YALE-UN ORAL HISTORY

Interview with David Biggs

Interviewer: Jean Krasno, Ph.D.

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in New York, NY

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with David Biggs on May 1st, 1998 in New York City. We are actually in the ECOSOC Room at UN Headquarters. And I am Jean Krasno. We will be talking about David's experiences in Cambodia. First of all, for the record, on March 15th 1992, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia referred to as UNTAC was established in Phnom Penh pursuant to Security Council resolution 754 of 1992 to implement the Paris peace agreements. UNTAC was a complex mission consisting of seven distinct components: human rights, electoral activity, military, civil administration, civilian police, repatriation and rehabilitation. Now as I understand, David, you were assigned to the civil administration component.

David Biggs: Yes.

JK: How were you recruited to go to Cambodia and when did you arrive?

DB: Well, I was recruited in a somewhat personal fashion because at the time in early '92, I was in the same department as Mr. Akashi and my boss did not want me to go and I actually didn't, [he] wouldn't allow me to go, but it just so happened that his boss was

Mr. Akashi. Mr. Akashi wanted young, aggressive people who were willing to go out there and work long hours and get things done. So I got there on the 14th of April, almost one month after the peace process began, one of the first people to get out there from the Secretariat. More or less, the majority of my colleagues started coming in June and July, but for us, the people that came out at first, there were a few, shall we say, comforts, in terms of office space, etc. In fact, the first time, and the only time, I met Mr. Akashi while I was on mission I asked him, "I'd like to work in the area of the demining," because I was one of these young, idealistic Americans who wanted to save Cambodia. He said, "That's fine David but I don't know if you saw this gentleman who was in the corridors and he's working on card board boxes. He's the highest ranking French national here, General Porcel and I want you to be his assistant." Even though I begged to work in demining, civil administration is where I ended up. I became the assistant of Mr. Porcel for approximately a year. He left the mission in May of '93. Then I joined the office of the DSRSG, Mr. Sadry, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General.

JK: Ok, describe the situation in Phnom Penh when you arrived and what were your first tasks?

DB: As I alluded to, when I arrived, there were not that many staff members there. We were in what was called UNTAC 1 (UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia), which was one of the first buildings that the UN, in fact I think that UNAMIC (UN Advance Mission in Cambodia), which was the predecessor of UNTAC was in that same building. It was

basically the whole of April, May and June were basically a process of getting logistical resources in the country, computers, cars, walkie-talkies. I remember on a number of occasions I couldn't reach someone on a walkie-talkie because at that time, our telephone was not in. The Australian engineer telephone battalion put the telephone system in. It was just a matter of having to get your car to go over to another building and find out if your computers had arrived. Everything was rather difficult for the first say four or five months of the mission.

JK: Really for that long? Four or five months?

DB: Yeah, and that was also at the time that the personnel started coming in. The first months were basically trying to assure that we had the proper resources to work and, in terms in substantive work, just to do what we could. I remember my boss was given a number of different assignments, such as writing. I think he wrote, the original legal brief for the Cambodian Mine Action Center. And in Civil Administration, we were basically trying to get people in so we could start the control regime, particularly in the ministries of the Phnom Penh. Those were the ministries of the administrative authority, the State of Cambodia, one of the four administrative authorities.

JK: Ok, we are going to get into that a little bit more, just trying to paint the scene here. Where did you live actually?

DB: When I first got there, I stayed in a hotel right on Achaminh, which is the main boulevard there called the Mitha piet. That was only basically two or three days. Then I heard from a buddy of mine, an American who had gotten there earlier, of a hotel called The Renakse, which means, I think, liberation. It's a Cambodian word for liberation after the Vietnamese came in. It's rather unusual because many people after they got into hotel, they subsequently went out to an apartment situation or a house and I think I stayed in this particular hotel for at least five months. Then subsequently was able to get a house with an Australian and a Canadian colleague.

JK: What was the climate like?

DB: I got there at probably the hottest time of the year. It's April and that's the dry season. So we're talking anywhere from ninety-five to over a hundred during the day and particularly at night, I wouldn't be able to know the exact temperature, in the seventies with tremendous humidity. That was really, in terms of the climatizing, that was the issue, was to try to be able to be comfortable at night with just a fan, if you were lucky, if you had a fan. If you didn't, then it was a matter of trying to put on as much mosquito repellent because we had heard that despite the fact that Phnom Penh was supposedly safe from malaria, we were still supposed to take doxycycline and do everything we could to prevent being bitten from mosquitoes.

JK: Were you vaccinated especially for the trip?

DB: We were all vaccinated; at least the people from the Secretariat were vaccinated before. But the type of malaria in that area of the world is so virulent that we were given doxycycline and told to take that on a daily basis, I believe. The down side of that is that we heard once we got there, that doxycycline over a long term could produce some bad effects on the liver and it could also mask malaria. So generally, the people in Phnom Penh did not take the doxycycline after, say, the first month. People in the provinces did, from what I understand, quite frequently because they had to. Most of our cases of malaria were out in the provinces. But there were some: my girlfriend got malaria and she basically was in Phnom Penh the whole time.

JK: What about the monsoon? Isn't Cambodia affected by monsoons?

DB: Yeah, there's a rainy season. It could start in October. I'm just not sure. I do remember that it typically would rain every day around four or five o'clock in the afternoon. We would have a torrent come down and then the rain, the consistent rains were there also.

JK: Did the climate, the intense heat, and the heavy rains affect the ability to function in any way?

DB: Not really, we were basically set up, and for the large part the whole mission was set up, by September of '92, at least in Phnom Penh. That was not really a problem in the capital. It was so in the provinces because they were dealing with prefabs that came in.

Generally in the provinces you faced greater risks, not only of disease and the comforts of life, but from banditry; if you were in the northwest, [there was] the possibility that there would be some difficulty with the Khmer Rouge.

JK: Yeah, I actually wanted to ask you, might as well ask it now, did you feel any threats to your personal safety while you were there?

DB: I was actually, one particular time, I went with a CivPol, civilian police, component to an area that I think is called Nicrete which is in… I think it is the province of Battambang. We were there to see about the possibility of setting up a police station. This would have been the first police station in Khmer Rouge controlled territory. I remember that we were radioing in with the Khmer Rouge contact and there were some shots. We heard some shots. We were on the Swedish anti-mine track vehicles. I was with a Dutch military observer. I heard these shots and I heard something like a buzz and he said, "Well, I think we better get down, get behind the vehicle." It was funny because later they said that they radioed in saying "What are you shooting at?" They said that they were shooting at wild pigs or something like that. That was sort of comical. There were many other people, particularly in the military component that were in that situation. Any encounter with the Khmer Rouge was much more deadly and dangerous. But with my situation, it's just that one time.

JK: So in Phnom Penh, you didn't feel that there was a threat?

DB: No, it's interesting, we did at the last, at the final part of the mission because the locals knew that we were going. I had my car stolen but it was a rather benign way of stealing it. It was just, oddly enough, stolen within the UN parking area. There were a number of my colleagues who were car-jacked. Basically, people came to them and threatened them at gun-point to get out of their cars. So it got dicey at the end.

JK: Why so much at the end?

DB: Well just because they knew we were leaving and they wanted to see if they could get as much material because we were carting everything out to go to other peacekeeping missions. But at the first of the mission, it was the typical expatriate delight. There was no sort of worry even if you came home late, even in the morning, that there would be any danger, but that grew to a dangerous prospect as the mission wore on, particularly as we were leaving.

JK: Well, I wanted to get more into the mission. UNTAC was supposed ensure a neutral political environment. In concrete terms, what did that mean for the Civil Administration Component?

DB: Well, it basically meant that we were supposed to exert control over the SOC, the State of Cambodia. We were supposed to exert authority over the ministries, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Public Security, which was basically the police, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information. Gradually as

the peace process went on, we discovered with respect to the State of Cambodia, that the real power was not necessarily in the ministries that typically were shells of dilapidated buildings with few workers in them and few facilities. We discovered that the essence of power within the State of Cambodia was exerted at the provincial and district level through familial ties. For example, Hun Sen and his brother was the provincial head of the largest province in Cambodia, Kampong Cham. There were all sorts of connections between the leaders in SOC and the provincial governors. He was not a director but a provincial governor. So we gradually discovered that this was the real nexus of power and we tried to refocus our energy on the provincial governors and on the district chiefs of police. We did that through an operation called the Control Team, which was basically an innovative operation that was allowed for through the Paris Agreements, in the sense that we had all the documentation for the existing administrative authorities. So, therefore, we would go, we would take a vehicle with expats who were Cambodian, who were fluent in Cambodian, and some Americans, French and British. We would have a vehicle with a copier and a generator in the back. And we would go to a district police station or provincial governor's office and we'd say, "We wish to have access to your documentation." And they did, they gave it to us. At some stages, we saw them burning it before we got there but, by and large, at least until the State of Cambodia got wind of this and started instructing people not to give us information, we found out that, by and large, the State of Cambodia was saying one thing publicly in terms of cooperating with the UN but, in private in these communications to its authorities in the provinces and the districts, it was saying, "Don't cooperate with UNTAC." There was pressure on voters to vote for the State of Cambodia and there was also pressure on political party leaders of

other parties to the Paris Agreements. We had one operation in the Funcenpec controlled area, in a place called Anlong Veng, I believe. But by and large, the focus was on the State of Cambodia. I think we had five different operations to five different provinces.

JK: Was that a part of the special control under the Civil Administration? There were the Defense Department and different ministries, and then there was one unit that really was kind of not assigned to one particular ministry.

DB: I think that was more thematic. No, I think, if my recollection serves me that the Control Team was totally autonomous. It was not only civil, in fact, it was a melange of different components. We had people from CivPol, we had military observers, we had translators and it was thought to be new way to find out what was going on at the grass roots level in terms of the administrative authorities exercise of its control over the population.

JK: I have read something referred to as the mobile control team.

DB: That's it.

JK: How did you get involved in that team?

DB: Let's see. I can't remember exactly where the proposal originated. It may have been my boss or it may have been someone in the information component. But we were

just frustrated because it just seemed we were getting little result in the ministries and we also seemed to be getting two different messages. One was the public message and the other was the private message. It was very interesting. I would like to think, probably this is an extreme exaggeration, that we were the original UNSCOM (UN Special Commission on Iraq) in the sense that we were going and looking and searching for things. As I mentioned, it was primarily after we went to Kampong Cham, which is the province of the leader of the SOC's brother. After that, we, it was really difficult to get out again because the State of Cambodia made some remarks that would lead one to believe that they couldn't provide for our security when we were out there.

JK: So about when did you start the mobile control team?

DB: That was late, late in November, December in 1992. And we ran them through March, I believe of '93.

JK; So, actually, you were actually doing it for several months.

DB: Yeah, as I mentioned, I think we went to four or five provinces and we would go for typically three or four days. It was quite an interesting undertaking.

JK: Because it is so innovative, I think it's a really interesting aspect of the work that you were doing. What would initiate the planning for a particular trip?

DB: I think we wanted to go to the provinces that were very important and but I am not sure of the rationale.

JK: Did you suspect there was some kind of disconnect with what was going on?

DB: Non-cooperation basically with UNTAC, yes.

JK: Well, those on the outside had some kind of understanding that UNTAC was supposed to run the government.

DB: Yeah, that was quite a fallacy.

JK: What was the meaning of 'direct control'?

DB: Right, well basically it meant making sure the documentation that went out of a ministry, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not prejudice one of the other parties, in terms of desiring to buy votes or desiring to put pressure on voters, or political leaders. Basically, we were there to make sure that the environment leading up to the election was neutral, in the sense that the political parties and activists would be able to assemble freely, to campaign freely and to get their message out to the people in a free and fair fashion. It meant having people in the ministries looking at documentation that came in, came out, and conducting various interviews with different individuals within those ministries, those types of activities.

JK: Ok, you also had UNTAC directors in the provinces.

DB: Definitely, provincial directors.

JK: Provincial directors.

DB: The same sort of situation. They frequently met with the provincial governors and they were the mini-UNTAC in each of the provinces. There was a human rights representative or more, there were electoral representatives there, civil administration, the military etc..., CivPol especially. So basically, it was small UN contact point with the provincial authorities.

JK: They were in each of the twenty-one provinces?

DB: To my knowledge, yes. Our provincial directors were liaising with their provincial governors in every one of the provinces.

JK: If that was in place, why did you need the mobile control teams? What was missing there?

DB: To my recollection, we thought that if the provincial director was involved in something like this, it would be not necessarily good for his relationship with--actually

his/her relationship because we had a provincial director, a lady in the south of the country--it would not be good for their relationship with their counterparts in the provincial governing authority in that particular province. So we came in from Phnom Penh and we had no connections with the director. Sometimes, the provincial director could conceivable be too cooperative with the provincial governor and we wanted to not necessarily have that sort of relationship when we came in. It was basically to protect our efforts and those of the provincial directors.

JK: What was the role supposed to be for the provincial director? Were they supposed to be basically diplomatic liaisons? Or were they supposed to be controllers?

DB: Well, both, actually. Both. They did have to liaise with the, because the provincial director was the highest ranked UN official in the province. He was the contact point between the SRSG in Phnom Penh and the provincial governor, or any contact with the local authority. So they had to be diplomats and they were, by and large. They were highly ranked individuals from the UN system. We had some excellent provincial directors who stayed on top of everything and they were also controllers. They had to make sure, in that area, that things were conducted in a neutral fashion and that there was no prejudice towards any one particular political party or any person for that matter.

JK: And so having that type of dual capacity was not contradictory?

DB: I think one can argue both ways. I mean they had to have a rapport with the provincial governors, that's for sure. We had to coexist. Originally, I thought and I still think this to some degree, that for real control, we should have been co-located with the provincial governors, so in other words, wherever the provincial governors office would have been, we would have had to be there.

JK: Civil Administration.

DB: Either been given an office or whatever. But that runs into a host of problems in terms of logistics, in terms of being too tied to, or being seen as being to tied into the provincial governor's office and then, security over information. I still think that it would have been better. It would have served better if we have been closer physically to the local authorities, particularly with respect to police functions. If we would have co-located police, in other words UN police, actually physically there in a police station. Then the control operation would have been exerted in a better fashion. As I mention, the logistics difficulties would have probably prevented that.

JK: Now, did the mobile control teams, did they arrive unannounced?

DB: Typically yes. We tried to go for surprise visits to the point where, as I mention, we had people burning documents, right in front. I distinctly remember, in fact I took some film, some video of it, a local police chief was burning documents. We actually went there and then we came back there and they were burning documents. It was quite

interesting and the interesting thing was that the translators, the people who were really experts in Cambodian history, etc, people like Steve Hadder or Judy Lagerwood, I mean this was their first eye-opener in terms of what was really happening in the administrative authorities, and the lines of authority, the lines of communication. One thing about the SOC, for example, the State of Cambodia, they kept good records. The orders were passed down and everything was written down. We had a tremendous opportunity to find out what was going on.

JK: Was there evidence that there was a certain level of intimidation of any opposition?

DB: Well, in my view there was. I think that that's been addressed in several of the Secretary-General's progress reports, that there was a level of intimidation. The genesis of it was in June of 1992 when the Khmer Rouge pulled out of the whole peace process. Then each of the administrative authorities said "Well, if you're not controlling the Khmer Rouge, then why should you control us? Or "you should control the other one more than you're doing us." So, that was a critical period for us in Civil Administration, just the difficulty in convincing the administrative authorities that we were exerting control in an equal and fair fashion. The State of Cambodia, for instance, felt that because they controlled eighty-five percent of the territory or eighty percent of the territory that we were prejudiced against them because we were there; we were in their territory. Whereas we did not have any presence in the Khmer Rouge area and we had a small presence in the KPLNF and the Funcinpec area, but that area was not, shall we say,

an administrative area. It was basically a military area. So, they didn't have hardly any of the same administrative capacity the State of Cambodia did. The State of Cambodia was running the country following the Vietnamese invasion. They had much experience in that.

JK: So you did primarily focus on the SOC?

DB: Definitely because they were the largest player. As I mentioned, they were basically controlling eighty to eighty-five percent of the territory. They had the most organized, in terms of their military and their administrative arrangements, their political party was the CPP (the Cambodian People's Party). The Cambodian People's Party was the most organized. That's another thing that we found when we were doing the Control Team operations was that--and I don't think it was only for the State of Cambodia, we found this for the Funcenpec area also--was that there was no such thing as the administrative authority and the political party; they were one, one in the same, despite the Paris Accord, the peace accord. Despite the fact the political party was supposed to be separate from the governing of the administrative authority, they were not. We saw that in documentation that we picked up. I remember one time in one province, there was a man who was an accountant with the SOC, the State of Cambodia, and he believed in us; he believed in the fact that he could have the freedom to join a political party. He did, he joined Funcinpec and the human rights people found him at the bottom of a water well. He had been tortured and shot through both legs and dead. For me, that was a very eye-opening experience in terms of what the real game was, what the real power was. If

you were not on their side, you were the enemy, and basically, to be very general, that's Cambodian politics. There's not much room for negotiation. There are clear lines of authority. You are either one of theirs or one of ours.

JK: So how did that impact on UNTAC's role of creating a neutral political environment?

DB: I think that the sort of secret weapon of the whole operation was the information component and particularly the radio. It would be really great if you could talk to some people in that component. UNTAC's radio was heavily criticized because it was a high-tech operation and cost a lot of money. It came in the country and it took a long time for it to get up and running. But the fact that we were reaching a majority of the Cambodian population and the fact that we were able to convince them when they got into the polling place, the polling site on the 23rd of May, '93, that their vote would indeed be in secret, despite what the State of Cambodia and the other entities but primarily SOC, was telling the people that their vote would not be secret and that they should vote for that respective administrative authority. That's one thing that we did that was right. We were able to make them believe that indeed their vote would be secret and it was. The electoral operation, the electoral component was very well organized, despite the fact that there were tremendous logistical hurdles. And as you know, the election went off relatively violence free. So, in the essence, we were there for the election. That was our goal. That was the goal for every component, to be in a position to have a free and fair election. There were many successes of UNTAC despite the recent events that have happened. It

makes me feel somewhat sad to know that some of the things that we put in place such as the promotion of the freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression through the mini-newspapers and the mini-local NGOs, human rights NGOs, that started out, it saddens me to know that the political space that we created between ‘92 and ‘93 has gotten much smaller because of something that one would called “Asian realities.” We came in with very high hopes, very idealistic, some would say with western hopes of thinking that if we gave them a free and fair election--or if they had a free and fair election--that we would put them on the right path. But at the end of the day, and it’s what everyone told me at every meeting that we went to among ourselves, it’s the Cambodians that have to decide what they want and what path they are going to take. We can only do our job and after $1.5 billion, or whatever it was, it’s going to have to be the Cambodians to do the job.

JK: So the UN can facilitate it or set the stage.

DB: Exactly, but there is no political will for any sort of wide spread electoral monitoring campaign as there was with UNTAC. The international community doesn’t want to pay for it and I don’t believe that the Cambodians want it, particularly the State of Cambodia.

JK: Now on the radio, I think that that’s a very interesting component. Do you feel that is something the UN ought to do?

DB: Well, I think that we learned our lesson. I think that one of the reasons that UN radio had such success in other operations was because of radio UNTAC, because we could really get the message out. I think that's definitely one of the lessons learned, that we could reach people by radio and get our side out. There was much criticism of the UN about the radios of the administrative authorities, but of course the Khmer Rouge, but also the State of Cambodia, and I'm not sure, possibly the Funcenpec also. But we were able to get our message out. We were able to get the UN message out and that was extremely important, whatever peace keeping operation.

JK: Well the literacy rate in Cambodia is not particularly high.

DB: No.

JK: So people get their information...

DB: Through radio.

JK: Through verbal sources, by radio. Now the radio station was in Phnom Penh.

DB: Yes.

JK: So did people have radios?

DB: Well from what we understood, yes they did. I mean portable radios and there were radios in shops. Certainly the opportunity for TV was not there because so few people, particularly in the provinces, had access to TV. But radio was our medium. Definitely, we used posters and all sorts of documentation that was distributed in the country in Cambodian script, in Khmer script. But as you mentioned, because of the illiteracy rate, the radio was out best medium.

JK: Were some of the ministries more cooperative with the civilian administration than others?

DB: Gosh.

JK: Or more uncooperative? Did some stand out in your mind as totally uncooperative?

DB: Right. I think that depended on a number of factors. One had to have been the relationship between the controller that came to the ministry and the relationship he set up with the minister of defense, for example. We had relatively good relationships with the Ministry of Defense, not so good with the police. That was one of our difficult points. That was a very big ministry that we didn't seem to get a handle on until the last of the mission. The police actually exerted authority and they were really the power, the people of power in the country through their networks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was difficult but I think we had a good director and we were able to change decrees after they

came out and/or we were able to prevent them from coming out. We were able to make sure that passports were not denied for political purposes, which was the case before.

JK: If you did uncover some level of intimidation, or political intimidation, what were you able to do about it? Were you able to have the person removed from active duty?

DB: Well, there were two schools of thought in UNTAC about that, in my view. It is just my personal view. One was confrontation and the other one was sort of back channel negotiation with the existing administrative authority. There were actually some differences within UNTAC of what should be the proper way to make sure that we got rid of officials because we did have the power to get rid of the administrative officials who were not complying with the Paris Agreements, whether we should do it in a public fashion or whether we should do it in a private fashion. I think that both of those arguments have some logic to them. I was in a component that preferred the sort of quiet diplomacy option. We were criticized by another component for not taking a stand, a public stand. And as I remember, when that happened, the police captain that we tried to dismiss, in a very public fashion, refused to go. He was backed by that particular administrative authority, so it became an opportunity to see how weak UNTAC was, even though we didn't think that we were. But when it all came out in public, and particularly in that area of the world, in that culture, saving face is everything and losing face is everything. I'm sure you will encounter people in these interviews that will tell you that one or the other is better. I am not really certain, not having had a lot of experience in the region before I got there. I sort of have both views. As a Westerner, I would feel that the

best approach would be the confrontational public approach but, having been there and having seen the reactions from the different administrative authorities, there was a lot to be said for quiet diplomacy and trying to work on a personal relationship with your counterpart in the ministry and say “we would like this person removed.”

JK: So was the quiet diplomacy effective? Were you able to get some behavior under control?

DB: We did, there were people that were removed. Certainly not as many as some would have wanted. We also had the problem, that if we didn’t have proof, I mean a smoking gun basically; we didn’t have a judicial system in the country because the Khmer Rouge had destroyed it. Basically, we had to catch people red-handed in the act. Otherwise, it was too difficult to try to dismiss people.

JK: Were witnesses fearful about coming forward?

DB: Yeah, that was always the case.

JK: What did they fear?

DB: Any sort of retribution from the existing administrative authority, and as I mentioned...

JK: Like losing their jobs or worse?

DB: Worse. I mean the violence really started in August of ‘92.

End of Tape 1, Side One

DB: There was a province in the West called Koh Kong, and there was a district political party leader and his house was granaded and a couple of people were killed. That was the first, and it escalated up and we started seeing a lot of violence in December and January and February and March. I am not sure that it was really so much in April, but that was the most frustrating thing. I am saying this really from a personal perspective that you could see the statistics and they were increasing every month, and these were real people. These were people that technically these things weren’t supposed to happen to them because we were there. That was, for me, that was, not that I expected things to be very ideal but it was, it was difficult to be necessarily proud of the job that we were doing, given the amount of political violence that was going on in the country.

JK: Well part of the mission of UNTAC was to disarm and demobilize. And so why didn't that happen? It seemed to be still very militarized.

DB: Yeah, to my knowledge basically again we go back to June 1992, when the Khmer Rouge pulled out and the other entities basically refused to give their weapons over, after that point. I think I read somewhere that half, approximately half, of the weapons of the

military entities were given over. That definitely was a difficulty of the whole process, the fact that we still had people who were militarized.

JK: Was there a period of time when UNTAC was unsure whether it could go forward because of the Khmer Rouge pulling out?

DB: No, the Khmer Rouge, themselves were not a threat, it was the impact of that in terms of the cooperation of the other parties, because, as I alluded to before, they made an excuse, in my opinion. They made an excuse out of that saying that, "If you are not controlling the Khmer Rouge, how can you control us? You should be controlling the Khmer Rouge." That basically was a major difficulty in the peace process, it was just the convincing the authorities that we had the right under the agreements to do what we needed to do and they needed to come under control.

JK: In you opinion why did the Khmer Rouge refuse to demobilize and participate in the process?

DB: I think they wanted to wait the whole process out and possibly get an arrangement. I am sure they hoped that the Funcenpec would win and that they would be able to get some sort of power sharing arrangement, which is what they tried to do after the elections. It was a strategic mistake; they lost a lot of political capital, particularly in the international arena, when they were in the international spotlight, when they could have come in. It was contradictory to their whole psyche, which was very Maoist and totally

autocratic. I remember dealing with Khmer Rouge officials in Phnom Penh and we never could get anything from them. They always had to wait for instructions and they were very vague and very adept at getting around issues, not willing to commit on anything. Because I am sure that they thought that they would be called back to headquarters and as you know in the Khmer Rouge period of 1975 through the end of 1987, if you were called to Phnom Penh, basically that meant that your death. It was an entity that destroyed itself because of the paranoia of its leaders and the tremendous in-fighting and self-destruction of the movement .

JK: How did you operate with language barriers? Did you have translators with you all the time?

DB: We did when we were out in the provinces, particularly when we were doing the Control Team operations. We had, typically speaking, and this is a big generalization, but people over thirty-five/forty spoke French and people under thirty-five, if they had a second language, they'd speak English. So if there was communication with locals, it tended to be in French. The majority of leaders that we were dealing with were educated in the colonial system and in French schools.

JK: And I wanted to ask you, did the SOC still reflect French colonial influences?

DB: I don't know.

JK: In the structure of the ministries? Or the administration?

DB: There definitely was that influence. Yeah, there were the vestiges of that influence.

JK: Was there any kind of French versus English language rivalry within your component?

DB: Not within components, but between components.

JK: Oh, between components.

DB: Human rights would typically was an Anglo component and civil administration was French, Francophone.

JK: Why particularly was that French?

DB: Well, my boss was the highest ranking French official, French civilian, there and we were recruiting people who were typically bilingual because we needed that, particularly in the provinces, because we needed that ability to communicate in French or English with our counterparts. That was a very important need to be able to speak French.

JK: Was he recruited because he spoke French and he could communicate with the ministries? Or he was recruited for other political reasons? And then he happened to be French-speaking?

DB: I am not sure. I think there were political decisions to recruit certain nationals for certain disciplines of work, but that shouldn't lead one to believe that these were incompetent people. I had the highest respect for my boss and he was fair to his staff and worked constantly. We had some really dedicated people there. We had some people who weren't so dedicated, but that's what you have when you have a large operation and that certainly wasn't the first and that won't be the last where you get a mixture of people. I think Mr. Akashi had it right when he focused on getting young people to come out there at the P1/P2 level. That was our test, to be out there with nothing and to try to make an operation work. It was very idealistic. We were thinking that indeed we could save the country. I am exaggerating but...

JK: There was sense of enthusiasm.

DB: Yeah, when you get out in the field in general you are closer to the fire, you are closer to what the UN really does. Here in the Secretariat, we're in policy and there it's implementation and its communication and it's action. I remember, I think someone told me that there were four different realities in the UN: One is the headquarters, the second is the capital of the peace-keeping operation, wherever that is, and the third is at the provincial level and the fourth one is at the district level. There is just certain realities

that you have to deal with at different levels. The district police chief probably doesn't know the text of a resolution on Cambodia. He has to deal with what he has in front of him, so that makes for some interesting interactions.

JK: You had said earlier that you didn't really see Akashi after that first meeting.

DB: I didn't actually speak to him.

JK: Speak to him.

DB: I mean for an extended period of time. That man was tremendously busy.

JK: Right, right. But what I was wondering is, was his leadership felt. You talked about a different style of approaching compliance, the confrontational style or the behind-the-scenes diplomatic style. Was there some kind of leadership that Akashi provided that guided that kind approach?

DB: He came from an Asia. Obviously, he's a Japanese national and came from a non-confrontational backdrop and that was his style. There are many people out there that would argue that that was the style that we needed there. We had to be non-confrontational, we had to get the job done and you can't sever relations with one of the ministers of authorities because you have got to run an election. That was our *raison d'être* was to run an election. So we basically had to do anything we could to stay in the

country and make sure to our utmost abilities that the election and the environment before the election would be free and fair in a neutral atmosphere. I think he was in his environment. He was the person to be there at that particular time and that place.

JK: I understand that there was something called the core group, which was a group of the ambassadors of member states of the permanent five members of the Security Council and so forth. Did you see any influence by this core group in your operation or the work that you were doing?

DB: I actually took notes for a couple of meetings when the DSRSG was going to these meetings on behalf of Mr. Akashi or on his own behalf. They were very interesting.

JK: Really, so who would be there?

DB: Oh, we would have the ambassadors from Germany, Japan, the United States, France, Indonesia. China was a member but I don't remember seeing the Chinese ambassador.

JK: Australia?

DB: Definitely, the Australians were very involved.

JK: So what was the nature of their discussions? I am really curious.

DB: You'd probably need to get somebody that was really there at a policy level. They were a good sounding board in terms of what was going on in the country and particularly what was going on in their capitals, as they saw the UNTAC operation unfold. They were an excellent source of communication if the powers of UNTAC wanted to source out a particular question or to see if they could get assistance, donor assistance for that matter or political support. They were essentially like a 'Friends of the Secretary-General' support group. They were essentially the support group for the UN in our mission. It was quite an important source of advice and as I mentioned a good sounding board for our operation.

JK: I think that is a very interesting phenomenon, that whole idea of a friends group or core group or whatever. Where are we now? I'm trying to get a little bit more of a feel what your personal existence was like there. I know you had many different tasks but, is there a way to describe like a typical day or a typical week during your time there?

DB: Well, as I mentioned, I was one of the first people that got there and Mr. Porcel obviously had a lot of needs because we were one of the largest components in UNTAC and we had to have all sorts of logistical equipment. Basically, I was doing everything I could to beg, borrow or steal that equipment for our component, handi-talkies, cars, computers, office furniture. Basically I was sort of a go-getter. I think the fact that I was American really helped out because the majority of the technical people and logistics were Europeans. So, I was really occupied with that for the first five or six months of the

mission before we got headquartered at the SNC. We had the prefabs at the SNC. Then, by and large, it was trying to get a sense of what was going on in the provinces because that was really what we were trying to do towards the end of the operation was to make sure that we had good communication with the provinces and that they were doing the things that they needed to do at the local level. Then I really participated in the control group. I went out in every mission, actually. Every mission but one, I didn't go to the Funcenpec control area. That was really unique because as I also mentioned that getting close to the fire when you really got close to the fire when you went out to these missions because you saw the documentation, not that I could read it but people were telling me. When someone knows Cambodian politics and Cambodian language, his eyes sort of perk up at a particular document. You feel as if you really learn something, that you really are at an important place in the mission at an important time.

JK: Was there a difference in the conditions of the civilian staff versus the military troops in UNTAC, in terms of the hours of the day that you worked? Or the living conditions?

DB: Right off the bat, I think one of the major criticisms of the military components was the fact that they were not getting the per diem that we were getting, to be very honest. There was always a bit of tension as there always is in any UN peacekeeping mission or any operation where you have civilian people working with military personnel. The military personnel tend to be much more organized and much more cohesive. There are always goals and objectives and getting those done. There was sometimes, I think a

sense that the civilians didn't always know what they were doing. But as we worked together, I attended the military briefings every day, for example...

JK: Oh you did.

DB: Yeah, and as we worked together we grew to have much more respect for each other, typically for the people with whom we came into contact. We were always working together. There were civilians that were extremely committed to the operation and there were military that were likewise. On the other side of the coin, there were people that did the nine to five and had a good time after that.

JK: Why were you at the military briefings every day?

DB: Well civil administration is so tied in with the situation in the provinces that we needed to know what exactly was happening on the military side. So, that was basically my role, to communicate that to my boss if there was anything dramatic that happened in the provinces. We would get communications from our provincial directors but typically the military, their sources of communication and their lines of communication are much more well organized and much more wide-spread in the country. So, we were able to get information on a shooting, or a mishap, or accident or whatever throughout the military.

JK: So when would the briefings take place?

DB: In the late afternoons, I think five, five-thirty, something like that.

JK: Ok, that's really interesting.

DB: Yeah, it was, not that I really participated in them in the sense that I said anything. It was typically very military. I remember we had some excellent Indian majors or captains who were briefing and they would stand in front a map of Cambodia or a board, and they would brief for twenty minutes without notes and remembering things as idiosyncratic as how many bullets were spent from a cartridge. I just had so much respect for these people because they really knew their job and they really wanted to get their message out. These things were very very well organized and tended to end a certain period in time. Sometimes the General would come to the briefings.

JK: General Sanderson.

DB: Yes, most of the times he had some of his high level aids there. I really felt that it was good for me to be there because in such a big operation, you sometimes get the sense that everything is so disconnected and disorganized but, the military really had their act together.

JK: Those briefings were in English?

DB: Yes, always in English.

JK: What kind of effect did this sudden introduction of about twenty-thousand foreigners as UNTAC personnel have on the Cambodian population?

DB: Well, good and bad. You have heard the reports of X-number of Cambodians who acquired HIV because of soldiers, or vice-versa. There were brothels. I lived actually near the SNC.

JK: SNC is?

DB: SNC was the...God, I can't even remember it.

JK: Was it the Supreme National Council...Oh, okay.

DB: Yeah yeah. They called it the... It was the big headquarters. We called it the SNC, it was strange that you forget things like this but…

JK: I was just reading about it.

DB: There was a Vietnamese brothel in between my apartment and the SNC and I remember distinctly that it wasn't exactly a great neighborhood in the sense that a lot of soldiers, Cambodian soldiers, would come in and have a good time and whatever. I mean

have a good time as in drinking a lot and they would shoot their guns off in the air and it would sometimes get pretty scary.

JK: Would they really? When they would get drunk and just shoot their guns off.

DB: Yeah, and there were other incidents.

JK: Were these bars outside?

DB: Yeah, they were outside patios sort of things.

JK: I thought shooting their guns off inside.

DB: We actually had incidents where people, because of hatred for the Vietnamese particularly among the Khmer Rouge, actually threw grenades in these places and killed some people. I distinctly remember that. But in terms of just the general effect, there was a tremendous amount of technology coming into the country. It was almost as if we were from Mars and we just plopped down and started operations. We employed quite a number of Cambodians. In Civil Administration, we probably employed the most, in terms of translators and drivers. Certainly to work with UNTAC was a very good occupation to have during the peace process. I remember we were always just flooded with people in lines trying to get recruited as translators or as electoral officers. My buddy, one of the guys that I lived with from Australia, was in charge of local payroll.

The number of employed went from the low hundreds to over thousands, in terms of the number of people we employed in the country during the time. Of course, the amount of commerce that we brought into the country and the dollar generation was quite dynamic in Phnom Penh. There were criticisms that we were responsible for and one of the main factors in the inflation rate. The inflation rate did go up precipitously and made it difficult for the poor Cambodians--I don't know really how can identify anybody as poor in such a poor country--but we made it difficult for them to buy rice. The rice prices had gone up in the country.

JK: And what about feeding all of you. How did that work? I mean you had to get water, you had to get food.

DB: We had contracted vendors that would come in on approval. They would compete for contracts. We had a Malaysian company that came in, they were like a commissary. Then you had private business to come in. Singaporeans were heavily involved in the commerce in the city, owning the hotels, the Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese. As you know, the Chinese are the heart of commerce, always have been there. They had been particularly persecuted by the Khmer Rouge. In the central market in Phnom Penh, they are the power. They are responsible for a good bit of the wealth in the country. The overseas Chinese just flocked into Cambodia because they saw the opportunities there to deal with so many expats who had a hundred and something a day in terms of their per diem to spend or to invest or to whatever.

JK: What was the political culture like when you got there? Was there any kind of understanding of democracy or of what that meant?

DB: No, to be very blunt, in my view it was the rulers and ruled. There was never such a concept as the governed and the governors, the people that govern. It's again, to be very black and white about it, the people that are in power, want to stay in power and they will do anything, I mean anything, to stay in power. The people that are out of power are usually very afraid. We did create an incredible amount of political space in the country to the point where you did have mass rallies, so many NGOs coming forth, and the press had never been freer in the country. But as events would turn out, that was a very temporary political space. I don't want to criticize the good that we have done because there is certain vestiges of that in the country today. It is a shame that it was somewhat temporary, particularly on the human rights side and the very good work that the human rights component did in terms of promoting awareness of human rights and engaging local Cambodians in human rights education and protection. I don't get that sense that that's active, or certainly not as active as it was during the UNTAC years.

JK: But nearly ninety percent of the electorate came out to vote.

DB: Again coming back, in my view, to the idea that we were somehow successful. If we were successful in anything, it was the ability to make them believe in us and we had all the administrative authorities telling them, "Vote for us. Don't believe in UNTAC. UNTAC won't help you. You are going to be here when UNTAC leaves, dadada." But

we were able to do that through an incredibly effective radio, to some extent television campaign, to make people believe, to encourage them to believe that their vote would be indeed free and fair and secret, most important.

JK: And secret. And there seems to have been evidence that it was free and fair and that the results were fairly split, the Government did not get an overwhelming turn out.

DB: The Government being the existing, State of Cambodia. I think it was forty-four percent for the Funcenpec. And thirty -eight percent for the SOC and then I think the LBP, which was the group from the KPLNF, I think they got six percent, I'm not sure. Many people were surprised obviously with the incredible logistical and administrative resources that the SOC had, that they in fact lost an election.

JK: But then the ballot was secret. Well, the Special Representative Mr. Akashi announced a few days before the election that conditions were not perfect but that the elections would go ahead. What did he mean by that? What was wrong at that point?

DB: Well, the level of political violence in the country had contributed to that feeling in the mission that there was pressure and there were physical threats and fear and this was also due to the Khmer Rouge threats to prevent the elections from happening. We had concerted threats on Khmer Rouge radio and their statement that they would disrupt the elections, violently. On the day of the election no one knew, no one knew that how

they would transpire, whether they would be violent or prevented it or disallowed it. But we were thankful that indeed that it didn't transpire.

JK: So, what kinds of things were you looking at to determine that you could go ahead? You are saying that there was a lot of violence.

DB: I think, to be very honest, there was so much political capital, and physical resources, and financial resources that were invested in Cambodia that we had to go. We had to go ahead and we had to see whether this was going to work. To pull out would have been an embarrassment to the UN and also would put Cambodia in the same situation. No matter what we did, we had created the opportunity for Cambodia to get back into the international community, to accept financial aid and multilateral aid that had been embargoed through sanctions prevented from entering the country and to start the country back on some sort of legitimate foothold. I remember a commentator from the *Washington Post* said that we would have been better if we had invested two billion or 1.5 billion dollars on roads in Cambodia. There's a lot of justification for that comment. That's essentially one of the things that needed to be done because the country was devastated from the genocide and then from the aftermath of genocide. But coming back to my point, we provided the political opportunity for Cambodia to re-emerge into the international forum with a legitimately elected government that could interact, that could get its seat back in the UN, could have an opportunity to get into ASEAN, etc. It was the re-emergence of a country that had been forgotten.

JK: In hindsight, how would you evaluate the role of, first of all, your component?

DB: Well, I think that, our component was criticized, much criticized for the supposed lack of control on the existing administrative authorities. I think that is a pretty hard case to make given the political realities in the country. I wish in hindsight, that we would have had more control at the provincial and district level at the first, possibly having had co-location. But again that probably would not be logistically feasible but to make sure that we would have been well represented in the provinces at an early stage. Even that is difficult to say because it was a tremendous logistical nightmare to try to get people, material, and resources into that country in a short period of time. It took the military component five months before it was fully deployed. Likewise the civilian components, it took at least that time if not more to have the ability to be there in some sort of strength.

JK: But to a certain extent, even if you hadn't been in complete control, don't results of the election show that you indeed inhibit their abilities to influence and intimidate the electorate?

DB: I certainly think that. I can't say that civil administration did, that's something that the whole mission did.

JK: The whole mission at one time.

DB: Particularly the electoral component and the information component. We just provided an opportunity for some positive things to happen. I get a little bit idealistic and I think that we had so many good intentions, but in the end result we were there for the election and the fact that the election went off as well as it did, no one can say that we didn't essentially do our job. The election was a success.

JK: Would you have wanted to have a little bit more enforcement capability, for example, police or military to help your civil administration when you ran into an enforcement problem?

DB: That's a difficult question given the culture. We had a very intrusive mandate from the Paris Accords but in a long-term operation leading to a goal, you risk any sort of cut off of cooperation. If you risk that, then you risk the cooperation of that entity in the elections. You had to be of a certain willingness to give and take and to try to choose the moment, if you for instance wanted to get rid of a particular official or if you wanted to arrest someone. I think that we certainly could have used the civilian police in a better fashion. I don't think that many of their personnel were as trained as they could have been. But that's just my personal view. I don't think that us coming in with a military individual with a gun or whatever would have done anything positive. Maybe a police presence, an unarmed police presence, which we did have during the Control Teams, would have been good because the whole country is sensitized to military structures and authority and possibly that would have been something that would have been useful to have.

JK: So when you went out with the mobile Control Team, you had police with you but they were unarmed?

DB: Well, police in the country were unarmed. And CivPol was unarmed in Cambodia. There were a lot of debates within the peacekeeping operation as to whether they should be armed. The CivPol people, particularly the Deputy Commissioner, were very adamant in saying that having a weapon was giving an excuse to someone to fire on you. It makes you a target; it makes you a combatant. For all the frustrations, because there were situations in which they needed to be armed, in my view, but you have to think of the long term and what affects any sort a confrontation would have.

JK: What did this experience mean to you personally?

DB: Well, I think if you asked anyone, particularly the younger people, about the experience, it was a very formative experience. It instilled within us a better sense of the UN of what we are doing with respect to how we touch people's lives and how we can change something on the ground and affect a particular entity. I would never trade the experience. I think fieldwork as it has been recognized in the promotion system, fieldwork is now required. Fieldwork is now required for eligibility for promotion, despite the difficulties one has with families. People are encouraged to go out and '92-'93-'94 was our hay-day. I am a little regretful that I came back in '93 after eighteen months there because I had a number of people that went on to other operations, Somalia

and Bosnia and got great experiences. I don't think that they would want to, and I wouldn't want to trade my experience in the field for anything. I thought far too much in terms of the career path and thought that I could, having been closer to home, that that would further my career prospects. But in hindsight, I wish I had gone out for that experience. That's something that you just don't ever forget. I mean it is such a life-changing experience. You meet so many people. When I came back to the United States, I found it funny to hear the American accent. I couldn't believe it, I just hadn't heard it in such a long while. It was typically the people that we came in contact were Ausies and Brits and French. It was a great experience to meet so many different people who were committed to the operation, committed to that blue flag.

JK: Is there a kind of an acculturation process that happens? It sounds as if you are talking about the fact that you have become and international civil servant in a sense and that your work for the international community is despite the fact that you are an American.

DB: There is. When you are in a field mission, obviously people are aware of where you come from but there is just no sense of that, there is such a goal-oriented philosophy that you have to get with one another to get the job done. We were there to achieve an objective and I hope that I was thought of as someone who was aggressive and hardworking and someone who was committed to affecting some change and fulfilling our mandate. Certainly nationality was something you couldn't escape. Being aware of someone's nationality and where they came from was apparent but, really we were there

to do a job and if someone wasn't up it, it didn't matter where they were from. We wanted them to get out of the way and get somebody who could do the job.

JK: I asked you everything that I had on my list here. I think we have covered a vast amount. I s there anything in particular that you would like to add to that?

DB: That's a good question. I think I react better to questions than just have a statement. Yeah, I think it is sad what has happened in the country and it was sad in the movie *The Killing Fields* that at the time the Untied States Government thought about all the geopolitical aspects of the conflict and the military dynamics and the last people they thought about were the Cambodians. It seems that it has come to pass again in terms of the changing of the lives of the every day person in Phnom Penh. But at the end, it is their country. We always have to remember that. We can only do so much, they have the responsibility to govern and to live there and to prosper in peace.

End of Tape, Side two