

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

GARY OVERBY

JANUARY 29, 2007

TRACY, CALIFORNIA  
Via Phone

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL HOSKING

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MINUTEMAN MISSILE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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## ABSTRACT

Gary Overby was born November 6, 1952 in Clear Lake, South Dakota, moving to Rapid City in 1959. Overby began his law enforcement career in the U. S. Army, serving in Vietnam then later working for Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, Pennington County Sherriff's Office, and eventually the U. S. Marshal Service. Beginning his career in the U. S. Marshal Service in the Sioux City, Iowa office in 1980, eventually moving to the Rapid City office in 1983 to begin missile escort duty. He recounts the basic duties and experiences he had over the year that he assisted the U. S. Air Force in transporting the missiles through South Dakota. He later moved up through the ranks of the U. S. Marshal Service retiring as the agent in charge of the San Francisco Field Office in 1998.

## EDITORIAL NOTICE

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INFORMANT: GARY OVERBY  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL HOSKING  
DATE: 29 JANUARY 2007

MICHAEL HOSKING: This is Michael Hosking, historian at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, and I'm conducting an interview on the 29th of January 2007 with Gary Overby, and that's O-v-e-r-b-y, over the phone. Gary, one of the first questions we tend to ask people, and some people get a little offended about having to give their birth date, but we're just curious about your birth date and where you were born and raised.

GARY OVERBY: That's quite okay. I was born November 6, 1952 in Clear Lake, South Dakota, which is in the eastern part of South Dakota. My folks moved off the farm, so to speak, in 1959 and relocated to Rapid City, South Dakota, where I went through their school system and graduated from Rapid City Central High School in 1971.

HOSKING: When did you get involved with law enforcement, and then eventually the U.S. Marshal Service?

OVERBY: In 1971, right after graduating from high school, I went into the United States Army. I volunteered for a two-year enlistment that included volunteering for Vietnam. I went to Fort Ord, California, where I was trained as an infantryman and sent to Vietnam in November of 1971. While there, I was eventually transferred from the infantry to the military police, which is where I obtained my interest in law enforcement. I came back to the United States in August of 1972, went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and was there until March 1973 as a military policeman.

Then I obtained a position as a park technician at Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, with the National Park Service. Back then, I don't know if you still have park technicians or not, but that was kind of an entry level for park ranger. I served at Mt. Rushmore as a law enforcement firefighter park ranger from 1973 to 1976. I was able to be furloughed for two winters in '73 and '74 in order to get my Associate of Arts degree in Criminal Justice Studies at the University of South Dakota, but in '75, afterwards we were having so many problems at Mt. Rushmore with law enforcement concerns that my superintendent wouldn't let me go back to college in the winter. So I remained there until August of 1976.

I then wanted to get more experience in law enforcement, so I obtained an appointment as a Pennington County Deputy Sheriff in Rapid City, South Dakota, and I worked for Sheriff Mel Larson in patrol for two years, and then school liaison, you know, juvenile delinquency type investigations for two years.

Then February 1980 I received my appointment as a Deputy United States Marshal. That was, of course, after spending almost a year and a half of a process of taking an examination and going through interviews, and so forth. When I became a Deputy United States Marshal, I went to Glencoe, Georgia, which is the home of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy, and I attended the eight-week basic criminal investigators course, and then I attended the basic Deputy United States Marshals course there. I graduated from both of them and I was assigned to Sioux City, Iowa, to the U.S. Marshal's office for the northern district of Iowa in June 1980.

I worked that assignment until May 1981, at which time I obtained a lateral transfer as a Deputy U.S. Marshal to the Pierre U.S. Marshal's office, and I served under Deputy U.S. Marshal in charge, Steve Turchek, T-u-r-c-h-e-k. Steve was one of the original Missile Escort Deputy Marshals, so I kind of enjoyed hearing some of his background in that field.

So in 1983, when an opening came up in the Deputy U.S. Marshal Missile Escort Program in Rapid City, I went ahead and applied for that opening. That would have been in the summer of 1983. I was able to obtain the appointment, and I transferred out from Pierre, South Dakota, to Rapid City, South Dakota, and I was assigned to the U.S. Marshal's office in Rapid City. I was one of two Deputy U.S. Marshals that were assigned to the Missile Escort Program for Ellsworth Air Force Base in their Missile Wing out there.

HOSKING: So the first time you heard about the Minuteman missiles was when you were in Pierre.

OVERBY: Well, the first time I heard about it in some detail was in Pierre. Prior to that, my first exposure to the Missile Escort Program was actually at Mt. Rushmore. In I believe it was '74 or '75, they just started the program in Rapid City, at Ellsworth Air Force Base, and Steve Turchek and another federal marshal by the name of Gene Coon, C-o-o-n, were the first two marshals that came out to Rapid City to be assigned the program. As part of their orientation for the area, they met other federal law enforcement agencies and officers, and they came up to Mt. Rushmore to introduce themselves.

I remember when I was in Rapid City, I got to look at their equipment and to learn a little bit more about what they're doing, but in a very superficial way. I didn't really go very much into it. Then as a deputy sheriff from '76 to 1980, while I was on patrol, I would come across their convoys every now and then. I would see the federal marshal leading the convoys that contained the nuclear warheads, and I always kind of thought that was fascinating, watching their configuration as they were going about their business. So when I was transferred to Pierre in 1981 and I started serving under Steve Turchek, he used to fill in a little bit more background about the Missile Escort Program.

One of the things I'd just like to mention about the program, my recollection, was that the first vehicles that were used were 1973 white Plymouth Furies. They were patrol models, which was unique for South Dakota. When they came to South Dakota, they had a red and blue emergency-like configuration on top. In South Dakota we only used red, so they kind of stood out a little bit. Plus they had these big bold letters on the side of the car and on the rear trunk lid that said United States Marshal, and all of us thought that was pretty interesting, that was pretty cool. They also wore Special Operations Group jumpsuits, which were kind of almost a turquoise blue with the United States Marshal emblem on them. They were a very sharp-looking group when they came out.

Both Steve and Gene represented the U.S. Marshal Service very well. They were very well read, articulate, and as a matter of fact, both of them went on to very high positions in the U.S. Marshal Service. Gene Coon eventually became the head of the Witness Protection Program, and Steve Turchek eventually became the chief inspector for the Office of Inspections office in the western United States out at San Bruno, California. These were very dynamic young federal law enforcement officers, and they made a very good impression on people.

HOSKING: You mentioned when we talked earlier that there were benefits of taking this assignment?

OVERBY: Right. Now, the entry levels for Deputy U.S. Marshals at that time, depending on your education, were GS-5 and GS-7. While I was a deputy sheriff, I had been able to complete my Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science at Black Hills State College, and I was also able to just about complete my Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Studies from the University of South Dakota. So I was able to enter the U.S. Marshal Service as a 5, but I went to a 7 very quickly. Well, our journeyman grade was GS-9. GS-9 was our journeyman grade as a Deputy U.S. Marshal.

Now, the Missile Escort position itself did not give you a grade increase, but what it did is it gave you more points, so to speak, for your promotion packages, so that when you would want to go on and compete for promotions, like a supervisory position or Deputy in Charge or a Witness Security Inspector or an Enforcement Specialist with the U.S. Marshal Service, it really helped to have had this assignment, because it showed, first of all, that you were willing to transfer, that you were willing to take on extra duties. And, hopefully, if you successfully completed these duties, it showed that benefit also, that you were someone that could take on these responsibilities.

When I first heard of the opening in Rapid City, I was very interested in it, and I decided to put in for it. I think one of the reasons I was able to get the position there was because I had been a deputy sheriff out there, I knew the chiefs of police, I knew the Highway Patrolmen, I knew the sheriff's offices, so I knew a

lot of the people that I would be required to perform liaison work with. And I just knew the area. I think that was one of the things that gave me an edge. But also, this was a paid move. It was considered a merit promotion. Even though you didn't really get a grade increase, it was still considered a merit promotion. And it was competitive. There were marshals from throughout the United States that competed for the position.

I might make this mention right now also. You had to be a journeyman level Deputy U.S. Marshal to put in for the position. You couldn't be an entry level marshal and put in for the position. You had to have at least one to two years in and have already completed your probationary period and have shown and demonstrated that you could assume additional responsibilities.

HOSKING: I know you went through your Law Enforcement Academy and all of that. Was there any additional training that you had to do once you received the position?

OVERBY: Well, that was the curious part of this. The U.S. Marshal Service had, of course, the Academy down in Georgia that they trained the deputies, and also they gave them advanced training. They also had Camp Beauregard in Louisiana for their Special Operations Group, which was kind of like their SWAT Team. But they really hadn't developed a training program for the Missile Escort Deputies.

If I understand the history on this, in the early seventies the Air Force contracted with the U.S. Marshal Service to provide civilian law enforcement escorts for their convoys, to handle, for instance, reckless drivers, drunk drivers, or someone disturbing the peace or impeding the convoy, so that there would be a civilian authority that could take care of that. Well, the U.S. Marshal Service really fits the bill because they had a very broad authority in their jurisdiction, but it wasn't a large program as far as manpower. I believe at the time there was Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, then there was I think Minot and Grand Forks up in North Dakota, then Cheyenne [WY] and Montana and Missouri. But, in other words, if you start adding up the actual numbers of Missile Escort Deputies, it probably only came to around twelve maybe, or something like that.

Initially, when they started the program in the early seventies, they had their orientation, they got their equipment at Washington, D.C., and they drove their cars out to the West, to the sites. A couple went to North Dakota, one went to South Dakota, and on and on.

Well, after that initial group went on duty, as the years started rolling by, you would have sporadic openings that would come up. There really wasn't a unified training program, like, for instance, well, you need to go to FLETC now, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, for a month for Missile Escort training. What they did is they had the senior Missile Escort Deputy that you were reporting to train you. In my case, the guy that I was replacing stayed an additional thirty days to give me training on the job with him in order to look at

the duties, to learn the duties, to drive several convoys, and to meet the people. It really was on-the-job training. I guess you could say, since you've already demonstrated that you've gone to the Academy and you went to other schools with the U.S. Marshal Service, and these other aspects, they would assume that you would be a quick study for the Missile Escort Program.

That was something I found kind of interesting is that, because they were so sporadic when these positions would come up that they really didn't have a class per se that they could say, okay, for this year this is going to be the Missile Escort class that we're going to train. They never really developed that. We had standard operation procedures that we were given. We went through an enhanced security background. But we really relied on the veteran deputies that we were replacing or that we were going to work with in order to train us and to bring us along.

HOSKING: Kind of the impression I'm getting, so the training would evolve as the program evolved. For instance, if you got your replacement and you saw some things that needed to maybe change, or something like that, you could change those.

OVERBY: Oh yes, absolutely. There's only so much you could change because, of course, you're dealing with the Air Force, and any time you're dealing with a military organization, there's a rigidity built in their structure of the way they do things. You can maybe affect what you're doing to some degree, but there are some things that are pretty much written in stone that you do. You learn that, and then anything after that is pretty minor as far as any changes go.

HOSKING: Okay. How many times would you end up going out with convoys?

OVERBY: That would have been probably a couple times a week. It could be a little bit more depending on their work schedule. The reason for that is, that was dictated by the maintenance schedule. I always kind of thought it was a misnomer to call it the Missile Escort Program when in actuality we weren't escorting any missiles, they were already out there. What we were doing was actually escorting the nuclear warhead, and the weapons carrier—I imagine you've seen pictures of them, or maybe even have one there—was a big semi-truck-trailer looking affair. So whenever the maintenance individuals, or the wing that was responsible for updating the warheads, whatever their schedule was, that was our schedule.

This was something else that people don't understand, I think civilians don't understand. When those missile fields were opened up, created and established in the 1960s, many civilians felt that all the Air Force did was pretty much insert their missiles and warheads and leave them there and go off to a launch facility and then conduct their operation. The reality is that those were highly technical pieces of equipment that needed to be tested, needed to be updated. In some cases they would rotate a fresh warhead and bring in the old one. The old one,

of course, they would just, like an engine, overhaul it, do all your testing at the facility at Ellsworth Air Force Base, bring it up to all the specs, all the codes, make sure everything is working, and then put it in the inventory so that, let's say, H1 or H3 or B1, whatever silo is in next for an update in their maintenance schedule, they go out and put a fresh warhead on the missile. That's really the gist of what we were doing, making sure that those warheads got out there in a safe timely fashion, and that they were brought back in a safe timely fashion.

The people that did the actual work themselves would meet us out there. They weren't part of our convoy. They would travel their own route, so to speak. Either they'd meet us out there or they'd be out there right after we got there. We always called them the Red Hats because they always wore red ball caps. Of course, our convoy commander knew the people, and all the security protocol there was done between our convoy commander and the Red Hats when they would get together. My responsibility was mostly with the conveyance of the convoy there and back, and then also the liaison with the law enforcement authorities as we were doing this work.

HOSKING: And the way I understand it, you had basically two marshals per office.

OVERBY: Right, and the reason for that is, of course, sometimes a guy will get sick, and also sometimes he'll be on vacation. Also, because we did have two, usually you would do a week or so on call, then the next week your partner would have the convoy, and then we'd kind of leapfrog. There were occasions, of course, when we would get sent on special assignments, one of us would, to Witness Protection detail maybe in New York or California, or Judicial Protection, or a Fugitive Apprehension team someplace that was going after fugitives. Of course, we would always make sure that one Missile Escort Deputy was always, always, always on call and available. The thing about the Air Force, too, is they may have done it while I was there and I've never seen it, where they would send out two convoys at once. In my recollection, it was always just one convoy at a time. So there were two of us.

Usually, how the escorts would occur would be . . . Of course, when you're not escorting a convoy, you're doing other federal marshal work, so there were times I'd be down at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation serving subpoenas, or I'd have arrest warrants, working warrants. I would get a call by my office midafternoon or so. Usually by three o'clock they'd call you. The Air Force would call our office in Rapid City and notify them that they had a convoy the next morning. So when I would get in, I would call and confirm, okay, tomorrow morning.

Usually, we would take the warhead out there, and sometimes we would wait and then we would bring the other one back. But there were times when we would maybe go straight out there because they were having an extended maintenance issue with the missile but they still needed to bring the warhead in.

They didn't have a fresh one yet, or whatever. So I would just bring it back with an Air Force security convoy. Or there were times I took one out there to one that was . . . on a missile that maybe didn't have a head, that because of whatever maintenance concerns they couldn't put a fresh one on there.

So you didn't always know if you were going to do a one-tripper, if it was going to be a one-way going out or one-way coming back. But they would tell us the day before. We would normally know by about three in the afternoon the day before. Then what would happen was, our vehicle was kept out at the Air Force base, and I would take my private vehicle. I'd get up and I'd be out there by about five-forty, five-forty-five in the morning, and I would go to the motor pool. They were the ones that were responsible for storing and securing the U.S. Marshal's escort vehicle. Now, mind you, this is not a U.S. Air Force vehicle. It was a General Service Administration, their motor pool. We had our GSA headquarters for the fleet out of Bismarck, North Dakota, so our Missile Escort vehicles were procured through the GSA office up in Bismarck. As a matter of fact, I had to drive up there to get our 1983 Missile Escort vehicle, which was a Plymouth Trailblazer. It was that red Trailblazer that I gave you a picture of.

Anyway, I'd pick up my vehicle about five-forty-five. I'd check it out, make sure that everything looked good. Then I'd leave my civilian vehicle there and I'd drive the U.S. Marshal's vehicle over to the Air Police, they had like a meeting room near their barracks. Everyone that was going on the convoy that morning would meet there by six. At that time, we would all go in, and there was always a captain or a lieutenant that was in charge of the convoy. He or she would check and make sure that all the Air Force personnel were present and accounted for and check with the NCOs to make sure that all the equipment is functional and road ready, that they're all ready to go.

They would finally, then, tell us where we're going. Of course, as you probably know, they was Hotel Flight, Bravo Flight, Charlie . . . and they would go like C1, C2, C3, or B1, B2, B3. They would say, for instance, okay, H1 today, we're going to H1, and confirm it's going to be a round-tripper. I had a map of all the missile sites, and I would confirm the location of that site while I was sitting there listening to her briefing. Because usually it was female officers that were the convoy commanders. I think there was only one male officer that I'd seen. Most of them were female officers. I was listening to them, and I'd look up the missile site location. Then I could figure the route.

For instance, if you're going up to the missile fields north of Belle Fourche and Newell, I knew then what cities I'd have to go through, what route I'd have to take. For instance, going up to north of Newell and Nisland, I knew I'd have to go through Sturgis, because we'd take Highway North 79 out of Sturgis, near Bear Butte. I knew what enforcement actions I would have to take because we always made sure the convoy never stopped, so I'd know ahead of time what

intersections I'd have to block to make sure that the convoy would not have to stop and could go through expeditiously.

The same thing if it was one of the missile sites north of Philip, or south of there. I knew pretty much where I'd have to go. In my mind I had thought out where I was going, because I was the head of the convoy. I never made a wrong turn, but I always kind of wondered in the back of my mind if I ever made a wrong turn, would they all keep following me.

They would go ahead and continue to give a security briefing at that time. Quite often we would have helicopter support, which was the Air Police that would be in a Huey helicopter. Their call sign I remember was always . . . I think it was Beaver 58. They would say, okay, we'll have Beaver 58 with us today, and whatever is pertinent to that. Sometimes we'd have maintenance problems with the Hueys, but usually they were pretty good about having air coverage. They would shadow us.

We would then complete the briefing. We would go outside. Oftentimes, the convoy commander would ride with me to what we called the Q-gate. The Q-gate was the entry and exit point that was secure to the area at Ellsworth Air Force Base where they kept the nuclear weapons components, worked on them, and so forth. Very highly guarded and secured. We would have a staging area outside of what we called the Q-gate. The convoy commander would usually ride there with me, and she would give me any last minute updates or anything that we needed to confer about before we left. By the way, my U.S. Marshal unit was always Unit 13, we were always 13.

So we would confer on that, and once we got there, she would go ahead and look her troops over one last time. Then she would get in a Chevy Suburban. Now, the typical convoy configuration would be lead vehicle would be the U.S. Marshal, Unit 13. Right behind the marshal would be the convoy commander. Like I said, that was always a lieutenant or a captain. Then she would have a small squad of Air Police with her. Right behind would either be one of . . . Are you familiar with the Armored Scout cars that they used back in the eighties and nineties?

HOSKING: Yeah. They called them Peacekeepers?

OVERBY: Peacekeepers, right. They would have Peacekeepers. Usually, we had two in the convoy. If I recall correctly, I think that they were right behind the weapons carrier. But, of course, the weapons carrier is inside the Q-gate. It's inside the facility loading the warhead.

So what would happen is, we would be there by six-thirty, and usually they were pretty timely. You would see the gate open up, and everyone would start turning on their emergency lights. We'd be ready for it, and then the convoy

commander would get in front of the weapons carrier, I'd get in front of the convoy commander, the two Peacekeepers would get right behind the weapons carrier, with lights. And I don't know why they did this, but they always wanted sirens blaring. I don't know if you've ever seen one or heard about them, but it was the noisiest . . . I think it was to inform the base commander to know, hey, we're working, we're on the job, and here we go. That was the big chance for all the nineteen-year-old Air Policemen to use the red lights and the sirens.

We would go out through the base with the lights and the sirens, and the other Air Policemen that were the law enforcement type would make sure that we got through all the intersections. Usually, if we were going to missile sites that were west and north of us, Philip and Newell and those areas, there was a gate . . . I'm trying to think. Was it called south gate, or what was it called? It wasn't the main gate, but it was to the southwest of Ellsworth Air Force Base. It was a small gate, and we would go out that direction, right into Box Elder, then we would take a right in Box Elder, then we would merge onto I-90 going westbound. If we were going to Philip and those areas, and up by Wall, we would then go out the main gate and take the on-ramp to I-90 right at Box Elder, right when you get past the main gate. Now, you probably know that they've redone those gates completely now. In fact, I think even the old exit to Ellsworth is gone.

HOSKING: The one at the south gate has been removed. Yeah, the one that you would have taken to go west. But the other one, I think the exit's in the same place, the gate's in the same place, but they've been redone.

OVERBY: I know they did a reevaluation on that aspect of it all. Once we were clear of the base and onto the interstate, they would turn off the emergency sirens, and we would head on out to whatever site we were going to. Now, I had two radios in my escort vehicle. I had the Air Force, I think it's VHF high band, that I could monitor the convoy commander and give instructions to, alerts, and different things. Also the other vehicles, their radio transmission. Then we also were connected to Beaver 58, the helicopter, so we could hear them. They would give us like traffic reports ahead of us, or if there was anything unusual looking or suspicious looking, they would alert us.

The other radio I had in my U.S. Marshal's vehicle was a VHF low band radio, which was connected to South Dakota State Radio Communications. Now, that was important because South Dakota had kind of a unified radio system, so on VHF low band, I think it was 32.16, I could contact the Highway Patrol, I could contact sheriff's offices, I could contact the police department. So if there was any concern that came up, they could contact me and I could contact them.

This is something I don't know if you've ever heard about before, but South Dakota did have an emergency response plan in general for any major law enforcement or security crisis. It was called a Checkerboard Alert. That's when

if you hit a Checkerboard Alert, all law enforcement agencies, they're all alerted, they all go to designated spots throughout the state, monitor all major highways and secondary roads. In other words, if there would have been a major problem or concern that came up while we were conveying the nuclear warhead, I could have contacted South Dakota State Radio and declared an emergency, and they then could have then declared a Checkerboard Alert, which would put all the state resources and assets into motion. That was pretty important.

Anyway, so down the road we go. Like any convoy, you only go as fast as your slowest member, and that was the weapons carrier. So I made sure that we went at a nice constant speed. Of course, back then . . . let's see, '83 I think the speed limit started to get bumped a bit because those were the Reagan years, and that's when they pumped it up from fifty-five back up to sixty-five or seventy. But we would do under that, of course, in order to have a good, safe, comfortable speed. Plus those Peacekeepers, I had heard, were not a real joy to drive. They were kind of a handful because they were a very heavy armored vehicle. So we went at a very safe and sane speed.

We maintained good discipline. We didn't let people in between us. You don't want people in their pickups and shotgun racks get in front of the weapons carrier, you know, with their bales of hay in the back with straw flying everywhere. We maintained a good spacing and made sure that nobody entered that area. For instance, as we would go up toward Sturgis, they had a couple of major intersections that needed to be closed off.

What I would do is, I would then speed up as I got close to Sturgis, and I'd have my emergency overhead lights on. I'd get on Highway 34, which goes through Sturgis, and I would go to the first major off-ramp there that would drop us on to 34. I would secure all traffic coming east and west so that the weapons carrier and the convoy could . . . and they would have their red lights on at that time, and they would drop down and safely get on the 34. Now we're in Sturgis, so I would then speed up and go to the left, past them, with my red lights and siren, and I would get up to the downtown exit, which was the next major intersection. Then I would stop all the traffic there. I believe that was also a traffic light controlled intersection. I would stop all traffic and make sure that the weapons carrier got through there. And I think there was one last one before we left the city limits of Sturgis. I would do the same thing. I would leap frog.

Now, remember, we're not going at a high rate of speed. We're just safe and sanely going, but we're not stopping. We're not setting up camp anywhere. We're keeping that weapons carrier rolling. The sheriff's and police departments were very aware of that protocol, and they were very supportive of it.

We went ahead then, and we would exit Sturgis and then take a left and go north on 79 up towards the missile fields north of Bear Butte and up by Philip. That would be a typical type of operation. Or, conversely, if you're going through Philip, there's that little intersection there when you first come into Philip where you go north to the missile field. I'm trying to remember if that was a controlled intersection or not, but that was on Highway 14 that you turn onto 73 going north. But, once again, you'd make sure that there was nothing there that could threaten the weapons carrier, that could run into it or cause damage or do anything to impede it.

We'd get up to the missile silo site, and more often than not the Red Hats, maintenance guys, would be there already. We would roll in there, and we'd have the gates opened immediately. I wouldn't go into the gate. I would stay outside of it. But, of course, the Air Police would branch off all around it and take up their positions as the weapons carrier entered the gated silo area. As you may have seen pictures of or maybe been told about, normally that weapons carrier would straddle the silo. So when they were working on it, it was really kind of . . . it wasn't a lot to see. That way they were safe from the elements. They were also safe from prying eyes. And they had all their equipment in the weapons carrier for what they needed to do, the winches and the different things, to get the old one off and secure it into its storage container. Conversely, then they'd have the fresh one that they could roll on over and put right over the missile and have it winched up and lowered and affixed to the top of that missile.

It was all kind of a secretive little process, but once the weapons carrier entered the gated silo, it was the Air Police's responsibility then to make sure that . . . you know, they have their National Defense Zone. You've probably heard that term before. National Defense Zone. It's the national law which pretty much states that ye shall not pass, ye shall not go inside. And they took up their positions around the silo.

Well, the convoy commander would then stand by to make sure that everyone was deployed correctly, everyone was accounted for, everything was proceeding okay. Then he or she would normally turn over the security responsibilities to the senior NCO, non-commissioned officer. Usually, this is by late morning that we're at the site. He or she would then get in my vehicle, and we would kind of go over how the trip went and talk about any issues that we needed to regarding that.

Two things happened then. Either we may be so far out on the prairie that you can't go anywhere really for dinner or lunch, so you have something with you to snack on. Or you go to a launch control facility, which then does, of course, as you know, have a mess and dining facilities, and we would go there. Or sometimes if we were close enough we would go into Wall, Philip, or Belle Fourche and we would meet the sheriff or the chief of police. What we would

do then, we would have lunch with them. We would go to whatever local diner is the most popular one. We'd just sit there and visit. It was a great way for the convoy commanders to get to know the local authorities.

It was also a goodwill action because South Dakotans . . . I've always found them—maybe because I'm from there originally—they're pretty easy going. They're pretty good people. This way, we could sit down with them. Because we've made a lot of noise going through their community. We have these stupid warheads going through their town. (chuckles) Well, this made them feel pretty good when they could talk to us. None of them ever expressed any problems or issues with that. They were always very supportive. But there were a lot of times that it was just regular chit chat, the day's events, and things like that in the world.

We would have a nice lunch with them. Then we would go back to the missile site and check on the progress. Then usually by early to midafternoon they would be ready to make the return trip. They have the fresh one there, and they've got the old one off and are ready to take the old nuclear warhead back to the facility there at Ellsworth. Beaver 58 would be on board again. The helicopter would notify us that they are in sight, or wherever they're at. Then our convoy commander would confirm that we're rolling. And we would return.

Once again I'd just do the reverse. I would be in front, and I would take them right on back. As soon as we got to Ellsworth, always the main gate, it seemed like, always the main gate. I mean, whether you're coming from the west or the east, they came in the main gate then. Everyone would hit their lights and sirens again as soon as they got to the main gate. For me, it wasn't much of a thrill because having been a deputy sheriff, I was used to hearing sirens a lot, and after a while it got pretty annoying to me. But you do what they tell you to do, and that's the protocol they wanted. We'd come right through the main gate. The circus is back in town. We'd get over to the Q-gate, and as we would roll up to the Q-gate, we would branch off and let the weapons carrier go right on inside the facility, and they would secure the gate again and we would all kind of just nod and wave to each other. The Air Police had their own protocol as to whatever debriefing or whatever they would do afterwards, check equipment.

My responsibility was then to return the U.S. Marshal's vehicle back to the Air Force motor pool, and they pretty much maintained it. I mean, I had a gas card for it. I could gas it up right there. We had gas stations right near the main gate there. What they would normally do, they would store it and they had a wash rack, a wash facility there that they would keep it clean. Because, as you can imagine, there's a few unpaved roads out there. But I would do that, take the vehicle to them, turn it over to them, and sign off on my log sheet for the day.

Then I would go back to the U.S. Marshal's office in Rapid City and fill out a daily activity report, which was just what I did, not in detail but just overall so that they knew how I spent my day, that I was assigned to the Missile Escort. They did show the Air Force. They would show them, okay, this is the time we're spending doing these convoys. If there was anything unusual that I saw or that I thought I needed to alert the other marshal that was doing the convoy, I would let him know. I'd say you might want to watch this or that, or whatever. I know one of the things that we were concerned about was road conditions and things like that. These vehicles are heavy. So you'd have to kind of warn them, you know, that road up there is getting pretty washboard. There's deterioration going on with it, so make sure you take it extra slow around this corner, by Billsburg or Midland or some of those little places up there, Mud Butte, and so forth.

That would be a pretty typical day. Rarely while I was there did we have any drunks or any reckless drivers try to challenge the convoy or try to mess with it. It's a pretty intimidating sight. I don't care who you are, if you're going down a rural South Dakota highway or road, and all of a sudden you see a warhead convoy coming at you. But we did have, at times, concerns because anything mechanical can break down. I know on one occasion our weapons carrier lost its left rear tire. They were dualies, but the tire shredded, for whatever reason.

We had to stop at, I think it was Tilford. There's what they call Tilford Rest Stop, which is just south of Sturgis on I-90. We were returning with an old warhead, and we'd just gotten past Sturgis. Then the weapons carrier reported to the convoy commander that we had a problem, that he was having stability problems with the trailer, with the carrier itself. As it turned out, of course, it was a blown left rear tire. What we did is, we were near Tilford, so I pulled into Tilford and I cleared out . . . those that were just there to stretch, the people, I had to ask if they could leave the area as the convoy rolled in right behind me.

I stood by and backed up the convoy commander while she had her men deployed because then you set up a National Defense Zone. You have to have your Air Policemen out there with their weapons at every corner of that weapons carrier. They had to make sure that anyone that went by there did not get within so many feet of it in order to maintain secure control of the situation. I was there, too, to keep traffic from moving. Of course, the circus is in town and everyone wants to see the circus. So I had to keep the traffic . . . I'd be waving them, keep going, keep going. Even though they're on 90, some of them had to pull in to see what was going on. Plus it gave them an opportunity to see what a weapons carrier looks like up close. But, anyway, I'd keep them going right on through the rest stop. Keep on going, please. Thank you.

It was funny. I know the Air Force is very serious about any kind of breaches of their protocol when it comes to security. They had, what was it, a major that

was out there? and a driver that drove by just to check and see how their Defense Zone was deployed. And our convoy commander got a critique the next day. One of the Air Policemen did not have his vest zipped up, the flak vest. Just little things like that that were noted, and that the helmet wasn't strapped. Normally, they wear a beret, but they also have these helmets that they wear if they have to do the National Defense Zone, because then they have to be ready for anything. Actually, I had seen him drive by in his U.S. Air Force blue vehicle, really checking us all out. The next day, sure enough, our convoy commander got a critique. It was passing, but next time make sure all their vests are zipped up, and make sure that the helmets are strapped on and secured properly, every one.

For the most part, the biggest headache for marshals in getting the convoys to and from there was really just making sure that we're together, make sure that we have good convoys insofar as we had good communication. A lot of it was preventive, knowing where we're all going, knowing what we need to do when we get to these populated. There weren't too many, but when you did get to them, make sure that they knew what you were going to do, that I was going to keep the intersection open for them. Of course, it was my responsibility to make sure that I didn't have anybody crashing into the weapons carrier or any drunks that were doing anything. Like I said, it's very intimidating to see one of these convoys, and I never had one that tried to compromise the security, I mean a reckless driver or a drunk driver.

Also, there's that aspect, of course, of antiwar or antinuclear weapons type demonstrators. I know in South Dakota, I think every Good Friday there was a group that would go to one of the silos and have a vigil or some kind of demonstration thing. But we never really had anyone that tried to impede a convoy. I think, of course, too, no one knew when they were coming or going, and I would kind of imagine, too . . . I don't know if they would know how to stop it. Once we left the main gate, or left the south gate of Ellsworth, we just kept rolling. We didn't stop anywhere. Maybe that was part of it, too. They probably noticed that we did not stop, so you couldn't really set up anything at an intersection, if you were a demonstrator, and start lying down in the middle of the street because they don't stop. Not that they wouldn't have stopped, but from they've observed, there was no place along that route where you could anticipate and say, oh yes, they're going to have to stop the convoy here, then that's our chance to jump out and do whatever. There was never really any problem with that at all.

And like I said, the location of the missiles being out in the Dakotas and Montana and Wyoming, these are good hard-working people out there in very rural areas, basically pro-American, pro-defense. Like I said, they're good people. For the most part, you got a job to do, and they want to get out of your way. And they do. I know that whenever I would get the assignment, I would always think . . . for instance, Dick Davis was the chief deputy sheriff up

in Belle Fourche. I could say hi to Dick when I'm up there. Or Norm Klingbille[?] was the head deputy sheriff in Wall, and Denny Sant, who was the Highway Patrolman in Philip—my cousin, by the way—I could say hi to Denny. You know these people, and you kind of know the area. It made our job a lot easier.

HOSKING: Did you ever coordinate things with them before going through a town?

OVERBY: Never. The reason for that is that I would never call somebody and say, hey, by the way, Norm, we're coming through your town today, or tell Denny, hey, we're going through Philip today. Once we started rolling, the only one that knew the destination as to where we were going was just the Air Force and myself. I wouldn't even tell State Radio. There were times that I'd let State Radio know that we were out there, if we were having some road conditions or something that they needed to be aware of. But for the most part, the local authorities were so used to us, they were used to working with us, they knew us. They also knew that if they needed to get a hold of us for any concern, they could do that. I had a State Radio guide in my car. I knew the call signs. They would tell me the call signs to everybody.

Conversely, my name was in there also, along with the other federal marshals. My call sign was USM4, U.S. Marshal 4. So if they wanted to call me about any concerns, if we were going through the town and there were any concerns, they could call. But they knew that when we were in town, or coming in town—because you could hardly miss us—they knew exactly what we were going to be doing, and they knew that if they had any concern they could call me. If there are not, everything goes good, then fine, we'll see you the next time we're in town, or maybe we'll have a cup of coffee together. They're just very good people to work with.

HOSKING: Yeah. And I wasn't sure, if they happened to see you coming, if they'd go ahead and block off a road or . . .

OVERBY: Normally not. They pretty much stayed out of our way. But the thing is, you always knew that if you needed extra help, if something was going on, you could always call upon them and they would do it for you, because they were just that type of people. We also tried to be good neighbors, too. We always chose the shortest route. For instance, Sturgis. There's much longer ways to get through Sturgis than on the 34, and you could really gum up their town a little bit. We always tried to take the shortest route possible, the most direct, shortest route possible that would impact the community the least.

We also tried to do it as inconspicuously as possible. For instance, we didn't run our sirens. Although I would toot my siren as I came to an intersection just to alert anyone that might be daydreaming that an emergency vehicle's there. I'd have the overheads on. Then as we went through the intersections, I made sure that the Air Force had their overheads on when they went through there. Then

when I saw that last scout car clear, I was in my vehicle already and on my way to the next intersection. We were going slow enough where I could do that expeditiously. We weren't going through there fifty, sixty miles an hour. We were going through there maybe twenty, twenty-five, just a nice steady roll through town at very controlled speeds. Everyone's comfortable with it, and it gives me time to secure the intersection, then I can go down to the next one and get that one taken care of. That's how we did it.

HOSKING: Did you ever hear how you came to lead this convoy?

OVERBY: That's a good question. I don't know if it was something that . . . the tip of the spear? (chuckles) If you think about it, if there was any real conservative effort to compromise the security of the convoy, I mean I didn't have an M16 machine gun or an M79 grenade launch or any of that kind of hardware. They're the ones that had the ultimate responsibility for the security of their convoy. They're the ones that had the equipment. I really don't know, but you know what? As early as I can remember, even when I came across their convoys when I was a deputy sheriff in the seventies, when they were first starting, the U.S. Marshal led the convoy. I think part of it was just that safety factor, knowing that there's a civilian law enforcement officer in front. You know who he is. I mean, this what he does. I think it was either Gene or Steve at the time. They knew all the locals.

Although I think it was harder for them perhaps to try to memorize the route to take in order to get to the missile field. Although this book would show you exactly where it was at. I knew from living out in West River, South Dakota, I knew all the different highways, the 79, 14, 73, 34. To me it was no big deal. But you take these guys, Steve was originally from Cleveland, Ohio, and Gene came, I think, straight out of Washington, D.C. These guys are coming out here, and this is the Wild West. I mean, they're out there in the wide open spaces. But they did a really good job setting the foundation for the Missile Escort Program.

The Missile Escort Program is something, as a deputy marshal, that you could do for a while, but I don't really know of anyone that would do it year in and year out, as a career. The reason for that is it would keep you fresher if you did it for just a certain . . . Both of them, I'm sure, did it for only two or three years. I did it much shorter than that, mostly just in '83, because a Deputy U.S. Marshal In Charge position came up in Pierre, South Dakota. I had worked that office prior to moving to Rapid City, and that was a really nice office. I knew the judge there, Judge Donald Porter, and I liked the area, so I put in for that. I didn't think I'd get it because they had just transferred me out a few months earlier to Rapid City. But, lo and behold, I was fortunate to get that position. So by the end of '83 I was training my replacement. I didn't mind it because, like I said, I knew the U.S. Marshal's office in Pierre.

I enjoyed many aspects of the Missile Escort work, but some of it, too, when you're waiting out there for them to change the warhead, bring a good book, because there's nothing for you to do except stand by and wait for that signal that we're ready to go back. You would go out there and wait. I know that the convoy commanders were in the same fix. Not fix, but same situation. Their people were already providing the security. They were posted around the site. Their job was just to make sure that their people stayed on the job. They would oftentimes get in the vehicle . . . actually, all the time they would get in the vehicle with me, and they would maybe read a book. Or if they were working on something with the Air Force, some kind of report or something, they'd be working on that. They were always checking in with their NCO. They were right there on site.

I think, too, most of their Air Policemen that were doing this job were like nineteen years old, or twenty years old, right out of high school. They were very eager to . . . oh, what's the word for it? Kind of the soldier of fortune, guns and ammo type thing. It was a big adventure. They'd ask the marshal, what kind of gun is that? And gee whiz. (chuckles) They were great guys, they were really great guys. I know that the convoy commanders, of course, were all college graduates and officers, and there's that separation of rank. They would like to stay with the marshal during that operation. They supervised their troops, but it was the NCO's responsibility to do the immediate supervision.

So the convoy commanders would always sit in the U.S. Marshal's vehicle out there on the missile site. Of course, I had the Air Force radio in my vehicle. I had State Radio in my vehicle. So they were in touch with everybody. They had a visual on their people. They didn't actually even have to be on site. If it was going to be a couple of hours before we were going to go back again, they could go with me into town if I wanted to have a cup of coffee with the sheriff or the Highway Patrolman. And they would.

I think it was great public relations for the Air Force, because they had really good NCOs on site that made sure that their people were doing the job, that they were securing that site, and they really didn't need the convoy commander there. Her job was mostly getting that convoy there, making sure the people are deployed, making sure the NCO is on top of it all. And if she has two or three hours, there was no problem with her going with me to Belle Fourche, or wherever we happened to be at, and then have a cup of coffee with the sheriff or the Highway Patrolman or the chief of police. Just do a meet and greet, then go back and get ready for the return trip.

HOSKING: Did you feel like there were enough safeguards in transporting these warheads?

OVERBY: Actually, there's two parts to that. There's the actual safeguard of the way you convey them, the physical security, making sure that they're secured physically and we've got a nice buffer so that an errant driver doesn't run into the carrier,

or equipment aspects of it. The other side of that, I guess, is the actual security itself, threats that might be posed externally to it. The internal concerns I was never much privy to. There could have been things that happened on the convoy that I wouldn't have known about, like the tire pressure went low on these two vehicles, or the security strap did this or that. I wouldn't know about that. But as far as the external security, as to how they deploy, how they anticipated problems, their level of readiness. Everything I saw is that they were spot on. They took it very seriously.

The convoy commander can set the tone for the convoy. If he or she, in the morning, really sets the agenda, set it business-wise, everybody knew this is serious work. It's very easy to get complacent when you've been doing this . . . As an Air Policeman, you're in for a four-year hitch, right? You've been in it already for two years, and you haven't had so much as a snowball being thrown at the weapons carrier. It would be easy, in my mind, to be complacent.

The convoy commanders I worked with would always remind them—it's kind of like that old *Hill Street Blues* TV show—be careful out there. They would always remind them about the seriousness of what we're doing and the commodity that we were escorting. If it fell into the wrong hands, or if there was some type of accident, the potential of harm to society was very great. They set the tone at the beginning of the briefing in the morning, and that would set the tone for the day. Don't take this for granted. These are our protocols, and this is what we'll be doing. Make sure that your weapons are ready, that the ammunition's there, and the whole works, that the vehicles are ready to go. This isn't just a Sunday drive. You're not just driving out to the country and back. I give them credit for that because I think, as a commander, that must have been very tough for them, to keep them sharp and on focus with that type of work.

The Red Hats, of course, their job is to make sure that everything is installed correctly, or removed correctly, and so forth and so forth. Their job is always pretty attentive to what they're doing. They already are self-motivated. But when you get a nice young nineteen-year-old man that's been trained very well to provide Air Police duty and security for these things, if you don't see any action for two years or three years, your convoy hasn't ever been attacked or you've never had anything really extraordinary happen, it's a challenge, I'm sure, to make sure that they're focused, that you keep them on their toes.

I think the military, because of . . . there's a lot of discipline, there's a lot of routine, there's a lot of miniscule things. Like I mentioned earlier, when they set up the Defense Zone over by Tilford, they got critiqued the next day about helmet straps and flak vests not being properly zipped up. Things like that keep them on their toes. I'm sure, the readiness of their weapons, the readiness of their vehicles. You have to do a lot of that miniscule detail work with them in order to make sure that they're on top of things. Because if things did go bad,

they're it. They're the ones that the country depends on to make sure that that warhead does not fall into the wrong hands.

I want to mention, too, I always had a lot of respect for those that rode in the helicopter. Like I mentioned, the call name was Beaver 58. They were flying about, they would give us little reports. Well, we're over here, let's clear this or that, or whatever. As you know, they lost a couple of those. Actually, my replacement, Bruce Jacobs, in Rapid City, he was bringing a convoy back from I think north of Bear Butte, and there was a mechanical failure on one of those Hueys, and they lost everybody on board. He went to the scene to see what he could do. That was right by Highway . . . I think it was 79, right there by Highway 79. So there is danger.

They also had, I know, a couple of Peacekeepers that rolled over. Not in the convoy itself but going to and from. Because they were very top heavy, so you had to really watch yourself when you were operating those vehicles.

There were inherent dangers in the work that they did, but it was very important for the convoy commanders to keep them focused and to make sure that they don't take it for granted as to what they're doing. This might be the day. This might be the morning that something's going to happen. Like for myself, too, it's keeping an eye out for civilian traffic, making sure that no one's trying to cut into the convoy, no one's driving erratic. Or if we're stopped at the rest stop, make sure the people keep moving, keep the traffic going. Or if you're in the towns, make sure that the intersections are secured, that that weapons carrier can get through. I mean, there's a lot of small things that when you think about it at the time, you don't really think too much about the consequences, but later when you think about it, if any of those things go wrong, something could possibly happen to compromise the security of that nuclear weapons carrier.

The Air Force, I think they did a pretty good job. But I know that a lot of those Air Policemen would get bored, or could get bored, and every now and then you'd see a little snowball fight, or you'd see somebody flip a buffalo chip at another one. (chuckles) Because there is a little horseplay out there. But it was also maybe kind of healthy horseplay, too, because it relieved some of the pent up energy. I never saw them do anything, though, that would compromise the security of the warhead that they were entrusted with guarding.

Anyway, it was a very interesting assignment in my life. I'm glad I did it. It's probably going to go the way of the dodo, I'm sure, at some point. It was something that I wouldn't have wanted to do a long time, but while I was doing it, I enjoyed it and I thought it was very interesting.

HOSKING: When you were out there, did they ever let you go into the silo or look down through the hole when it was opened, or anything like that?

OVERBY: No. I never requested it. I never asked to go up to peer inside of it. I just assumed that if they wanted me to, they'd ask me. As I mentioned earlier, I had been in the army, in the Military Police, and I think that helped us a lot. Everyone I can think of that was a Missile Escort Deputy at that time had been in the military. All of us knew the protocol with the army or the Air Force, or whatever branch you were with. I always thought, well, if they want me to, if they thought it was all right, they would let me. It's interesting that once the weapons carrier entered the gated area, it would straddle the silo, and they would do their operation kind of like abracadabra behind the curtain. (chuckles) I always just said, okay, that's fine, that's their thing. I always thought it would be very interesting to look at a missile itself, especially since I was supposed to be a Missile Escort Deputy. (laughs) I served all time and I never saw a missile. I did go, of course, to the launch facilities, and that was kind of interesting. Little self-contained communities out there on the prairie.

I always was very respectful of the Air Force. It's funny. They all have their jobs. The Air Police had their job, the Red Hats had their job, and you just recognize that that's their turf, it's their area, and that's fine. I just made sure that my responsibilities, I performed them to whatever need that they had of me. I just did a hundred percent.

Like I say, it was very satisfying. I had a good relationship with the convoy commanders. They were all very good people to work with. The airmen were enjoyable. I could relate to them because I had been nineteen once and in the military, and I could relate to them. Ellsworth Air Force Base itself I was familiar with because I finished getting my degree in the late seventies at their Black Hills State College campus, the extension campus out there at Ellsworth Air Force Base. I knew the air base pretty well. Actually, in the fifties and sixties I'd gone to air shows there with the Thunderbirds. So I was very comfortable with the Air Force base. Overall, it was a very nice assignment in my career.

After that, I went on to be the Deputy In Charge in Pierre, and I was in charge also of the Fugitive Warrant Program for the Marshal Service. At that time I was also in charge of contracting for federal jail space in the state, so if they brought in a federal prisoner, I'd contract with the local jails to have agreements to house federal prisoners. I did that out at Pierre.

Then in 1986 I was promoted to Internal Affairs Investigator with the U.S. Marshal Service and I was transferred to California. Eventually, in 1989, when they created a new Inspector General's Office for the Department of Justice, I was literally drafted as a Special Agent. I went one day from carrying a U.S. Marshal's badge to a Special Agent badge.

I became the Special Agent In Charge eventually out here in San Francisco and ran that until I was medically retired in 1998 after my unmarked Crown Victoria government car got broadsided by a driver that was coming off the freeway.

She was out of control; her accelerator had stuck. I was at a traffic light and she hit me right on my driver's door. I don't even remember the accident, but I woke up some time later in a hospital. After three months of extensive rehab, I was able to walk again. But by that time so many bones had been broken that I couldn't pass my physical any longer.

In the meantime, I retired and I now do tutoring at a local Catholic school here—math and language arts. And I work with the Red Cross. I keep busy with those entities. Life is still pretty fulfilling.

HOSKING: That's good. One thing that we talked about earlier on the phone that I just wanted to capture. Seeing the picture, I see what you were talking about with the red vehicle that you had, that 1983 Plymouth Trailblazer?

OVERBY: Yes, uh-huh.

HOSKING: Do you mind telling me a little bit about that?

OVERBY: That's a funny story. When I was sent to Bismarck, we had . . . I believe it was a 1980 Dodge Ramcharger, which was like a Blazer or a Trailblazer, but it was a nice cream color with U.S. Marshal's markings. When I went to replace that in '83, when I drove it into Bismarck at GSA to replace it, they had two vehicles there, a real pretty blue that I thought was going to be the Missile Escort vehicle. Then there was a red one, a red Trailblazer. Well, my supervisor in Rapid City wanted the blue one for himself, and he didn't want to drive a red Trailblazer. He said, "We'll just make the red one the Missile Escort vehicle." He sent somebody for the blue one, and I drove the red one back. I personally helped place all the emblems on and make sure the equipment got installed for it.

The joke was that we used to call it the Billsburg fire chief's vehicle because it was red and had a red light on top. Actually, when I went to my new assignment in 1986, I had mentioned to my boss in the U.S. Marshal Service Internal Affairs about that story and he thought it was kind of funny. He mentioned it to the auditors, so when the district office got audited in 1986, they were still using that red Trailblazer. And he got wrote up for it. (chuckles) I said, "Oh no, I didn't mean for that to happen." He says, "No, that vehicle should be either a blue or a white. That should be more of a law enforcement color. That's too confusing to have a red vehicle with emergency lights on top. People could confuse that for a non-law enforcement emergency vehicle, and we want the public to know that that is a law enforcement vehicle." That was the only time that we used a red vehicle for a U.S. Marshal's escort.

The last part, which is really funny, is that a company put out a model car. It was a U.S. Marshal's Missile Escort vehicle, and it was of a 1970 Chevy Blazer. Guess what color they painted it. Red. I'm looking at it right now on my shelf, and I don't know if somebody in the company had seen a picture of our vehicle

or had seen it out there, but this has on the side "United States Marshal." Of course, we didn't have Chevy Blazers—they were Trailblazers—but it's a nice red U.S. Marshal's escort vehicle. Anyway, that's kind of a Paul Harvey rest of the story thing.

Originally, they were all white 1973 Plymouth Furies, and they looked sharp. They were a good-looking vehicle. But they kind of wanted to go to the SUVs as practical experience showed that a lot of the driving was going to be on these rural roads and highways, and especially in the winter, that four-wheel drive could come in handy. And that was fine. But that red vehicle, it was . . . (laughs) When you're in the military, or you're in the government, if your supervisor tells you that's what they want, you can only negotiate so much with them. Right now, I don't know what the marshals are driving up in Montana or North Dakota. That wasn't a bad vehicle. It just looked like a fire department vehicle, that was the only problem. Of course, if you didn't see the U.S. in front of the Marshal, you might think it's the fire marshal.

Like I mentioned, the uniform that I sent you is the exact one that I wore in the photograph that I sent you. There is one little piece of history on the coat that I'm sending you. It's my cold weather blue U.S. Marshal's coat. Actually, I got that from the Rapid City Police Department and I put our U.S. Marshal patches on that one, because that was a better coat than the one the marshals gave me. What you're going to see there, it's the color, it's the U.S. Marshal's, and it's the one I wore, but it's a heavier one and it's a much better made one. The U.S. Marshal Service had one type of cold weather coat. Every deputy was issued it, and it was kind of a generic . . . it was all right, but it wasn't anything to really get excited about. Whereas, this coat, I had friends at the Rapid City Police Department, and they had extra ones. I had told them my concern with this coat I had, and they said, "Well, we've got extra ones here. Just give us your patch and we'll take care of it for you." They were great. So that's actually a Rapid City police jacket that was converted to a U.S. Marshal jacket. There's another Paul Harvey rest of the story.

Then they gave us some items we just never used, like the galoshes. You couldn't even drive a vehicle wearing those big old rubber galoshes. That little hat . . . I mean, you could wear the hat, that little trooper-type hat. I don't know how you would describe it. But I sent that also in there. Some guys wore it, but I always thought they looked kind of goofy. I put that in there also.

I also put in my gun belt. That was my privately owned one because the Marshal Service did not provide you with a gun belt. That was an expense that was out of my pocket. I already had a gun belt from when I was a Park Ranger. The Park Service didn't provide you with a gun belt, either, so I had purchased a gun belt from the ranger that I replaced on Mount Rushmore. So I always had that. When I got the assignment with the U.S. Marshal Service Missile Escort, I went ahead and brought my old gun belt out of retirement. I used that on the

escort for my duty holster. I always carried a six-shot revolver. It was a Model 66 Smith and Wesson. That was pretty standard for the Marshal Service. That pretty much became the standard weapon, the six-shot Smith and Wesson. Of course, now they're all semiautomatic handguns, shooting fourteen or fifteen rounds. Back then it was the old six-shot revolver.

Usually for boots, we'd wear kind of a western style boot. We wanted to kind of fit in with the local law enforcement, which wore always kind of that type of a boot. They were a good boot for western South Dakota. I don't even know where my old boot is anymore. But that was not issued. We bought those ourselves. It's kind of like when you're in Rome, you do as the Romans do, and that's what I did there.

Oh, the shirt. The shirt is a short sleeved shirt. They gave me two short sleeved shirts right off the bat, with our emblem on it. And we were supposed to get long sleeved shirts, right? I got them, I think, two or three months after I was promoted and transferred.

HOSKING: That was handy.

OVERBY: That was real handy. I said, "Well, just give it to the next guy." (chuckles) Poor fella. That's still the shirt I wore, though, the one that you're getting. I usually wore it with a tie, with a jacket. It looked a little bit better. So, anyway, that should be coming to you this week. That should be arriving shortly.

HOSKING: I got a note about that. I'm keeping my eye open. We just have a couple general questions, kind of Cold War type questions that we like to ask people. Kind of personal feelings, that type of thing. The first one is, How real did you think the Soviet threat was of attack?

OVERBY: Well, I grew up next to Ellsworth Air Force Base, and my family had moved to Rapid City in 1959 when I was seven years old. I wasn't old enough to remember the B36's, the big huge Peacemakers, but I do remember the B52's very well. And, of course, our neighbors. We had a captain in the Air Force that was one of our neighbors and another one that was a sergeant, a boom operator on a tanker. We knew the fear that our playmates had when their fathers were called on alert and were gone.

I also remember very vividly the Cuban Missile Crisis. I think at the time I was at Canyon Lake Elementary School in Rapid City. They would time us. They would blow the air raid whistle, and they had our parents notified that this was going to happen. They would time us as to how long it took us to get from the school to our homes. Our mothers were supposed to write down on a note the time that we got in the front door. Also, every Friday at twelve o'clock they would test the siren, and it was right next to the school. It was just like the London Blitz in 1940. You'd have the siren go off. So we were very much aware that

we were living in a dangerous age. The threat, to me, always seemed very real, but it was one of those things that if you dwelled on it too much, it could be obsessive. You might start worrying too much, being too distracted.

That was a different generation, too, back in the late fifties and early sixties. Our heroes were Uncle Ted that had fought in World War II. I remember my uncle was still in the National Guard. He came up with his National Guard Jeep and visited us in Rapid City when he was there during his encampment. We had very positive feelings for the military. My friends all knew what their dads went through, and so forth, and that was maybe conveyed to me.

My best friend, his dad worked for Sylvania. He was the civilian contractor that installed the security systems in the missile fields. His name was Rudy Flor[?], and his family was actually transferred here. He went from missile field to missile field, Missouri and Cheyenne and other places. He was on the Sylvania team that installed all their alarms and different things. He was a great man, just a great man, and I knew how attentive he was to his work. So you put this all together.

Plus, every summer Ellsworth would have an open house, and the Thunderbirds would come in and you'd go out there and watch the air shows. You really got a sense that we were in a . . . The Cold War was very real to me. I remember in 1960 I think it was, at Rapid City High School in the student parking lot, they set up an Atlas rocket. Was it an Atlas or was it a Minuteman? It was a mock-up. And it was an open house thing where they had this rocket sitting there in the parking lot. I'm sure it wasn't the real thing. I'm sure it was a mock-up. I'm trying to remember if it was an Atlas or if it was a . . . but I remember the big deal. My dad and mom loaded us kids into our '55 Chevy, and we all drove down there and got in line with everybody else and walked around this thing and oohed and aahed, pointed straight to the heavens. That was courtesy of Ellsworth. I don't know if it was kind of an introduction to the community to kind of let us know, we're your neighbors, we're your friends.

Like I said, for me, the Cold War was not something that was abstract. To me, it was something that was very real. I think the scariest part was probably the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. Like I said, when they were doing those tests with us to see how quick we could get home. And also when our teacher gave us instructions on that. She was worried sick. You could tell in her face. Her name was Mrs. Fugate[?]. She was an old schoolteacher. I mean, she was already in her fifties then. Nothing ever bothered her, it seemed like, and she was very steady. But she was very worried that week. You could tell with her when she was giving us our instructions. "Don't play. You need to go straight home and make sure you go to your mother right away."

Of course, what was that, 1962? Well, mothers were home. Nowadays, what would we do? At least in California, very few mothers stay home. The fathers

and mothers are all . . . double income. Back then, my mom was a Cub Scout leader, a den leader. I'd go home there and say, "Mom, I'm home." My brother and my two sisters came in, and she dutifully, on the slip that the school had given us, wrote down the time that we got home. And that got sent back to the school so they could get an idea how long it would take to evacuate the kids from the school and to get them home to their parents.

I think growing up in Rapid City in the fifties and sixties, you really had a better sense of the Cold War and its impact on the world. We lived near Rapid Creek, and eventually our house was taken away with the Rapid City flood, but that was after we had moved from there. Anyway, the Air Force actually had sent people there in the early sixties that helped with different little projects, community service projects.

I remember an Air Force crew there near our home there at Thirty-Second Street at Jackson Boulevard that were there, pick and shovels, were doing work with the Rapid Creek and different things. They were good neighbors. They were in their uniforms, they were supervised. I remember one morning going to school at Meadowbrook School, when I was in first grade—I went to Canyon Lake in the third grade—but at Meadowbrook School, on my way, and they stopped and asked me if I wanted a cinnamon roll. Here I am, a first grader, with my buddies. We're all standing around. These guys are our heroes, and they're giving us cinnamon rolls. You could see that they're helping out the community. They're there with their axes and shovels and other equipment doing some kind of work along the bank there near the bridge. I mean, it was kind of a neat time to be, I guess, a kid. It was just neat. Of course, getting that roll from these guys. We were all just chomping down on these cinnamon rolls. And we were in Heaven. These were our heroes.

I guess maybe that's why, in part, in 1971 when I graduated from Rapid City Central, I went into the army within ten days of my graduation. I volunteered for two years, and I told them I would go to Vietnam. They looked at me kind of funny, and I said, "That's where the attention is. That's where I want to be." Looking back now, that might seem kind of corny or a little bit foolhardy, but when you're eighteen years old and you grew up with the World War II generation being your heroes, and with Ellsworth Air Force Base next door, I thought it very natural to be where I thought I was needed. I didn't join the Air Force, I joined the army, but that's because my brother was already in Vietnam and already in the army.

HOSKING: I guess the final one, since that's what really made this park what it is, is just kind of a general feeling about the arms reduction that we were going through in the nineties. Good? Bad? Indifferent?

OVERBY: I had family in the eastern part of South Dakota, and I was transferred out of South Dakota in '86, like I mentioned, to California. I was used to going across

the state all the time, and I would always take 14. I knew my missile silos. I knew where they were at. It was kind of like something I always . . . like a fixture. Kind of comforting that they're always there. When I went to California, we would still come back every summer and I'd see them as I went across the state. Then when they started getting shut down, I think it was in the nineties?

HOSKING: Yeah.

OVERBY: I remember one summer going past the missile silo site just west of Philip, and it was just a big mound of dirt. I thought, oh gosh. I guess I was a little conflicted because I thought all that we had done to install those, to secure those, to make sure that they were kept up to date. Of course, they were part of the defense triad. I was just thinking, I hope that we get a lot out of this, for giving up what we're giving up.

In retrospect, yeah, we look back now and the Berlin Wall did come down. I never thought I'd see that in my lifetime. I never thought that. I thought we would still be confronting some Soviet-style menace. I guess, on one hand, the familiar sight, I was sorry to see that go. But also, I'm glad that we don't have that confrontation with the Soviets. It, of course, doesn't mean that we still couldn't have, because they still have nuclear weapons, and so do several others that we're very skittish about.

HOSKING: And some are wanting them that don't have them now.

OVERBY: That's right, that are in the market for them. That bothers me a lot. But I do know that we have an excellent delivery system with the Trident submarines, and the Air Force still does have the ICBMs in other locations. I don't know if they're ever going to, in the near future, be stood down, so to speak.

HOSKING: They're upgrading as we speak, let's put it that way.

OVERBY: That's good. There was always something comforting about driving on I-90. As you approach Wall, there were always these Wall Drug signs, and one would always say "free coffee and donuts to missile crews." (laughs) I don't know if you guys ever got that sign or got a picture of it. But there was something very familiar to me growing up in western South Dakota and being around the Air Force, and in particular, being around these missile silos. It doesn't have a negative connotation for me, these missile silos. To me, they were part of our national defense. The guys wearing the white hats, the good guys. I always thought that's great, that's fine.

I always thought it was very foolish, these others that would go out there and protest every Good Friday. They'd be out there wanting unilateral disarmament. Let's go ahead and drop our defense and see what happens. I thought, oh,

that's silly. But that's just me. Everyone's entitled to their own political and religious views.

Personally—and I think I probably mirror most of the majority of South Dakotans—we always looked upon the Air Force as good neighbors, and we always, I think, were rather proud that our state was an important player in national defense, and very supportive of that. And they still are supportive. I mean, look what our congressional delegation and our state political leaders did to keep Ellsworth Air Force Base from closing, and also to enhancing their mission there. They want the military. They want the Air Force. I was sad to see the Missile Wing disappear, and these places now, I guess the boards have been beaten to plowshares.

I'm glad, I'm very glad that they've preserved your historical site because, for me, the familiarity of them all, growing up with them, maybe I took it for granted a lot, but there's a whole generation coming up now coming up now that really does not understand just how important the Minuteman Missile System was to our national defense. And its greatest evidence of success is the fact that we did not have to use them. It was the big stick. I think that we need to keep this historical site very much alive for future generations so that they can understand the length to which these former generations went to insure that our country and our democracy would continue. I think to this day we should never take it for granted.

I'm just very happy that you folks are preserving the Minuteman Historical Site. I'm especially pleased that it's in western South Dakota. I think it's a good step. It's really a good step. I really look forward to going there, maybe this year or whenever I get back to South Dakota again, to see that. Maybe I can finally look inside one of those silos, see what was in there all those years. (laughs)

HOSKING: You can see behind all the doors you never got to see behind when you were working.

OVERBY: That's right. Finally, at this stage of my life, the Cold War's over with and I can look at one of those monsters.

HOSKING: Is there anything that I might have missed asking about that you can think of that you feel like would add to this?

OVERBY: No. I think we've covered most of it. The dynamics of getting a nuclear warhead from a secure site at Ellsworth out to the missile field, I think the public really needs to know that once the missile was put in that silo with its warhead, they just didn't cap it and let it sit there year in and year out. There was a great effort on the part of the Air Force to keep the warheads fully functional, fully tested, keep them fresh, so to speak. And that, to my knowledge, at least in South Dakota, they've never had a compromise on security, never had anyone

attack or do something that would have jeopardized the possession and safety of those warheads. I think the Air Force should get a lot of credit for that, the Marshal Service perhaps for just making sure that those convoys got there safely and expeditiously, that they didn't end up in traffic accidents out there or overturned in some ditch out there by Billsburg, or whatever else. And that the local officers, jurisdictions, understood our mission and they were supportive of the Air Force and the marshals when we were moving those warheads, that we never had anybody try to block our way, try to impede us. I think a lot of that's because of the cooperation between the communities and the Air Force and the Marshal Service.

Just the good people that are out there. I think that when the Air Force slated South Dakota as one of their sites for the missile fields, I don't know if they really knew how good of a fit that would be, but I think it was a really great move for the Air Force. The missile fields were around for over thirty-some years. They did their job, and they deserve to be remembered, and the National Park Service and your park is the place to do that.

HOSKING: Well, thank you very much. I guess we can conclude the interview then.

OVERBY: That's fine. I really appreciate this opportunity, and hopefully this will help future generations understand a little bit more about this important aspect of our national defense and of the Cold War.

[end of interview]

Appendix A



MIMI 2676: Gary Overby standing in front of vehicle at a missile silo somewhere north of Wall, South Dakota.