

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project  
Tales of American Diplomacy

**F. ALLEN “TEX” HARRIS**

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[Note: This transcript is from the Tales of American Diplomacy Video Series. Watch the video [HERE](#) or listen to the podcast [HERE](#).]

*NARRATOR: Distinguished American diplomat, Tex Harris, recounts attempted intimidation by Argentine security forces in 1977 at the height of that country's dirty war. This is his story.*

HARRIS: I'm Tex Harris. I was for 36 years a battle-scarred fighter in the Department of State Foreign Service serving in a number of hot spots. This is one of my worst moments. I was a human rights officer in Argentina during a dirty war. What's a dirty war? Dirty war is when the government is fighting an anti-terrorist campaign and they decide to fight it by kidnapping, torturing, and killing people. In Argentina, they ran the score up to kill over 15,000 people. I was the guy who was doing the reporting on it, and the military who was doing the killing knew about my reporting and didn't like it. One evening, my wife and I were invited to a dinner party in the outskirts of Buenos Aires on some guy's little farm. We went out there. Argentine parties start very late. I mean, they start at nine o'clock and you may not get fed till 11:00 p.m.

Anyway, about midnight, my wife came up to me and said, "I'm exhausted. The Joneses — our next-door neighbors — are going home. I'm going to catch a ride with them unless you're willing to leave now." And I said, "No, go ahead and I'll drive by myself." So about 1:30, after having some conversations with some key contacts who were at this politician's party, I drove home on an empty road in the middle of the night. All of a sudden, I noticed there was a car behind me. And all of a sudden there was a stoplight, and at the stoplight was another car. I stopped behind that car, and the car behind me pulled right up against my bumper. Within five seconds of that, the four doors on each of the cars opened up, and eight guys jumped out of their cars with handguns and long rifles.

I'm sitting in my car, and I said, "It's the end! Harris, you're gone. You're gone." But I had read — I guess I'd seen a movie on television or something like that — that if you kept your hands over your head when the bullet went in, the forensic guys could see the entry trajectory and know that your hands were in the air. So, I figured the only way they would claim that they shot me was because I was going for a gun underneath the seat. So, I fixated in my mind, keep your hands over your head. So, I reached in my pocket, I locked the car door, reach in my pocket, got my diplomatic ID card, and I lowered the window on the driver's side by about a half an inch. Finally, a guy came up to me, and the

guys around me in the middle of the night with guns, and I'm thinking, "Keep your arms up; keep your arms up or you die."

So, I handed my diplomatic ID card through the window and I told the guy, "Cuerpo diplomático (diplomatic corps). What's the problem? What the hell is going on here?" He looked at my card and discussed it with the other people there. Then they finally came back, and they gave me my card. And I'm sitting there like this [hands up] waiting for the bullets to come in. And they said, "You ran a red light," which I hadn't done. And they said, "Be careful in your driving." Clearly, the military stunt was to scare me, which they did. The military truly wanted me and my work to end in Argentina. It didn't happen. I stayed. And I made a difference, and I'm very proud of that today.

*Narrator: Thanks for listening to "Tales of American Diplomacy," a Tex Harris Initiative for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, "a Personal Life Story" produced by Poss Productions. Donate to support our work at ADST.org. Because diplomacy matters. Now more than ever.*