE: This was the issue that we worked most closely with J-5 on. As I was explaining earlier, these books on guidance – regulations on what you can do; how to best accommodate yourself when you're in the Saudi environment – squibs on Saudi mores, Saudi culture, Saudi customs, Saudi history. It was a delicate issue that I would raise, in the sense of how you conduct your own religious services in a country in which the predominant theme everywhere is Islam. That's a very sensitive issue and I know it's come up from time to time – how best to do that and to avoid any possibility of misperception, but I think it was accomplished.

Q: How did you work this? I mean obviously you have chaplains with the troops and they conduct services, including Jewish services. What sort of guidance was there and how did you work it?

PIERCE: Well it was a military issue in the sense of what the military has to do. Normally if you are in an environment that is yours – like a large camp – then what you do inside, as long as it's done in an appropriate manner, like a simple service, that's fine. We would have certain approaches like that, and then they would implement them in the field. We would find more often they were extremely sensitized to the need to keep that smooth. There were all sorts of issues that the military had to work on the phone. When you're in the field, rubbing up against the rural Saudis, this was an issue that I know they were really preoccupied with. We didn't have to get involved in that. Then there were claims issues. An errant artillery shell blows up a camel or you drive a tank across somebody's date orchard or something. They were very sensitive to these issues. We didn't really have to work with them on it.

Q: How about women in our armed forces? At this point women were an integral part; they weren't token.

PIERCE: They were indeed.

Q: In fact I was in Korea in 1976 when we had a border incident on the demilitarized zone and in those days female personnel are supposed to get out of the war zone and the commanding general there, as we went on high alert, said, "Hell with it. We can't run a war because women – truck drivers, military police, and all this – have to be there." And certainly by 1990 they were a major component.

PIERCE: Well I think it's a matter of record that General Schwarzkopf had a lot of coordination with Khalid bin Sultan who was at that time his counterpart on the Saudi side. A lot of these issues that we worked with J-5, General Schwarzkopf would work with Khalid. I think our military was in a position to see that certain things had to happen, and would happen. Our forces are unified and there are men and women in it, that's just the way it is. When they moved their headquarters into the Ministry of Defense headquarters there may have been some initial apprehension on the part of Saudis seeing certain women officers, and women soldiers dressed for combat, in the halls, but when they would go into intelligence briefings and they would find out that the person who

knew exactly what they wanted to know happened to be a woman, that woman thing sort of evaporated. It wasn't really there. That person became a person who knows the intelligence brief or who knows something about communications equipment for an F-15. That's what took over in large part. Also I think there was an acceptance, and how quickly I don't know, by the Saudis of the fact that a certain percentage of our drivers who happen to drive these trucks that are getting these supplies to point "A" and point "B" are going to be women. You have any problem with that? The answer was that the U.S. military drivers will drive the vehicle.

There were always rumors, and reports that become anecdotal, of an occasional incident or two in a public place, but I think most of those were taken care of and there was never any significant – as I recall; I could be wrong – disciplinary breach on our side. One of the things that was extremely admirable about General Schwarzkopf – or sensitive – was the immediate guidance that members of the U.S. military would not drink in the kingdom. It was pretty much adhered to. There was a pretty good esprit, I thought, among the military there.

Q: I think you've alluded to this before, but was there the feeling at a certain point that it was pretty obvious we were going to go in? You know, if you put a half a million troops there you can't keep them there for too long. Did you have the feeling that a clock was ticking and they, you know, were going to "use them or lose them?"

PIERCE: It's the Greek play. That's just the feeling I had. Slowly but surely. The thing that was so interesting about that is Saddam had many chances to have reduced that possibility and he didn't take them. He did the exact opposite instead of coming out with a token show of conciliation. An interesting scenario would be to have moved out of Kuwait except for the oil fields that were being contested. What would that do to the Arab nation component of the coalition? He could've thought of these things but he didn't. So, in essence he basically remained totally intransigent. There were several attempts, I think, to offer some graceful way for him to pull back and he didn't take them.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the relations with other Arab countries, the Gulf State military forces – Syria, Egypt, I guess Morocco?

PIERCE: No. Egypt, Syria, Morocco. I think Morocco did.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: I'd have to go back and look. No, we didn't have any real ability to coordinate with these people. We and the British, and perhaps two more embassies were proactive in the political-military aspect of the relationship. I don't recall other embassies having that same role. They could have, but it wasn't that obvious. I didn't have any contacts in the political-military aspect in the Syrian Embassy, or in the Egyptian Embassy.

Q: Well what about say with the British and the French? They had troops on the ground.

PIERCE: They did.

Q: Did you get into a consultation role or asking what they were doing?

PIERCE: Not on any regular basis. I think I might have had one or two conversations with a British counterpart; with the French, no. Not to any great degree. Mainly, as I recall, most of that coordination was worked out at a MIL/MIL level. And CENTCOM, CINC, would have relationships with certain other military officers in trying to forge a common approach on a variety of issues. I'm not sure about that. Obviously, greater coordination occurred in the multilateral naval forces. We did get very involved in Japanese support simply because we were very active in coordinating with the Japanese. They sent a vast amount of assistance. Their assistance was in large part sent into CENTCOM and through their embassy. We got into pretty frequently contact with the Japanese, facilitating their contact with CENTCOM in the sense of when they would send their assistance.

Q: Were you picking up a different spirit from the contacts you had in Saudi Arabia – civilians, others – about the United States during the war?

PIERCE: No. There're two different things. As I mentioned at the beginning of this our presence began to bruise sensitivities within certain Saudi circles. The good example which is used all the time now is bin Laden saying that the Saudi government basically allowed sacred Saudi soil to be stained by foreigners, by unbelievers. That issue was working itself in any great degree around Riyadh during the buildup towards the fight. It might've been in certain circles, but it wasn't an issue that was prevalent on the streets. I don't think anybody there – any Saudi – underestimated the threat. I would find that over the years my contacts would say they do know quite a lot about what's going on; they're not quite that naïve. They were fully aware of the threat coming out of Kuwait. We had tens of thousands of Kuwaitis coming through Riyadh and Dhahran. It was not as though we were living in a vacuum. They did not underestimate the dangers to them. The hype on gas masks was extremely sharp and there was a sense of vulnerability, but I don't think there was any negative reaction against our presence there to address that vulnerability.

Q: The war was over rather quickly. Well, we had the air war that went about thirty days, forty days.

PIERCE: Quickly enough. Yes, that's right.

Q: And then we had, what, about three or four days? What was the general feeling that you all had about the end of this? I mean was there a feeling of maybe we quit too soon or that we didn't take care of it?

PIERCE: I'll let history be the judge of that.

Q: Yes. Well, you know, it's a debatable thing and I'm just trying to capture the spirit of the time.

PIERCE: Yes, I understand. It was a difficult issue at the time to make the call.

Q: Were you picking up any of the frustration that came out in my interview with Chas Freeman about nobody was talking about how this thing would end. In other words, our embassy, and obviously Schwarzkopf, were not getting instructions to say, "If they surrender, you will ask for this and that." Sort of the lack of…

PIERCE: No end game.

Q: An end game, you know. It was sort of remarkable that there really wasn't.

PIERCE: This is true.

Q: But I was wondering whether this was apparent at the time. I mean to you all on the ground.

PIERCE: I'm trying to think if that as an issue ever came up. When you're in a situation that is so difficult and with a heavy agenda you are trying to work on a daily basis, your longer-term thinking is not always on Iraq or on the greater regional picture. It always was on the kingdom and the relationship that the military has with the kingdom. So it was an issue that would come up, but it wasn't an issue that we were charged with focusing on. Freeman had a more comprehensive picture to look at than we did.

Q: When the war ended was there a feeling of exhilaration or was there one of "let's get these troops out of here?"

PIERCE: No, as I said before, the stars came out again. You could leave. It's not like you wanted to leave, but to know that you couldn't leave if you wanted to was not a positive feeling. You have a feeling of a darkness; and that darkness was gone. Immediately there was resuscitation of life in the city and people just had a greater spring in their step. The whole issue of working out the UN resolutions and getting the Iraqis to sign them and then setting up the regimes that would be responsible for assuring that they were complied with, ultimately to set up the no-fly zone – that was farther down the road. The beginning of rebuilding of Kuwait, these were the priorities that were the focus at the time. And then the slow but steady diminution of U.S. forces and other foreign forces out of the area.

Q: Did your job change much from '91 to '93, and after the war was over?

PIERCE: The preoccupation after the war was to take advantage of the situation, to assure greater military cooperation on the ground so as to have a much greater capability as a deterrent as well of an actual preventer of any recurrence of this type of aggression. That

was the main issue after the war wound down.

Q: Was there the feeling on your part or maybe your colleagues that the Saudi military instrument had been tried and worked? And was stronger than before?

PIERCE: You would have to look more carefully at the CENTCOM's evaluation than mine, but I think there were several bright spots in the Saudi approaches and there were several deficiencies. I think one of the things that we expressed great amazement at is when they initially deployed their M-60 tanks, sometimes as far away as the southwest up to the Kuwait border, they did it, and it was not an easy thing to do for any military. Their pilots performed admirably. Their Saudi National Guard demonstrated an extreme superiority of fighting, and not always with the best of equipment. There were other coordinative problems that again I'm not an expert on. There was an evaluation and no one is going to say that the Saudi army or military was perfect or anything close to it, but you recognize its weaknesses and its strengths and you try to build on it.

Q: So by the time you left how did you feel about the way things were going?

PIERCE: One of the things that did occur, which I felt was a great success on our part – although again we can always question it – is that, with the war and the evolution of Saudi-U.S. military cooperation, we got to the point that we became extremely positive to Saudi arms proposals and were in a position to basically constitute a massive, very large, very long-term assistance program that would put them in very good stead. To me that was a very positive thing, culminating with the sale of F-15.

Q: Ground attack.

PIERCE: Had the ground attack capability with some modification, off the F-15 E as I recall. The more problematic issue was how we approached military cooperation with the Saudis on the ground in the kingdom. Our suggestions had to be counter posed with this vulnerability that the Saudis have to criticism internally and externally. By the time I left it was obvious that this was not the most productive aspect of our military dialogue. It had potential, it was working, but it was a learning process. It was not always easy to convince people in Washington how to go about doing it. And there I left it and I don't really know the end result of that.

Q: Well you left there in '93. Where did you go then?

PIERCE: I went to Personnel for two years.

Q: Okay, '93 to '95.

PIERCE: Yes, I started in 1993.

Q: Okay, 1993 to '95. What were you doing in Personnel?

PIERCE: I was head of the assignments division in charge of Near East assignments – all assignments to South Asian posts and also the regional bureaus for those areas. Also all assignments to POL/MIL, to PM (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs), assignments to the narcotics bureau, all assignments to the Seventh Floor – that is to the secretary's floor and to the undersecretary's staff – and other specialized offices tied directly to the secretary of state. Offices like Dennis Ross's office; offices like the Office of Counterterrorism. I am missing a significant bureau that I handled assignments to. In total there were about eleven bureaus and offices and embassy sections that I was in charge of assignments to.

Q: I'm interested in looking at the Seventh Floor. This is where the principals are and where the special assistants are and all this.

PIERCE: That's right.

Q: Did you find there that this was sort of out of the hands of Personnel or _____?

PIERCE: *(laughs)*

Q: Because this is one of the best ways for people to move on the fast track up by snuggling close to an undersecretary or something like this. How did this work?

PIERCE: The relationship of Seventh Floor offices, offices of sub-cabinet level individuals and the secretary, is one of tension with the personnel system. While a number of positions at that level went through normal assignment procedures, there were always several positions up there that ultimately did not follow strict personnel procedures for assignments. In some cases where the senior official wanted a specific individual for the position, it was so difficult to do that you would find frequently that the director general of Personnel would have to designate – it was "she" at the time; Mrs. Genta Holmes – had that authority to do, and the position would be uncontested through the regular assignment process. I could exercise prerogatives that normally assignments officers would not be able to do, to assure that a candidate that an office or a senior official wanted had a very good chance, if not an absolute chance, to get it.

You have three different types of systems up there. Number one, you had the DG directed system and this is where you had a candidate who was just simply not going to conform with all assignment procedures and the senior officer really wants that person. Two, you had special prerogatives or rules that the assignments officer could use to enable the Seventh Floor position to be filled by a candidate that a senior officer wanted. And three, you had others that fell into the normal system. By and large most of those positions were filled through the normal assignments process.

Q: Now what would happen… one of the reasons so many people are willing to work very long hours and all up there is they are seen and they are tabbed as being comers or

special people. But what about coming out from there – not I guess at the senior officer level, but at the mid-grade level – were you getting directives to give this person a good job, or were they naming their jobs?

PIERCE: Very often. After a junior officer or a mid-term officer completes a tour up there, usually that person can get the backing or concurrence of the person they worked for – in other words, a very senior official – to support him or her for an ongoing position somewhere else. And obviously if you are evaluating candidates for position "A," if undersecretary of something calls you up and says, "Hey, I like Anne for that job. She's really quite good," you're going to be somewhat hard-pressed to say, "Gee I've got somebody else."

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: But that normally does not affect the Personnel processing so much as it affects the candidates that the individual offices or bureaus would support for a non Seventh Floor position. For example, a deputy director job in a country desk somewhere – a candidate coming from a Seventh Floor position with his or her boss backing that person has an extra chance to get it just by virtue of the support that the senior level official might give that candidate.

Q: You mention that you were in charge of staffing the Political-Military Bureau.

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: Now one of the complaints or comments that I've gotten from people in recent years – I've never served there and I've been retired now for some time, so I'm speaking from other peoples' points of view – is that the Political-Military Bureau used to be considered one of the up-and-coming places to go and they had some very bright, young officers going into it. But they're saying that this has become more and more an area of Civil Servants. How did you find it during your time?

PIERCE: In the Political-Military Bureau you could divide the positions into three types. You had several, but not an awful lot, of very solid positions that offered extremely interesting, very hard, very high-level work. Also, unfortunately, you had a number of jobs that were much less significant. Number crunching jobs. Not very significant jobs, not very high visibility jobs, just a lot of hard work. They did not attract a lot of people in many cases and the potential for onward assignments for an officer there was based more on that person's experience perhaps than other bureaus. In many cases it was not an easy sell for a candidate coming off of these number crunching jobs in PM to be competitive in other positions outside the PM Bureau. And then you had a significant number of jobs in PM that were decent jobs and were not numbing by the numbers. So you had three different types of jobs there.

The other problem PM had was reorganization. They were always reorganizing. There

was a significant reorganization when I first came into Personnel. What the reorganization problem is, is when you reorganize you rewrite your position descriptions, you recategorize your jobs, the job work level, who is being supervised by whom, what the different office tasks are, etc. But you're always behind in the sense that the system itself hasn't taken hold and ingrained those positions into the computer system. There's always a final act of approval; there's always some detail missing so you don't really get that position quickly into the personnel system. So you assign in an ad hoc way. You create personnel numbers and assign people into them in close consultation with the bureau, but they're not real numbers yet. You can't really do the honest assignments into the system until everything is regularized – and sometimes this would take months. And in some cases, very astoundingly, it could take years. You would have people leaving domestic positions in which they were not in the system to begin with although they had always been paid. But they did not have accurate records thanks to the fact that the system itself had not incorporated that position that they'd served for two years in, into the system. Very frustrating in any case, but you had to keep the assignments going. You had to make things work.

Q: The Foreign Service assignments process is pretty much a competitive one because we have an "up or out" service and there are certain jobs that give you a far greater visibility than other jobs, and therefore the assignment process is part of the competitive process. How did you find that NEA did in getting what you considered as you looked at your clientele, how did you feel that you did?

PIERCE: I need to give you a clearer idea of how the system worked.

Q: Okay.

PIERCE: Within Personnel you had two different spheres. You had the assignments officers and the assignments officers basically worked within Personnel but for the bureaus of the offices that were trying to staff. On the other hand you had the Career Development Officers (CDOs) – this was a system that was changed in '95 – that looked after the individual Foreign Service Officers. By and large, people who would bid on jobs, people who would become candidates for assignments into various jobs, would primarily go into the bureaus and be interviewed and basically try to tell the responsible person there why that person was good for the job. Now out of those candidates, normally then the bureau or the office involved would select one that it wanted, and informally, in many cases, contact that person to see if that person was really interested keenly in that job. And that person would become that bureau's candidate.

Normally, in most cases, the Career Development Officer, working for the client – not for the office, for the individual – would find out obviously if the person were keenly interested or would take the job. If there would be a mesh, a meld, the position would go through smoothly. That's what happened for most positions. Frequently, however, what would happen would be that the bureau wanted one candidate, but then another Foreign Service Officer, through his CDO, would also want that job. So then you would have a

conflict. This ended up being settled – if it couldn't be settled outside through alternate jobs coming up or alternate candidates coming up from the bureau – in what is known almost notoriously as a "shoot-out" within the Personnel Office, where we would assemble once a week to sit down and thrash out the better candidate for the job.

Q: The assembly would consist of whom?

PIERCE: The assembly would consist of the executive section in the assignments office within Personnel. It would also consist of all of the assignments officers for all of the various bureaus. I think there were about five of us. It would consist of all of the heads of the various CDO offices. The heads of the political sections; political officers, the econ officers, the admin officers. They would sit down as well as other key bodies within the Career Development/Personnel assignments process. The officer in charge of training, an officer who basically looked after their personnel matters. That's about it. Probably about 11 or 12 voting members in this assembly. In that situation the position in contention would be outlined by the assignments officer, who would describe what was needed. That would be the job of the assignments officer. In this type of case you would have two candidates – the one the bureau wants and the one the bureau does not want, but the CDO for that candidate and the CDO for the bureau candidate would both be backing their respective clients. And then each one of them would outline the background of the clients and make the case as to why that specific client merited the job. Then there would be an open time for discussion and then you would have a vote. The candidate that got the largest number of votes would be assigned the job. Those could get quite tense.

Q: One of the problems that occurs sometimes is that it's hard for people to break into a bureau if they've been out for a while or something.

PIERCE: That's correct.

Q: Was there an effort to say, "Somebody ended up in Science and Oceans," or something like that, "but he wants to get into Near Eastern Affairs?" Was much done about this or did you find that people would be kind of frozen?

PIERCE: It's difficult to remember precisely, but in many occasions it could happen. What would happen in some cases though is you've got a person who has been in a bureau like environments/oceans and aspires to a very specific select job in a regional bureau, one that the regional bureau might want to use as a reward for someone who slugged it out in Baghdad, for example.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: Or who has put in fourteen-hour-day work on the Lebanese Desk or something. I would make the case primarily based on guidance from the specific bureau involved, but sometimes on my own idea that there was another job in the bureau perhaps and not seen as a reward a job well done, that the person had a decent chance at.

Q: Was somebody overall looking and saying, you know, here I am representing the NEA; are we getting the people we want or is the European Bureau gobbling them up or what-have-you?

PIERCE: That again would be a bureau issue. It's not a Personnel issue. We would treat all candidates as candidates and the quality of personnel in each bureau was an issue for them to mull, not for us. Oftentimes we'd get a bureau that would want to go after a string of candidates that might seem unusual, but they would outline a strategy for that and you would try your best to accommodate the Personnel system with making that happen. But it's they who do the outreach work; it's they who do the recruiting for these types of jobs.

The thing that you would get into is when you would have positions that would draw very limited bidding; bidders that a bureau might look upon as just not adequate – the quality or the size or the number of people – for them to make a good decision. So you'd be aware of these vacancies – these positions that were due – and you would look carefully and see if you could come up with alternate candidates that were in the system looking for jobs but just hadn't focused on those particular jobs. And you would try the sell. You would try the sell sometimes with the individual, but mainly an assignments officer did not work with individual FSOs. The assignments officer would make the approach to the CDO of that person because this is where, under this system, the CDO had the responsibility for apprising clients of what the CDO thought was a good match, and doable.

From time to time you would have an FSO who was adamant that he or she wanted this specific job and even in the face of the CDO's advice perhaps that this may not be the best match, that person would be adamant. Ultimately it would end up being that the CDO representing the client, the FSO, would demand a shoot-out for a certain position. And then you have a shoot-out. It would be the job of the other CDO, whose FSO was the candidate from a bureau, to outline the reasons why the bureau's candidate was the better choice. Almost certainly in situations of that nature the assignments officer would be as supportive as possible since the bureau is the client of the assignments officer of that CDO's position.

Now there's always the suspicion that the deck was stacked against FSOs that were trying to buck the system, trying to buck a bureau's selection. I found in shoot-outs that of those 10 to 12 people who were sitting in judgment making the final call you had represented there, not only assignments officers whose clients were bureaus, but also CDOs who were very attuned to the needs of candidates. And you had two or three individuals who were neither CDOs nor assignments officers. You have these debates and sometimes it would get heated, but the exchanges were reasonably neutral and a bureau was not favored in an automatic inclinational way. It just did not happen that way. Any time there is an objection by anybody at the table you either explain it and overcome it or that position is held until the objection is sorted out. You lost a few. After these panel meetings you would call your client bureaus and you would tell them who got assigned and who didn't,

and why. Sometimes those conversations could be just a bit tense. Bureaus didn't always appreciate the fact that their candidate didn't get paneled that week, or lost. You know they have someone they did not want to see in those jobs. The odd thing about it is that if you look clearly over a year's span after the assignments process, after somebody who has been put into the bureau or into an embassy against the bureau's wishes, in many cases those persons worked just as well, if not better, than the other person might have. And what's really important to get assigned one week is totally irrelevant a month later. It's all a passion of the moment issue.

Q: I've been doing these oral histories now for almost 16 years and one of the things I was getting from an earlier generation of officers with senior ranks was that they would be assigned as General Services Officer to some post and they thought, "Oh God, how awful," but the expression again was that you stood up and saluted and went. But often they said, "You know, the job that I thought that would be the worst turned out to be one of the greatest learning experiences and fun or everything else that I've ever had." How is it during the time when you were there, where it's a much more negotiated procedure and all? There must've been an awful lot of jobs that just nobody wanted.

PIERCE: Exactly. I was in charge of the "hard to fill exercise." The "hard to fill exercise" is a Department-wide exercise mainly for overseas positions, but also for some positions in the Department that got inadequate bids by candidates at the level appropriate. In other words, it's an O-2 position and all you got were O-3s or O-4s bidding on it. Or maybe one or two O-2s. It was a system whereby bureaus and embassies could designate positions that were hard to fill, and that enabled you to relax the criteria for assignments and also give some incentive to better talk up those jobs. You had a significant number of them in some AF (Bureau of African Affairs) posts, mainly around the Sahara. It waxed and waned. The "stans" always had their fair share of problems.

Q: The what?

PIERCE: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan…

Q: Oh yes.

PIERCE: Other positions would be difficult to fill because of environmental issues, an occasional one or two, for example Mexico City. Colombia might be difficult from time to time given the situation there. It just really depended. But you would go through an exercise in which you would try to make it easier to entrap people into those places. Another thing you would do is raise the differential if you could. That was a very difficult exercise because at the time the Department was trying to reorganize the criteria; the end result meant a number of posts lost 5 percentage points off their differentials. You would try to come up with ways in which you could entice people with monetary gain to bid on these jobs. It was a problem.

The issue that you raise, though, is that you used to salute and go out and do it. I had my

share of these positions – not necessarily of the "hard to fill" exercise type, but not easy to fill. Pakistan got very dangerous during that time and we had some problems trying to fill some slots there. Algeria, of course, had difficulty simply because you couldn't do anything there. You were in the compound and they were killing people just outside. Lebanon had problems like that before but it pretty much situated itself. Both Beirut and Algiers at the time were hardship posts with danger pay, which is a significant financial incentive for people raking on one-year assignment. Others were just difficult to fill; not necessarily in NEA, but around the world.

You never really wanted to force a person to a place like that. The reason is if you live in a tight environment, which is difficult anyway and could turn even worse, you don't want to see a person there who can't pull it. You just don't. So you want to be very careful of, yes, you want to fill the position, but no, you do not want to force someone into that position who could become a liability in a bad situation. Bureaus at the time were beginning to resort to other ways to fill these positions. WAEs (When Actually Employed) were coming in as possibilities, and contract employees. Long-term TDY. These were primarily jobs, as I recall at the time, jobs such as the junior or the GSO in a "stan." The other thing would be that bureaus would have to work extra hard in enticing people in with promises of those select positions later; "if you come in and take this job, we can see what we can do about that job which you really want."

Q: One of the things I picked up by both experience and listening to gossip is that you can't trust a person who promises something will happen two years later, but you go back than, and it is a little like Willie Loman, who says that promises were made.

PIERCE: That's right. But these were not promises within Personnel; these were promises by the bureau. The Personnel system can not promise you onward assignments or that you will have a solid reputation in bureau "A" if you go to this job. It's a bureau thing. That still doesn't eliminate the problem. Of course the problem is there. But it's an incentive and if you do well in a bad environment you will earn credits in the bureau.

Q: Well, I was going to say, in a shoot-out or something or even before that, if somebody has just come out of a "stan" and lived in a hotel under very difficult circumstances for a while, I imagine that the career counselor would present this saying, "Look, this person has earned their bonus; we owe them something."

PIERCE: The argument has merit and it has been used. In essence I think in a situation of that nature, all things being equal, the assignments panel will tend toward the individual who's just had the hardship. The job of the opposing side is to basically present the case as to why the other candidate offers vastly better qualifications for that particular job. You don't really want to go into the personal aspects. Though you don't talk about personal aspects of individuals, you can suggest that the person that's aspiring to that job would be better qualified elsewhere. It's not a very polite way, but in very few cases it does become an issue.

The Personnel system takes the position that everybody who is a candidate for a job is qualified on paper unless it's an O-4 aspiring to an O-2 position or an obvious bad mix. Any legitimate O-3 admin officer has a fair shot at any legitimate O-3 admin position. It's for the sides that are discussing a position to make the case while not suggesting that one is not qualified for the job, but that the mix is better for the other. It's a delicate issue. Personalities always intrude into this. It doesn't get really heated in the sense of acrimony, but at the same time you can have some very compelling arguments and the tension is in the discussion.

Q: After all the processing is done there must be a group, significant or not significant, of those nobody really wants. I mean whatever their recommendation is they're not considered candidates by most bureaus. I mean they just don't want them. I think the term I've heard used in other eras is "the turkeys." Which I always avoid because it's so easy to get a bad reputation by one or two people badmouthing you who don't understand the situation that today's turkey may be tomorrow's water-walker. But still, what did you do with the hard to place people?

PIERCE: They were always at the end of a personnel assignments cycle. The positions that weren't filled and officers that for one reason or another had not been assigned. There are a variety of reasons why. One is the one you just outlined; others could be that Mr. "A" was the number 2 choice here and then he went and he got paneled for another position and then that position was eliminated, etc., etc., or it could just be that people want to stand and watch until the system sorts itself out and something might pop up at the end of a personnel cycle, which it does although it's a big gamble. In situations that you're outlining – where you have questions about an officer, like why has this person been at grade for 12 years? – that suggests something about the person. It's not a tell-tale sign but it suggests it.

In the end you will have assignments that have laid open for a number of reasons – they may be positions that most people would consider unsatisfying – and you will have a CDO who will propose a person for those positions. In those cases many bureaus are prepared to accept candidates for these positions, and will accept what they got and that's the result. I don't think you will ever see a candidate for assignment who just plain can not get a job. At the end of the cycle – and I was not a Career Development Officer so I don't know how these dialogues work – you would have jobs out there that were just open, and as a CDO, you would basically tell your candidate, "make your choice." Once the choice was made you would confer with the assignments officer involved, or with the bureau directly, and the bureau may or may not object.

Q: Did you find that the "up or out" standards as far as promotion goes and the fact that you had so many years to show that you had supervised and all of this, did this make the system a little difficult to manage, because people would be put in jobs that might make them, by the systems standards, ineligible to be promoted?

PIERCE: That's correct. Not ineligible, but certainly it would weaken the credentials that

one must have to be likelier to be promotable. If you don't have supervisory experience – this gets into the political officers, primarily, but they end up being protected in other ways, I think, and this was simply the way the system worked – but if you don't have supervisory experience at a certain level then you become far less of an attractive candidate if you aspire to a job with a significant management criterion as a key aspect of that job. You have no background in management. It's kind of hard to aspire to a DCM job if you've never on paper managed anyone.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: Not always though.

Q: Speaking of assignments though, after two years in '95 where did you get somebody to assign you?

PIERCE: I aspired at that time to a number of principal officer and DCM jobs and I found out one day – I put down Surabaya as one of them – that I'd been paneled to it and it was somewhat of a shock. It had never been discussed with me by anyone and I did some investigation and it seemed that on that bid list no one had prior Indonesian experience, and the requisite supervisory background was present, so I got paneled for the job.

Q: So you went to Surabaya?

PIERCE: Yes.

Q: You were there when?

PIERCE: In 1973 and then I went back in 1996.

Q: So you were there three years? Could you explain both where is Surabaya and what was its importance?

PIERCE: Surabaya is the second largest city in Indonesia; it's on the eastern part of the island of Java in Indonesia. Jakarta being on the western side. It is the second most important city within the country. It is within the Javanese ethnic heartland as opposed to Jakarta, which is not. It was the second largest, by far, commercial center in the country; well developed infrastructure, an awful lot of money being pumped in and a lot of exports. At the time it was a growing foreign investment center and modernization had made a dramatic impact there. In essence it had become almost an international – at least a Southeast Asian – center with direct airline transport coming in and going out. We were able to make the case for having a consulate there in terms of advancing commercial interests. A number of firms had set up their regional headquarters there given its location, given its transportation infrastructure, given its direct access into the market of millions of people, as well as its proximity to natural resources.

The consular district was large. It began in Central Java, went into East Java where Surabaya was, and then extended all the way out to West Timor, not East Timor. It then went up north and included the island of Sulawesi and the Maluku Islands, now undergoing such tremendous ethnic religious turmoil. It had the old traditional cultural Javanese capital of Yogyakarta. So it was very, very large.

One of the wonderful things about that job is that you had basically – not an inexhaustible – but a very sufficient amount of travel funds. I approached that position in a way that though you live in Surabaya, your job was to find out what was going on, see it, and develop contacts in the eastern half, virtually, of Indonesia, about 90 million people. It was a tremendous challenge. I like to think I had all of the best places in the country to visit from a sense of sheer beauty, but also by far some of the most interesting developments from a political standpoint.

There were two things about the job. Firstly, prior to my getting to the position, in respect to how it related to the embassy, there had been little interest in developing political contacts. That changed just prior to my coming with the arrival of Ambassador Stapleton Roy. I was charged with developing political contacts, which I did much to my great benefit ultimately. The other thing, of course, was the dramatic rise in the economy there and our tremendous commitment towards strengthening the commercial side of things across Indonesia. And Surabaya had an excellent potential for that up until the economic collapse.

Q: I can't remember, have you had Indonesian before?

PIERCE: I have a 4/4 in Indonesian.

Q: How did you find your political contacts? What was your impression of them as political leaders, how the political system worked?

PIERCE: This was in the last year of Suharto's complete control of the system. At the end of my first year is when he became loose and then ultimately fell.

Q: When you first arrived.

PIERCE: Developing political contacts at that time was difficult. Firstly, virtually everyone in the system was co-opted. I was able to begin to have some small contacts with political leaders, political party people, who had the potential – which was proven out – to get beyond that. But aside from that you basically began to expand your contacts in the human rights area. The other thing – and this was mainly on Java that I'd do this – you would do is to talk with people at Gadjah Mada, perhaps the best university in the country. It's in Yogyakarta. Not the most renowned; that's the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, but it's a close second. But the embassy had, for years, had interlocutors amongst the academics there and you began to develop those. And from that you find others. We had long-standing academic contacts in the local universities in Surabaya. You developed

those again. They were pretty well disposed to the consulate; it was very easy to maintain the dialogue. But you expand them; you look at people that traditionally the consulate hasn't had contact with.

It's amazing that the academics ended up being critical in the fall of Suharto. When I first got there I would've never imagined that, but the key ones were invaluable in propelling the student movement which was the beginning of the erosion of his base. In Sulawesi it was far more difficult. The first year I was there, it was very, very difficult in the city of Makassar – at the time called Ujung Pandang – which is the key city in Sulawesi. I went there several times. It was under much tighter control; the political process was more tightly enforced; people were far more wary of talking; and the military was far more interested in me than I like for them to be.

Whenever I went anywhere in the district I always tried to make contact with the local regional commander, normally a two-star general, the governor, and the chief of police. Just as a protocolary measure. I didn't expect much to come out of those conversations. The military invariably, at that time, would see me. Later it got more difficult when they began insisting that we had to go through a rigid, almost impossibly difficult, protocolary arrangement to pay calls on some military leaders.

The first year I had some interesting conversations, did a lot of commercial promotion; and then began to open contact in as broad a way as possible with religious leaders. In the past, consul generals had always paid courtesy calls on certain local key religious leaders, called "kiyayi," and almost invariably they control religious schools. And there were about three that were extremely important and courtesy calls were always placed on them. I expanded that; one of the first things I did was sought out the East Java leadership of something called "Nahdlatul Ulama," NU, which we did not have an awful lot of contact with. And I was most fortunate, after an initial sort of reservation on their part, to meet a man named Mr. Hasyim Muzadi, who was the head of NU in East Java and became a close friend. And through him I was able to be introduced, using his name, to other kiyayi in East Java as well as Central Java, and that has been one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.

Q: I would imagine that being of the Muslim faith must've been somewhat startling to them at the beginning, wasn't it?

PIERCE: Not really. I think the way that Indonesians approach that is a very laissez faire ad hoc way. Once well after the time I met Mr. Hasyim Muzadi I was sitting with him and I had one of my employees with me whom I always took to see him and it came out that I was Muslim and Mr. Muzadi said, "That is no business of mine."

Q: When you arrived there obviously you were in close touch with our embassy and all. What was the consensus of whether Suharto and whither Indonesia when you got there in '96?

PIERCE: The embassy was going through an intense dialogue over the effectiveness of the Suharto regime and its future prospects. At the time the Suharto regime had been in place since '66. It was looked upon conventionally as bequeathing an economic miracle to the country, and admittedly, the prosperity of Indonesia and the average Indonesian had gone up. There was a trickle down affect, although those at the top got immensely richer than that. The dialogue was, from what I could tell, being in distant Surabaya, from time to time very sharp. But the challenges to that belief, inherited from thirty some odd years, were difficult to find formal expression of without an awful lot of proof. Therein the tension lay.

I, myself, one of the early things I did was attend a meeting, or a religious ceremony, by President Suharto at a famous pesantren not far from Surabaya in which Gus Dur, Abdurrahman Wahid, the current president, as national head of the NU, was coming as well as Suharto. It was expected that there would be serious tension, because they were not known as close. My reporting, describing a Javanese situation where the tension was subsurface, was looked upon with some skepticism. That was indicative –you're looking at signs, you're not looking at actualities, and you're trying to predict. Any time you do that in a situation like this you could be wrong. It's very difficult to meet the burden of proof to a degree that you would like to see. There are cracks in the feet of the statue; that tension was there. It was only as the student demonstrations began to get rowdier and rowdier, and more pointedly antagonistic to Suharto, that you began to sense with greater confidence that the ship of state was not being steered well. And you had a greater latitude to express the suggestion that maybe the end was closer than farther away, which happened in Jakarta, in Yogyakarta and in Surabaya. It also happened in other key cities. The student protest movement, particularly in Surabaya, was one that my junior officer and I followed with extreme care.

Q: Well it must've been a tricky situation. Did the students look upon us as the enemy? The helper? How did they look upon us, or were we looked upon at all?

PIERCE: We, from time to time, were looked upon. We were, unsurprisingly – it happens quite frequently – from time to time labeled the reason why Suharto had stayed around so long. We were labeled as the proppers-up of a regime that was immoral, that was bankrupt. At that time the economic collapse had already begun and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the basic loans were being put in place. And we were also looked upon, in some ways, as the destroyers of the Indonesian economy, as intent on seeing the nation fragment. Now these issues would come forth, wax and wane. There was no monolithic student view of things. There was no monolithic student leadership. That's one of the reasons why it succeeded. You cultivated contacts mainly through the academics but also through students. And through priests – that was another way that we got into knowing what students were doing. Priests in Surabaya, because so many of the students who were spearheading the protest movement were Christians.

Q: Would this be a Catholic priest?

PIERCE: Catholic priests primarily. We found Catholic priests to be extremely good interlocutors. I think primarily – and it would be my guess and I always found this to be the case – because they had an organization. The Protestants were independent. We did latch into some Protestants. One was a heart surgeon who got upset in 1996 with the total burning of all of the churches in an area in East Java called "Situbondo" – burned out one day by mobs – and began establishing his own network to record and report religious intolerance and violence. He became an extremely close friend. I exchanged views with him. I was amazed at how quickly he was able to find concerned people, mainly Christians, who would be in a position to tell him anywhere in the country where an example of a church burning was happening or anything with a religious overtone that was erupting into violence.

Priests, I think were lower key. We are talking about workers on the ground, not higher officials within the church, who would gain impressions from their ministry to their communities at the grassroots level. This type of contact is a long, long process. You sit and you talk and you drink tea and you swap stories. You do it in January and then you come back and you do it in late February. You just develop a rapport, and it's a laid back thing where you sit and you talk. You've picked up things, they've picked up things; you swap. And then you're sitting with someone in a community just outside of Surabaya and say, "I'm going to southeast Central Java next week. Do you know anybody down there who I might stop by and say 'hi' to?" and a name will pop up, and you'll try to see him.

And you're going there for a number of reasons. Number one, it may be politically interesting, but number two, more importantly in this particular case, because I had had reports that there may be starvation down there. I was interested in finding out just what people were eating. There were pockets of hunger in 1998, '99, that I took extremely seriously. One of the things you'd always look at is what poor people were eating. Were they eating rice? Were they relying more on traditional tubers? How much of their diet was cassava? And, from that, where did they get the nutrition from what you were looking at? You were trying to estimate visibly, and as well as by talking to people, how the staple of the diet had deteriorated in terms of nutrition. That was one reason why priests were always in a very good position to give us advice.

Q: Oh, yes.

PIERCE: You would feed that into the embassy. The south side of East Java always had these reports. We would go down there and look, and talk.

Q: As these student demonstrations and all went on, was it pretty soon apparent that the Suharto regime was not going to make it?

PIERCE: I don't think you could say it was pretty soon apparent. Students were never going to be, in my view, the topplers of the regime. Whenever you would have the beginnings of student protests you've got two different types of people. You've got the students, the youngish twenty-somethings who have become convinced that it's time for a

change. They were extremely active in the ‘60s when change was what they wanted. Then you have this community of impoverished people who have absolutely nothing, who live in very impoverished conditions with no prospects and little to do. Those that worked, worked hard. Those are the ones who were looking for the basic staples. In cities with modernization producing so much you have increasing masses attracted into town. Sometimes they get income, sometimes they don’t. When you began to have student protests, these people began to look. They began to crowd along the streets; they began to become attracted to the show. There’s always a spirit of great show in the Javanese Indonesian tradition and participation. That’s the element of disorder. When you begin to mix the two it moves into where control becomes questionable. Ultimately this is what happened in Jakarta in May of ’98, which ultimately was the end of the Suharto regime. The students massed more and more people and had a sheer show of great numbers. The other test that happens, that begins to question the validity of the regime, is that you’ve got the military there. The military has two things to do. The military/police. They have to control. You do that through several ways; you do that through intimidation; you do that through negotiation; and ultimately you can do that through force. Excess force. And this is what began to happen.

The military could not withstand the pressure. The police could not withstand the pressure. You had the deaths of students. I would sit there in early ’98 and say, “Who is going to be the first student to die?” At the time it was just an unthinkable thing. You knew leaders in universities and you just did not want to see that happen. You would see the beginning of pushing on the military – very dramatic pictures. You could either look or you would see them in the papers. Very dramatic pictures. And then fights; invariably the students would lose. Blood, beaten heads oozing blood. Very dramatic. Tear gas in the air. You could see that the test was there and as you began to see this test, you began to question whether the military and the police could control the situation and their own ability. That’s what collapsed. And then the situation just went chaotic. That was in April or May. It happened in Yogyakarta, but not so much. It happened in Surabaya, but not so much. It happened in Jakarta terribly and it happened in Solo terribly. I know I was in Solo the day it happened.

I attribute the relative quiet in Surabaya to one thing: good, solid, strong academic leadership which inspired students. The academics were never directly involved but they exercised immense influence over students. And, oddly enough, an enlightened military commander who worked very closely to try to ensure that it didn’t get too out of hand. It almost did, but it didn’t. In Yogyakarta I attribute it to the university leadership at Gadjah Mada, and most importantly to the Sultan of Yogyakarta, Hamengkubuwono.

Q: Did you feel that there was danger of mobs just going amok?

PIERCE: I don’t use that word.

Q: Yes. You know, of things just getting really out of control?

PIERCE: I had seen this happen. You see it on a small scale; it happens from time to time. Over the least imaginable issue. You could take a perfectly calm marketplace – busy – and if you still shot that every 30 seconds, you could have one 30 seconds in which it would be just a basic busy market, but the next 30 seconds you could have an incident. It could be anything. It could be some man saying, "He stole my bike." The next 30 seconds you could see that guy, whoever he is, the suspect, surrounded, and the next 30 seconds you could see him dead. It does happen. I saw this happen once in Ujung Pandang – just very shocking - where a student in junior high school was standing with other students waiting for a bus at six-thirty in the morning, and someone said, "He stole my wallet!" Suddenly he was being chased by seven, eight, a crowd up to 20 other boys. He had lost his shoes, he had fallen in the street, and they surrounded him and started kicking him and then quit. He was able to sneak away. But it was extremely hair-raising.

Q: While these things were going on, how did you sense, as a political officer by training, the attitude of the American leadership? Stapleton Roy, the ambassador, others, and also Washington. Suharto had been the general on the white charger as far as we were concerned back in '65 or so. Did you feel there was a time when we were beginning to write him off?

PIERCE: The problem with that is that I was not in that direct relationship with the embassy. Certainly writing him off is not the best way to express that. But certainly we began to see that the situation was changing and that there needed to be a dramatic realignment of power bases in the country. I began to sense that – again, not having direct access into embassy Country Team deliberations – in early April of '98. Suharto fell in May.

We were expressing our reservations and our concern over the security situation. As I recall we did not have major potential problems for foreigners, and certainly not in Surabaya. Foreigners were secondary, tertiary; they were not on the scope. A foreigner would be endangered only if by chance that person strayed into a demonstration and that demonstration resulted in turmoil. And most demonstrations didn't occur where foreigners went. You didn't have that problem; this was a constant message that I kept reinforcing with the foreign community in Surabaya, and in some cases in Bali. Bali was also in my district, where on any given day we could have a thousand Americans. Bali, at the time, was considered insulated from turmoil and there was a good reason for that.

We were very watchful, but there was not much we could do except as human rights violations were recorded and become obvious we took positions on them. That was our main focus during March and April, although the economy obviously was an underlying factor and another part of our policy. But in the political sense it's not anything for us to do; you don't want to become directly involved. You don't want even to be seen as directly trying to influence internal events.

Q: I would imagine that just when it really gets interesting would be the time when you really have to avoid your contacts.

PIERCE: I didn't avoid my contacts at all.

Q: Well what would they be doing? Would they be saying, "Where do you stand?" I mean, where do you, a representative of the United States, stand? Or did this come up?

PIERCE: The constant American position here is that we always support democratization; we always support popular representation. We are not interested – and this is the traditional view – we have no role in getting out in front of the will of the people of Indonesia. We support the aspirations of the will of the people of Indonesia. The political will. That was our long-expressed view in the face of Suharto's autocracy. As their aspirations became more and more for change, our position was apparently more attractive. But we did not get beyond that. We weren't getting out in front of aspirations. There was no real clear purpose here except a 19-year-old student saying, "Topple Suharto," which is hardly a position. And certainly not anything that the United States… Again, we always support stability and orderly process and the rule of law. So these are our standards. No one quibbles with them. No one quarrels with them. We do not address ourselves to every shake and rumble that goes on in the country, except where human rights comes to the fore. Then we have a clear policy, which we did express.

Q: And of course we had the example of the overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines in a way. We did not overly support Marcos. We backed away pretty quickly.

PIERCE: In a public way we're distanced from what's going on inside the country. To me, with my inner interlocutors, that was an extremely useful position. It's one that I was comfortable with, I could articulate, I could defend, and they almost invariably would appreciate it.

Q: Were you concerned or looking at who or what, if anything, takes Suharto's place? Before everything was in red or white because of the Communist thing, but this was no longer the main issue.

PIERCE: What happened is Suharto resigned. The term that was used was "lengser;" he went lengser keprabon. He stepped down to go into tranquility and aesthetic meditation. He was replaced by his vice president, which I think most students felt was not legitimate because the regime was illegitimate. But the institutions accepted that and Mr. Habibie came in. Mr. Habibie was astute enough to realize that he didn't have the full deck Suharto did to impose his will. He began a pretty decent process of "reformasi," which was what the students lad called for, and had been taken up by the nation, trying to turn things around, more open, freer, in terms of the press, in terms of the right to free speech, and in terms of the political process. Which he did. And then also to arrange the elections in '99, which he lost and stepped down from. Also his other call, which many Indonesians question, is the plebiscite in East Timor. These were things that he did within a very short time. So it diffused a lot of the tension after the week or so of chaos surrounding Suharto's resignation.

Q: While this was happening, what were you observing in the vibrant, economic city?

PIERCE: Well the economy had begun collapsing before that.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: It was freezing up. The downspin was rather dramatic in the economy. The poverty line, the amount of capital that people had, the potential for food. One of the things I investigated in East Java, particularly, as the price of rice skyrocketed, was the potential for rice traders to be attacked and rice mills to be raided by people – just the potential for violence – and whether this could begin to produce a string of violent incidents that would all be interrelated. One of the things that Mr. Amien Rais – who's somewhat notorious now, he's the speaker of the MPR (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat); at the time he was the head of the "Muhammadiyah," which is the reform movement of significance in Indonesia – used to say before this was that Indonesia was like a dry rice field waiting for a match, a spark. It would suddenly become inflamed and flames would whip across, and it would be before anyone knew.

I was always interested in seeing the wisdom of his remarks. If you began to have riots or a food incident of violence in Malang, would that occasion a string of incidents that could erupt in a conflagration. I had my doubts, but you just didn't put it away as a minor issue. Always investigated it. Always went after that potential and talked to the people involved. You would drive along the sides of someplace on the roads of East Java near Tilomar, which was a city very ominous to me. I didn't like it at all; I always felt it was potentially very, very violent. I would stop and talk to rice threshers and see what their situations were, how the attitudes of people around them would be – whether they could make rice deliveries unimpeded. You would investigate how "BULOG," the national logistics command which distributed rice for poor people, was going, and it wasn't going well. But there was a vast distribution network under BULOG for distribution of rice to borderline survival families. You would investigate; you would talk to people and see if it were happening. See if the deliveries were being made, how the rice was being distributed from delivery points, how much rice was there, how satisfying was it to people. You'd always go and look at that. You would also check constantly on the price of rice. You'd stop anywhere and you'd go in and you would ask, "How much is that kilo of rice?" Always looking. Trying to make sure if the conflagration, or if something resembling it were to occur, whether what you knew would gel with that reality. And it never occurred.

Q: What about Americans in business there; would they come and ask you, during this time, "Should we get out? Should we stay?" How would you treat that?

PIERCE: There were a few American businessmen there who had asked the question. Most of them would be at the beck and call of their headquarters in Jakarta or in the States. Of course, if they were in the States, much like the Department of State, they listen to CNN before they listen to the people on the ground. And CNN, being in the business of

making breathless reports, was not, I could say, the most reliable place to get news.

Q: This is a problem.

PIERCE: There was one significant group of American businessmen who were reasonably content. Most others had left the country because of the economic downturn; they were involved in projects. We started looking very aggressively at where other Americans might be. We discovered a whole cache of TDYers. The companies would not send in families; they would send in temporaries to work for Indonesian companies and keep them in hotels. All of them had their own evacuation plans. With that said, we would also make sure they knew we had one as well. This is just something you would do. I mean it's not like we were trying to say something is imminent; we were just trying to be prepared.

We also began canvassing the more isolated groups in the district. There were certain missionary groups up in Sulawesi we wanted to make sure we knew where they were. We communicated our potential concern about the situation, always finding out that in places like Sulawesi in '98, in the more isolated parts, things just went along. You know, the birds sang in the morning and people cut their rice and they went home at night. But they also had their own contingency plans. This was also a good way for us to share impressions on local conditions.

We began to look more carefully at Bali – we had done this earlier – we had an office with an American there. We've had it since the mid-'80s, I believe. A small office, but he had a very good network of hotel connections, and again, Bali being considered reasonably safe from this type of thing just simply because of its environment. It was still very good, but we began to expand even more the hotel connections that he had there. We began also to expand our own connections with every three-star or better hotel in East Indonesia, on the premise that in a situation of this nature if something were to happen, we couldn't find every little nook and cranny the Americans might be in on every little island, but they would probably gravitate, in one form or another, to the most developed hotel just to find out what was happening.

Q: Yes.

PIERCE: So we began finding three-star hotels in Palau, Central Sulawesi, and in two or three more like Manado. We found some of them stuck in weird tourist havens in Central Java. Always making sure we had connections with them just in the event that they would be happy to post a sheet from us in certain situations. One of the things that we found out when the problems in Maluku exploded in 1999.

Q: This was after you'd left?

PIERCE: No, this was before I'd left. About six months before I left. This was in January of 1999.

We had always knew of two groups of Americans in Ambon – mainly missionary groups – and we presumed that the occasional person would come through who had heard about the beaches, wanted to experiment, that kind of stuff. Well, when Maluku first exploded it was very tumultuous, very difficult to communicate with. They got out; they had charter aircraft go up and they were gone. Both of them. I thought, that's finished. Then they started surfacing. It wasn't one, it wasn't two, it was 45 Americans. By then connections outside were severed and it was about a week of touch-and-go. It was even longer than that before we got the final ones out.

Q: What happened in Maluku?

PIERCE: Across the country, especially in places where ethnic mixes occur, especially when ethnic mixes are of different religious backgrounds, and an incoming group manages to get an economic toehold over the indigenous group. That's what happened in Maluku. It happened in Kupang, and there was some potential for it happening in some of the islands between Bali and West Timor. It's happening in Kalimantan now, although that's not the area that I specialized in. But whenever this happens you run the risk of having a religious ethnic clash, mainly brought about by some of the underworld that tends to permeate the fringes of the less privileged society of Indonesia – common gangsters and thugs. Oftentimes one, unfortunately the Christian in those cases, is drunk and they get into a fight. It happens all the time. Most of these incidents go away, but if there is a sufficient combination of circumstance, if there is in the immediate vicinity enough grudges against one group over the other, it can get out of control. Now beyond getting out of control, you have to have another factor to make it into a Maluku situation, and that is a reasonable balance between the two conflicting groups. That's what you had in terms of the Christians and the Muslim newcomers that were quickly allied, more often that not, with some of the Muslim old timers.

In Kupang you had the same situation in late '98 – maybe November of '98 – but the issue there quickly went away because the incoming Muslims were outnumbered one to twenty. There was a quick accommodation there. But not in Maluku, for a variety of reasons but the primary one is that they weren't outnumbered one to twenty; it was maybe fifty-fifty. In Ambong you didn't have that and each side could make the point that the other side is destroying our way of life. There is a tendency amongst Christians, which I often thought of as alarmist, but I'm not Indonesian Christian, to fear that the Muslims were going to take over. They would express this in the most simplistic of ways to me. "They're going to run us out. They're going to cheat us. They're going to wipe out our way of life." Very, very hardcore alarm. I think that took fire especially in Maluku and impelled the Christians, who had a pretty good hand in terms of position and personnel, to fight much harder. Then it deteriorated into what we have today, which is just a constant battle.

Q: What was your reading on Indonesia – and maybe what you were getting from the embassy too – about this very diverse, large place, with lots of islands, lots of different

ethnic groups? The ability of it to stay together?

PIERCE: Overt, open suggestions of questioning the integrity of the country in a political sense have always come from places such as Aceh, which has a durable separatist movement.

Q: That's in Sumatra.

PIERCE: Northern Sumatra. And in a smaller way in Irian although that's now progressed thanks to the Indonesian military's heavy hand there. When I started traveling in Sulawesi, even in '98, even during Suharto's "new order," as you talked to people who were co-opted into the system you could always detect the difference in the way they viewed the country as opposed to Javanese. But as you got further and further into the deterioration, and especially after it, you got more overt expression from people in Sulawesi. I think this has always been the case, but they were far more open about the need for northern Sulawesi in the most perfect of worlds, to become independent. Independence was their hypothetical perfect; they had no pretensions of that, but they would begin to express political initiatives about trying to decentralize the country. This was not a question before Suharto fell, but as he fell and afterwards, it was from these people, I think, that came the awareness that decentralization was not a priority years down the road; it would become a critical issue more quickly. It came specifically from Sulawesi first.

Q: Sulawesi is where?

PIERCE: Sulawesi is the crab-like island, Celebes is the old Dutch word, immediately to the north of Java, to the east of Kalimantan, Borneo. It's a rather large island and it's extremely populated, especially South Sulawesi which is the home of the Bugis people who are one of the most significant ethnic groups in the country. They do a lot of roaming, traveling; you find them everywhere. It's a major rice producer; further north in Sulawesi. It has been a major source of extracted resources, but I don't think it economically has all the potential there as it used to. Sulawesi has its own very separate, and also quite diverse, sense of tradition, of history, of governance, that is quite contrary in many ways to the tiered sort of societal stability, layered social caste system with an unquestionable loyalty to the one on top that the Javanese seem to be most comfortable with.

Once you've been in Java you can appreciate the cultural habits of both. I enjoy those Javanese people who are very, very oblique in the way they talk; and it's quite an eye-opener when you come to Sulawesi and you find out that not everyone talks obliquely. They especially don't, but it is also the case in Sumatra. It's right to the point; so there's just a great difference. So the pull for decentralization became far more prominent more quickly. I think it was primarily from Sulawesi remarks first that it became evident to us that it was not going to go away, that it was an issue. And then of course it's taken on a life of its own as the government began to try to wrestle with it, being fully aware of the

fact that decentralization had to be a success for the integrity of the country. The form of it is the other issue – whether it's really going to happen or not in a meaningful way.

Q: You were consul general there. Back to the consular side of things. With all these kids going out and enjoying the beaches and the surf and all of that, how about counselor problems? Did you have a lot and what were they like?

PIERCE: We had few. We had an occasional American citizen issue that had to be solved. I'm not aware of any that were starkly difficult. The major problem that consular operations had in Surabaya was visa applications – our rates of turn-down, our rates of refusal, and as the economy deteriorated and the politics deteriorated, the ballooning applications that would sometimes stretch us to the maximum with little hope for seeing a decline in applications. These were all visitor visas – tourist visa applications – we processed no immigrant visas, the criteria for issuing visas becomes a murkier problem. With a tourist visa you're going to enjoy the United States for a limited time and you're not going to work, and of course you have the money and the ability to come and spend and then return to your home country. And suddenly things get bad and you are spending all your time dealing with local Sino-Indonesians who from had been the victims of riots. And your refusal rates go up.

Q: (laughs) I'm sure that was a subject that nobody at the consulate could duck as far as people coming to you and asking.

PIERCE: It's a constant barrage, but the thing here is you've got, especially amongst the Sino-Indonesian community, the Indonesian Chinese community, some extremely wealthy individuals who have countless tens of hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure invested in the country and continue to do just fine. You rarely have a major problem with these people and their putting their children into the best universities in America. It's more a problem when you have small shopkeepers who have just seen their inventory burned out and now think it's time to go visit Disney World. That's the problem area and that's where you had the major issues.

Q: You left there when?

PIERCE: I left there in mid-'99.

Q: And what happened?

PIERCE: That's when I did retire, but was asked to come back in early 2000 for a five or six month stay in Medan – which I had never been to – in Sumatra to sort put an American presence in Medan. Although we did not have an official office there, we had had a consulate there, which as you might recall was closed. We had sold the premises that the building was on. We still owned the old consul general's residence and had operated a makeshift presence there staffed permanently by a Foreign Service National. The Department and the embassy wanted to see someone American there in anticipation

ultimately for us to restore an office, although this was not an official office, but simply a TDY assignment. The other issue that was specifically a priority for the embassy and the Department was to keep a closer watch on the province of Aceh and the separatist movement there.

Q: I would've thought that your just appearing there would've lent a certain perception of importance to this rebellion. Were you considered our man looking at the rebellion or not?

PIERCE: By whom?

Q: Well by the rebels, maybe, or something like that.

PIERCE: I don't know.

Q: I would've thought the Indonesian authorities would've wondered what the hell you were doing.

PIERCE: I didn't ask them.

Q: But did they?

PIERCE: No. When the consulate was there officially, and I think it was closed in '96 or '97 maybe…

Q: So it really wasn't that long ago.

PIERCE: No. And it was closed from the last exercise wrongfully, I think. We had been determined to restore our presence. Ambassador Roy had been fighting for it before he'd come, and had received the go-ahead for trying to pursue that. I think the logistics of it is the problem of trying to find the appropriate office space. This is beyond my knowledge; this is more an FBO/ADMIN issue. We had kept people up there for long periods of time, in the gap, when there was no American, looking at Aceh. We've made no secret of our concern over the place – and the major American presence there of course being the Mobil facility. Even when we had no American in Medan, we had TDYers from Jakarta who would stop in Medan mainly for the economic interests there, and the small American community, but then also go on to Aceh. We've had a very long relationship up there. It's amazing to me when I first got there to find out that in Banda Aceh, the capitol of Aceh, the American alumni club in that most remote, most violence-torn place in the country, has in excess of a hundred members. Long, long cultural and educational ties. Aceh was what we were most interested in and what I focused my attentions on.

Q: Well what was your reading of it? You hadn't been there before. When you got there, what was your reading of what was happening there?

PIERCE: Initially you come very fresh to it. I didn't have any acquaintance with Sumatra whatsoever, and knew of Aceh simply from books. This was in the year 2000. What had happened is that Aceh, which is rich in natural gas, has been a cash cow for Central Indonesia. Basically what we're talking about is for the last decade, plus, it's been a major source of income. The primary fields near a town called Lhokseumawe spawned a development area all around it utilizing the presence of the natural gas facilities. Then as well it is an exporter of natural gas.

Aceh has a very checkered history; they never really officially surrendered to the Dutch. I think it was a forty year war before the Dutch declared that Aceh was part of the Indies. It was a bloody time. It was I think the only place the Dutch ever lost generals. They are very good fighters and they have a very fierce streak of independence. They joined the country in the revolution against the Dutch but became quickly disillusioned. I don't want to go into Aceh's history, but they always sensed that they were deprived of their rightful place as a nation; a significant portion of them have that feeling. That said, another significant portion have strong ties to the concept of Indonesia.

The use of their natural resources by the central government, the obvious fact that the return in revenues was far less than what was extracted, and that most Acehnese live in borderline survival poverty all created conditions which spawned separatism. Most Acehnese – this was in '76 – did not give a damn for the separatists, but they were successful enough over the years to incur the wrath of the Indonesian military, to the extent that the Indonesian military in key parts of Aceh reacted too harshly, by far. An unfortunate fact of life is when you have a separatist group and you have a military from the centralized part of the country, they sometimes don't distinguish very well between who is a separatist and who is a common, ordinary person. The victims were innumerable. This started basically in the late '80s, and the human rights violations were atrocious. Through a variety of ill-conceived military principles and inept political maneuvers, the central government, especially since '97, '98, had taken what would be a 5 or 10% support for independence for Aceh amongst Acehnese to the overwhelming majority of people preferring to see Aceh independent. The GAM – that's the name of a separatist group – has been able to ride that wave. And that's where we are today.

Q: You mentioned human rights. Was that part of your brief, to go up there and check on human rights?

PIERCE: It's always the brief whenever you do reporting of this nature – to keep the government apprised of human rights and to articulate our positions on human rights. We had already made them well-known before; our great concern over human rights abuses. It's not as though the military was the unilateral infractor of human rights in Aceh. The GAM is a brutal, heartless, quite bloody organization and it has taken its toll amongst people that it does not consider loyal to its cause of independence. They consider them an impediment to their goals, sell-outs to the central government. The GAM has its fair share of blood on its hands as well. We've taken very strong stands ever since the emergence of extreme human rights abuses primarily by the military in the early '90s. It was egregious.

Q: I would imagine you would have problems getting around there because of the military, wouldn't you? They wouldn't want you around.

PIERCE: When I first started going I did take a plane flight – there's one a day from Medan to Banda Aceh, the capitol – and made the usual contacts and tried to broaden my contacts there. There's a road that goes up the northern coast from Medan to Banda Aceh and it was not considered the most secure option. I first traveled that way probably in late April, because I got there in March. It's basically a 12-hour trip broken by an overnight in the town of Lhokseumawe which is the major focal point of hostility.

At the time when I went last year, in Aceh itself there must've been 45 military checkpoints along that main road. Most of them were military armed checkpoints, almost all of them adjacent to police stations on the side of the road. What they would do on those is just look at the traffic as it went through. They would not stop it; rarely they would stop me. I never really engaged in conversation about traveling there with them. The Indonesian government had said that diplomats needed permission to travel to Aceh, as well as other provinces that they considered troublesome. I don't think we ever accepted the conditions for travel in country, so it didn't concern me one way or the other. The military or the police never expressed reservations about my travel.

As in Java I like to travel on roads. That's where you see things. You don't see things by flying. I'd travel most of the time by road to Banda Aceh; it would take two days up, two days back, and then maybe two or three days overnight in Banda Aceh in a decent hotel. I only got into about two conversations with military or police officials over the wisdom of what I had done. I would always try to talk to military commanders, but by that time most military commanders would insist on bureaucratic clearance in Jakarta before they would meet with me, so I no longer tried that. I talked to police officials in Banda Aceh on every occasion I could. Never got into their policy or my travels; I was perfectly comfortable if they raised the issue with me, but the subject never came up. The only time the subject ever came up was when I strayed away from the area of Lhokseumawe into sites maybe ten miles away in the interior where two communities of villagers had taken shelter, becoming internally displaced persons, in two mosque areas, and I went to see them. Unfortunately that got into the local press and the police reacted somewhat sensitively to my failure to coordinate my going to this place. I think they were stunned more by the press play than they were about anything else.

The only other time I ever got cautioned by a policeman was once I was in a wayside restaurant late at night in Lhokseumawe eating supper and a plainclothes policeman stopped, came in, and asked me where I was going, and told me in no uncertain terms that I should not travel outside of Lhokseumawe on the main highways at night – which I had no intention of doing. When I first took the road, one or two or three or four of these road-blocked police military checkpoints would be bombed by the GAM on a daily basis. Firefights would ensue and sometimes one, two, three, four, five people would die. It was always targeted at the military or at the police, at the checkpoint, and pursuit would occur.

These incidents mainly lasted perhaps a half an hour. Most of these GAM attacks would take place and you'd presume that the perpetrators, a limited number, would have motor bikes and would sneak away into the interior through the small infrastructural roads, through the rice paddies, within minutes after making their hit.

Q: Did you have contact with the leaders of GAM? Alright we're having a significant pause here.

PIERCE: *(laughs)* Well, let's just say I talked to a lot of strata in Acehnese society.

Q: What was your impression by the time you left there of what was going to happen? Was this going to be a subliminal – or maybe not subliminal, but an actual – war that would go on forever or what?

PIERCE: Let me tell you the first thing which happens over and over again, and one of the most important things I did. The first thing, obviously, was to find out what was going on in a more detailed way, which I did do. The dynamic of the situation had changed as GAM increased its hold on the villages outside the major cities, and there was a truce at the time which decreased in part some of the hostilities. The second thing, which was the most important thing in my view, was to continually iterate U.S. support for the integrity of Indonesia and our opposition, for lack of a better word – you don't say it quite that starkly in Indonesian – to an independent Aceh. Then of course you get into the need for dialogue and peaceful resolution in some way where Acehnese can express their aspirations within the structure of the country of Indonesia, and get more of the economic largess that is coming out of that province.

I don't think the situation is going to change much. Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, Gus Dur, was a positive selection as president of the country and tried to address the issue. The problem is that the GAM insists on independence and a significant portion now of Acehnese people support that idea, at least in principle. It's very hard for them to back away from that idea. The Indonesian government has on paper admitted that it needs to give the people of Aceh more of a share of the natural resources and more control over their local affairs. Yet finding a concrete way of letting that occur, especially on the economic side, is not easy in a country which needs as much revenue as this one does simply to finance its economic problems. So you have a standoff and you have no real movement to narrow the thought processes between one side and the other. In the interim what you have is the increasing bloodier and bloodier conflagration in which primarily neutral people are snuffed out in an oftentimes haphazardly way and the violence persists.

Now, as you might know, the natural gas fields are no longer operating. The Mobil/Exxon people pulled out in late March or early April because of security concerns. It is in the heart of the activity of separatists. You have an Indonesian government committed to reopening those fields but facing severe difficulty in doing so. You have a dialogue between the GAM and the Indonesian government, which started when I was there last year, which has been on-again, off-again, producing little but at least opening the

possibility that these people can talk to each other. That's about all. Future prospects? Normally in Indonesia you have inertia producing status quo. You may have a collapse of government or local government responsibility. You may have events that continue to spiral off into turmoil in Maluku. The country is large enough that it will lumber on even as the central government is paralyzed, or at least close to it, with President Wahid now in constant crisis with the parliament.

Q: So then you came back?

PIERCE: I came back.

Q: And so here we are.

PIERCE: That's right. That's it.

Q: Well, I want to thank you. I really appreciate this.

PIERCE: Thank you.

End of interview