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University of California
Berkeley, California

John Compisi:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Ann Lage
in 2009

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John Compisi, "Oakland Army Base Oral History Project"
conducted by Ann Lage in 2009, Regional Oral History Office,
The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

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Interview #1: January 7, 2009

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01-00:00:00

Lage: Today is January 7, 2009, and this is an interview with John Compisi. Am I saying that right, Compisi?

01-00:00:14

Compisi: That's correct.

01-00:00:16

Lage: For the Oakland Army Base project. And I'm Ann Lage with the Regional Oral History Office. Okay. May I call you John?

01-00:00:22

Compisi: Please do.

01-00:00:22

Lage: Let me ask you. In your professional life, now that you're out of the military, do you go by colonel or—

01-00:00:31

Compisi: I don't frequently, but many people know that and they will with good nature refer to me as colonel, and I appreciate it.

01-00:00:38

Lage: But it's not required.

01-00:00:40

Compisi: Yeah. If somebody insists on calling themselves doctor, I'll say, "And you can call me colonel."

01-00:00:44

Lage: Well, I'll call you John for now.

01-00:00:46

Compisi: Thank you.

01-00:00:47

Lage: We want to start with just a little personal information. Beginning with date and place of birth and just very briefly about your family and growing up.

01-00:00:57

Compisi: Well, I was born in Gowanda, New York, which is south of Buffalo about 25 miles. In 1948 on November 27 actually. And I came from a family of four brothers. My mom and dad lived there all their lives. The town was called North Collins, New York, which is where we grew up. We all went to high school in Athol Springs, New York, which was Saint Francis High School. And it specialized in football. It is a college preparatory school.

01-00:01:30

Lage: A Jesuit school?

01-00:01:33
Compisi:

No, it was Franciscan actually. And it was a split boarding and day school. And most of the students—although Buffalo is obviously western New York, most of the resident students came from Long Island and the New York City area, because their parents apparently decided it was a better place to send them to high school. So it was a very rich environment. And they focused on creating gentlemen and professional college-oriented people who could make a change in the world and bring better stuff to the world. It was a great high school. And I got great things from that.

And from there I went off to college in John Carroll University, which is a Jesuit university outside of Cleveland, Ohio, and we kiddingly would refer to John Carroll as the Harvard of the Midwest, because it had a great business program, and the West Point of the Transportation Corps, because John Carroll University was a Transportation Corps-oriented ROTC program.

01-00:02:25
Lage:

Oh, this is how you got into the Transportation Corps.

01-00:02:30
Compisi:

That's how I got into the Transportation Corps. In fact my eldest brother also went to John Carroll and was a transportation officer for five years from 1965 to 1970. So he ended up with the direct Vietnam experience, having spent a year there. And fortunately for me—as I think fortunate—that as the war was winding down, the lottery came in instead of the draft. However, I was in ROTC, and I continued. Got my commission in May of 1971 and got married that summer before actually going on active duty. And my wife and I took our initial assignment to Germany as a transportation officer in an Army maintenance battalion.

01-00:03:11
Lage:

The war was still going on.

01-00:03:13
Compisi:

The war was still going on. And I was lucky that it was coming down, and they were sending a lot of new people back to Germany rather than having everybody go to Vietnam, which was the case. Everyone could assume they were going to Vietnam.

01-00:03:22
Lage:

And at the time you didn't want to go to Vietnam I'm taking it.

01-00:03:25
Compisi:

And I don't think anybody really did. Some people might have. Marching toward the drum is part of the war ethos. But as a Transportation Corps officer who certainly wasn't excited about the concept of Vietnam, especially when you knew it was starting to wind down. I was not especially interested in going there.

01-00:03:39

Lage:

Let's just back up for one second. What kind of work did your parents do?

01-00:03:43

Compisi:

My dad was the commissioner of public works for this very small village. He had no college education. He was the child of an Italian immigrant. But the kind of work he did was good honest solid American citizen work. He was extremely well known in the town. I always tell people that I had cousins whose parents were not as closely recognized as my father and my mother. And if we got in trouble out in town, before I got home, my mother and father already had a phone call saying, "We saw Johnny doing this." And I might get a little bit of a whipping. Not bad. My parents didn't do that kind of stuff. But I would certainly get punished for being out of line. Whereas my cousin would go home and never hear a word. Because people respected my parents and knew they cared.

01-00:04:37

Lage:

So they would help keep tabs on these four boys.

01-00:04:40

Compisi:

Unlike some people would say, "It takes a village to raise a child." In this case a village was supporting—my parents raised their children. But they did it on their own no doubt. And my mom also didn't graduate—in fact she didn't graduate from high school, but went back and got her GED and ended up being the audiovisual person at the high school. By the time we all left home she was then working in the high school. She stayed home up till that point.

And we all had summer jobs. And my dad had two jobs most of the time. But he was also an accomplished musician, played sax, clarinet, and recorded several albums for local distribution with a group that he was with for years and years and years. He was the singer and the lead artist.

01-00:05:20

Lage:

How lovely!

01-00:05:22

Compisi:

Yeah, it was a great youth. I have many fond memories of all of that.

01-00:05:28

Lage:

And was there a military tradition in the family?

01-00:05:28

Compisi:

No. My dad was in World War II like everyone was. He did his four years "for the duration" as you might say. I think he rose to the rank of corporal. But he always had a keen respect for what the military did. So my eldest brother as I said went through ROTC at John Carroll also and did his five years on active duty. And I followed several years behind him. And I'm the only other one of my immediate family that went in the service.

01-00:05:55

Lage: And did your brother stay in the Army?

01-00:05:58

Compisi: No, he got out after the five years.

01-00:05:58

Lage: Okay, that's good. Anything else about that background that you think is significant?

01-00:06:07

Compisi: I think it's all significant, but for me.

01-00:06:08

Lage: I didn't realize that ROTC programs specialized.

01-00:06:14

Compisi: At that era a lot of them did. Norwich University or College in Connecticut was all field artillery. I think Tulane was transportation. Or LSU. Because I know we had a lot of graduates who were alumni of LSU. So there were a few. Not all the branches, but they were. And now they've sort of come back to that. It all went away I think during the intervening years, but in the last ten years they've at least affiliated with a branch. And then they try to have that professor of military science who comes in be oriented from that branch. I think it's a good program. It gives people a special focus.

01-00:06:49

Lage: Right, sounds like it. So we got you to Germany. And how did you decide and when to make the military a career?

01-00:06:54

Compisi: That was a rolling decision. My wife and I had our only child in Germany the second year we were there. And I was only a two-year volunteer. And I asked for an extension so that we could enjoy the tour in Germany. I got that extension, but as part of that I had to request voluntary indefinite status, which meant that there was no termination date. It was up to me or the Army to decide when we'd had enough of each other. And at the end of almost four years in Germany we had used all of our vacation. We had no savings. And it was like a logical decision. You don't want to go back to the US without a job, without a home, and without anything to sustain you. So it was logical that we said, "Well, we'll just take our first assignment back to the US and stay in the Army for that." So we went back to Fort Eustis, Virginia. And up till that point although I was a Transportation Corps officer, I had never served in a Transportation Corps position.

01-00:07:53

Lage: Oh, I see, you didn't do that in Germany.

01-00:07:57

Compisi:

No, I was like the adjutant, which is typically a—well, Adjutant General Corps, which is like a personnel officer. And I was a training officer and classified document custodian, which is branch immaterial. It doesn't matter what your branch is. And when I got back to Fort Eustis, I ended up, my first assignment was being the Race Relations Equal Opportunity officer, which was also outside my branch.

01-00:08:22

Lage:

Well, that must have been interesting, because that was in the seventies.

01-00:08:25

Compisi:

It was a time that it was very interesting, yes. It was 1976.

01-00:08:27

Lage:

Anything to relate about that?

01-00:08:30

Compisi:

Well, the Army was definitely having a hard time with not integration as such, because we'd integrated in '48, but with human relations, race relations. And we experienced a lot of it while we were in Germany. And so the Army had taken steps by creating the whole Race Relations Equal Opportunity Program. In the US in particular they had merged that with the EEO Office, the Equal Employment Opportunity Office, which was responsible for the civilian side. So as I was there, I was assigned to that position. As a psychology major in college and with a philosophy secondary, I certainly had, I think, the aptitude for that type of role. But it was not, again, building my career as a transportation officer. In fact, at one point, I called the transportation branch, and I said, "Look, every assignment I've had except for the classified documents one has been in human relations, HR, personnel."

They said, "Yeah, we made that your secondary, MOS." Which is your military occupational specialty. I said, "Fine, but I'm not getting any assignments in T.C. Maybe my career would be better served if I went into the Adjutant General Corps." And they said, "Well, we'll release you if they'll take you." So I tried that, and they said, "No, we're all filled up on AG officers, we don't need any more in your year group." And I said okay. Well, I went back to my senior evaluator, my senior rater. And I said, "General Post, if I don't get into the Transportation Corps soon in terms of assignments, I will have no career." And he said, "Well, then you go find yourself a job down at the Seventh Transportation Group, and I'll release you from this position, and we'll fill you with somebody else."

01-00:10:16

Lage:

But it's up to you to find the position.

01-00:10:18

Compisi:

Yes, exactly. It's like he wasn't going to force me on somebody. He said, "Go make your way." So I went down to the Seventh Transportation Group. It has

four battalions. And one of them was a marine terminal battalion, which is starting to lead into most of my career. And there was a lieutenant colonel, Sam Malave Garcia, who had been an RREO, race relations officer, for the US Army in Japan. Because quite frankly, you asked if that was an interesting experience, and it was. I was considered sort of a pariah by my contemporaries, because they didn't like the program. Not because they didn't agree with race relations. But it was a lot of digging in and inquiring and open-door stuff that was a distraction.

01-00:11:03

Lage: Was it investigating or was it doing cultural education?

01-00:11:06

Compisi: It was both. If there was a complaint it was investigative. But at the same time there were programs to educate and inform and bring people together. But it was the investigative—

01-00:11:15

Lage: Were they the touchy-feely type that you hear about?

01-00:11:17

Compisi: Of course. They were definitely that. Cultural, but also touchy-feely. You would do group sessions.

01-00:11:22

Lage: I can see some of the Army guys not liking it.

01-00:11:23

Compisi: Yeah, let's all get in a circle and sing Kumbaya, right? You're exactly right. So I wasn't highly regarded. Because what the heck are you doing there? You obviously aren't an Army guy. But fortunately I found this lieutenant colonel who was the commander of this battalion and he understood that it was a job that people needed to do. And he respected the fact that I was willing to do it. So he said, "Yeah, come on down. I got a job for you."

So I spent the next two years on his staff learning to be a transportation officer for marine terminal operations. And those are the units that have stevedores, military stevedores, tugboats and barges and some freight ships for training purposes particularly. And also a riverine vessel that did resupply in Vietnam. Actually because it was flat-bottomed and it had a big ramp, you could move tanks and equipment and armored personnel carriers across the water with these vessels.

So it was great. I learned a lot. And battalion commanders changed. I got an opportunity to command a company, which is what, as a captain, a company grade officer, you need to do if your career is going to progress.

01-00:12:33

Lage: So you're getting promoted throughout here.

01-00:12:36
Compisi:

Yes. So in fact I got promoted to captain when I was still in the Race Relations Office. And so I got the opportunity to be a company commander of a tugboat company, which was very interesting, because I had 250 people, which was a very large company. An infantry company is about 170 people. And I had the company—because we had tugboats, every tugboat was like a crew, and every one of them had a couple warrant officers who were very seasoned technically competent people, who like to be out on the water, because when they're out on the water they're in command of their vessel. So that was a great experience too. But again I think I had the—

01-00:13:13
Lage:

Was this still in Virginia here?

01-00:13:16
Compisi:

This was still in Virginia.

01-00:13:18
Lage:

Was this the floating craft I saw referring to in your—

01-00:13:19
Compisi:

Exactly. The floating craft company, right. My resume.

01-00:13:22
Lage:

I have a little one-page write-up that came our way, I don't know from where.

01-00:13:25
Compisi:

Well, I can give you a multipage. Yeah, it was the floating craft company, Seventy-third Floating Craft Company. And again it was a great experience. And I had that command for a couple years. And then I went to the Army Advanced Course for Transportation, which was right there at Fort Eustis. And then again I leaped out of the Army.

My next assignment in February of 1980 took me to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where I was working as the chief of the transportation and packaging branch of the Defense Logistics Agency organization. It's an organization that monitors the contracts and manages the contracts for any Service that awards a contract to a commercial company in the US.

01-00:14:06
Lage:

And is it a private company?

01-00:14:08
Compisi:

DLA, Defense Logistics Agency, is a defense agency.

01-00:14:16
Lage:

Oh, okay, you said you'd run out of the Army.

01-00:14:14
Compisi:

I left the Army.

01-00:14:14

Lage: Yeah, it wasn't Army, it was the—

01-00:14:15

Compisi: It's Defense Logistics Agency, right. And it's an agency, not a tactical unit, not a deployable unit. So I was one of I think six officers in the entire organization of about 250 people. The rest of them were government civilians. So on my team, the transportation and packaging branch, I had three people who were transportation specialists, and I had two people who were packaging specialists. And we would get a contract for—say it was a company in Cadillac, Michigan. And they made—their special product was this pallet, aluminum pallet. It was big enough, ninety-six inches by 108 inches, and it would roll on a bed in a cargo aircraft so that they could easily roll it in and roll it off and then lock it in place. And they were the sole source. So we would go up there once or twice a year, make sure that they understood what the transportation requirements were in their contract, make sure they understood how the product was to be packaged when it was shipped. And we would oversee their execution of those requirements.

01-00:15:14

Lage: You said they were the only company. So it wasn't a competitive bid.

01-00:15:18

Compisi: Well, no, for that, because they became a sole source. It was a niche market. There wasn't enough volume to support multiple companies doing it. So it was sole source. But then there were other companies like in Grayling, Michigan. They made the slats for a truck that was a flatbed truck, but you'd have to put sides on it for cargo. They used to call them cattle cars. And they made the wooden slats. Other companies did, but it was the only one in our area that did it. And then when they would build it then they had to ship it, and we provided shipping instructions and packaging instructions. It's part of the Defense Department that most people don't know about. Most military people don't even know about it because the stuff just shows up to meet their supply requirements.

01-00:16:04

Lage: And you were doing this basically in a peacetime setting.

01-00:16:05

Compisi: It was 1980 to '83, yeah.

01-00:16:07

Lage: I bet that really picks up in times of war, that kind of thing.

01-00:16:10

Compisi: Well, yes, and it was also—there was a lot of resupply occurring, rearming. Because of all the stuff that was consumed during the Vietnam years. So it was pretty busy. It was never a problem of being too busy or not busy. But we did that for about three and a half years. I say we. My family lived in Michigan. My daughter went to school there. It was wonderful.

01-00:16:30

Lage: You liked Michigan.

01-00:16:32

Compisi: We did. It was a great family area. Grand Rapids is not Detroit, or Detroit as some people say. So we enjoyed that, and it was a great opportunity. My wife finished nursing school during that period of time and got her degree, and actually got commissioned into the Army.

01-00:16:47

Lage: Oh, really, so you were a dual military family for a while.

01-00:16:51

Compisi: Yes. In fact it was that commissioning of Linda as an Army nurse. Our daughter of course was going to school as well. She, I think, made it through fifth grade. She made it through fifth grade in Michigan. And Linda was taking her coursework, most of it, during the day, when Aimie was in school, sometimes at night when I was home. So there was no issue there. But she was also a great role model for our daughter in terms of shutting herself up in the bedroom and studying, because she was going to get her degree and finish it while we were in Michigan. She had dropped out right after high school. Had started nursing school, dropped out, when we were at Fort Eustis she tried to start up again and she didn't have the focus. And so she lost all kinds of coursework when we moved to Michigan. She said, "I'm not letting that happen again. I'm going to finish while we're in Michigan." And then as she approached graduation she determined that if she kept following me around—because obviously I was career-oriented at this point—that she would always be the newest hire and be on the nightshifts and the rotating shifts as a hospital nurse. She said, "Why don't I just come in the Army with you? And I can build up seniority and not do that." I said, "Makes sense to me."

So I have the privilege of saying that I swore my wife into the Army. And later on I'll tell you how I swore my daughter into the Army.

01-00:18:04

Lage: Oh, really? This is great.

01-00:18:06

Compisi: So when we finished up in Michigan, because of the dual military, the Army Nurse Corps and the Army Transportation Corps tried to find a place where we could both be assigned. And the best they could do is if Linda was assigned at the Presidio of San Francisco at Letterman Army Medical Center. And there was no TC jobs for me. So I'm back in personnel. But this time instead of Race Relations Equal Opportunity the Army had started a program also as a result of Vietnam called the Organizational Effectiveness Staff Officers Course. So I spent four months at Fort Ord. Can we turn that off for a minute?

01-00:18:45

Lage: Okay, we're back on here.

01-00:18:46

Compisi: So I was assigned to the OESO for Sixth Army, which was headquartered at the Presidio, and in preparation for that spent four months at Fort Ord at the OE School.

01-00:18:59

Lage: The Organizational Effectiveness—

01-00:19:01

Compisi: Staff Officers School. And my responsibilities were for all the National Guard and reserve units in northern California and part of Nevada. And there were other OEs in southern California and Washington State and Utah. But that was my area. But we worked together. We would cross-support each other. And we were providing basically consulting support on strategic planning, goal-setting and vision-setting, organizational development, all of those things. And a lot of that sort of relates to human relations as well. For those brigades and divisions and corps in the National Guard and reserve. Which was a very enjoyable opportunity to understand more of the Army.

01-00:19:41

Lage: Had you gone at that time to getting your MBA? I have here somewhere that you got your MBA along the road.

01-00:19:52

Compisi: I did that at Fort Eustis actually, the last couple years at Fort Eustis. In 1979 it was awarded if I recall. And I got an MBA with a focus in logistics management from Florida Institute of Technology.

01-00:20:00

Lage: So you had a lot of background.

01-00:20:03

Compisi: Yes. So that was a great opportunity. My wife obviously was working at Letterman. My daughter was doing great in a local school, made great friends. And about eighteen months into the assignment, which was supposed to be a three-year assignment, my branch came back and said, "John, you're slated to go to Fort Leavenworth to the Command and General Staff College. But we'll defer you for a year. That way you can finish your three-year tour." I said, "Okay, great." That's what I was counting on.

Well, about two months later they came back and said, "Look, we've used up everybody who has more time on station than you. We've got these seats at school at Leavenworth for the Transportation Corps. We don't want to give them to another branch. But in order to fill that, because some guy fell out of a helicopter, some guy broke his leg, they can't go, we're now down to twenty-one months on station, and we're moving people, and you're going to have to go." And I said, "But the Nurse Corps is not going to move my wife. And this

year at Leavenworth was always described as the best year of your life, because it's a full year. You're in a school environment. It's a great family environment. And you guys are making me go unaccompanied. My family is going to have to stay here because my wife can't leave. And my daughter has no one to care for her. My wife is working nightshifts and swing shifts." Well, we made lemonade out of those lemons. And one of my recently graduated from college nieces—actually cousin, but she was young enough to be a niece—came and lived for a year at the Presidio.

01-00:21:32

Lage: Oh, so you did go.

01-00:21:34

Compisi: So I did go. And that's what led to "But you guys better get me assigned back to the Bay Area because my wife is still in the Army, she's there, my daughter is there. So I want to finish Leavenworth and get back to San Francisco." Because we loved it here is the real reason. And they said, "We'll do our best." But when it came time to do that in the spring of '86 they said, "There's no TC jobs for someone who's completed Leavenworth," because that's a premium.

01-00:22:04

Lage: Oh my God.

01-00:22:07

Compisi: I said, "But you guys have got to get me back there." So they worked with the colonel that was in charge at MTMC Western Area for him to open up a position that—they call it MEL four, military education level four. They had like only one position MEL four at Oakland Army Base at MTMC. And they moved somebody out of that position, because he'd been there a couple years. They made it vacant so that I could be assigned to it. And that's how I ended up coming back to the Bay Area in 1986, assigned to MTMC Western Area to the Plans and Strategic Mobility Organization, which was headed up by a full colonel named Mark Klein, Air Force colonel, who I am still in touch with. He lives up in the Seattle area. And I spent two years working for him.

And the commanding general at Western Area at that time was Bill Farmen, F-A-R-M-E-N. And shortly after a few months he was replaced. His tour was up. And General John Stanford came in, who was quite an individual. A very charismatic, larger-than-life one-star general at the time. I may have this reversed. It may have been Stanford and then Farmen.

01-00:23:20

Lage: And is he the African American general?

01-00:23:24

Compisi: Yes, yes. Since deceased. But really made—

01-00:23:28

Lage: Tell me a little bit about him.

01-00:23:28
Compisi:

Well, like I said, he had a great personality. He was full of himself in a good way. He was bodybuilder. And he embodied all of those human relations characteristics that went over extremely well in a mostly civilian organization. Definitely—

01-00:23:49
Lage:

More so than in a mostly military organization would you say?

01-00:23:51
Compisi:

Well, certainly I think he did exceptionally well in military organizations as well. He was an aviator. As a transporter he was an aviator, a helicopter pilot. But as such he knew how to touch people. And I think Western Area with all these civilians wasn't used to a charismatic leader who could touch them as civilians. So he had a huge impact. And of course the working population of civilians, I don't know if it was predominantly African American, but it had a high content of African American employees. Certainly Hispanics as well. It was a very diverse group.

And he fit in very well. And he knew how to get those people excited about what we were going to do. So he was there I think—I'm not sure if he was there the full two years, because I was only there four years, but I had four generals. And he was followed by Dick Larson. And Dick Larson again rose to be a two-star general. Farmen made it to two-star. And General Stanford made it to two-star also.

And then halfway through my tour—I did the first two years in Plans. The last two years I moved over. I got promoted to lieutenant colonel and moved over to be the Cargo Operations and Plans Officer. Go ahead.

01-00:25:18
Lage:

Does that take you out of Western Area and into the base?

01-00:25:21
Compisi:

Yes. Into the military ocean terminal. Not the base. There was a subordinate command that was a transportation command called Military Ocean Terminal Bay Area. So it was the operating command. There was a Military Ocean Terminal Southern California at San Pedro. There was a military ocean terminal up in Seattle that was responsible for Seattle Tacoma. And at that time I think they also had the—yes they did. They had the ocean terminals in Yokohama, Pusan and Okinawa.

01-00:25:48
Lage:

So all of these reported to the headquarters, which was also on the base.

01-00:25:53
Compisi:

Right.

01-00:25:53
Lage:

Okay, and you had been in headquarters.

01-00:25:54
Compisi: No, I was in the 06 command.

01-00:25:57
Lage: So you were not reporting any longer to the general?

01-00:26:02
Compisi: Right. Not directly. But as the hard-charging lieutenant colonel transportation guy, and there were not many of us, there was a lot of direct contact. And the generals liked coming down to the piers, because that's where the real business was going on.

01-00:26:20
Lage: Yeah. Where the work of the base took place.

01-00:26:21
Compisi: Right. And I was responsible for all the—I don't know if you know the row of warehouses. All those were to my responsibility. I had people like Grant Ivory, who was a great American and a great civilian employee. He was running inbound traffic in all the household goods. Or actually he was outbound in all the household goods. And then there was another civilian who was responsible for inbound.

01-00:26:45
Lage: Now I interviewed Mary Myers. How does she fit into this?

01-00:26:55
Compisi: I want to make sure I've got the right Mary Myers. Because there was Mary Miner and Mary Myers. But I think she was doing cargo documentation if I recall.

01-00:27:03
Lage: She said she was the deputy in charge of cargo operations.

01-00:27:07
Compisi: Okay. That happened after I left.

01-00:27:08
Lage: Maybe she was promoted after you left.

01-00:27:08
Compisi: Right, she was. And I do remember that.

01-00:27:10
Lage: Very vivacious.

01-00:27:11
Compisi: Was she blond?

01-00:27:11
Lage: Yeah, strawberry blond.

01-00:27:13
Compisi: Yeah. Was her name Crandall at one point though?

01-00:27:13
Lage: I don't think so.

01-00:27:15
Compisi: Never told you that. Because I think that is the Mary Myers I'm thinking of.

01-00:27:18
Lage: Very vivacious and—

01-00:27:20
Compisi: Yes, yeah. Anyway yes. I think she moved out into—we had a GS twelve who was working for me, Ken, can't remember his last name right now—but I'm sure I can come up with it—who was like my deputy. And he mostly focused on the warehouse side. I mostly focused on the pier operations. But obviously we had to do both. And then she must have taken his place.

01-00:27:44
Lage: That might have been it. Although she talked about the pier. She talked about being in charge of the marine cargo specialists.

01-00:27:48
Compisi: Okay, well, he was, yeah, as well.

01-00:27:51
Lage: So what was your role vis-à-vis these civilians?

01-00:27:55
Compisi: Well, I was in charge. There was no doubt. But you have a deputy just one, for continuity, because the military position you move in and out and you want some continuity, particularly because you have stevedore contracts that go on, have to be assembled and negotiated. Because we used all commercial stevedores. So the civilian obviously would have expertise in that labor management stuff that you wouldn't expect a military guy to come in on as a major or lieutenant colonel. So that provided continuity but clearly you owned it. You were responsible day to day. And they were your team.

01-00:28:27
Lage: The buck stopped here.

01-00:28:27
Compisi: Exactly. So I wish I could remember Ken's last name. And the marine cargo specialists, to justify the position sometimes you have to make sure you delegate enough responsibility. So the marine cargo specialists, who were the overseers of those stevedores, that was their job. When the stevedores were working they were the chief on the pier that the stevedore lead would be reporting to. And he would be giving them direction. They also stowed the ship, planned for the ship stowage. They would also call the cargo forward,

which was mostly all rolling stock, Humvees and trucks and all that, tanks. And they would call it forward based on their plan, and then load these ships.

These ships could hold over 1,000 pieces of equipment. And the way it was done typically is we would have a deployment for an exercise—or in the case of Desert Storm when it kicked off, the ship would start maybe up at Seattle and load equipment from an Army unit there, come down to Oakland, load up some more, and then go down to Long Beach, San Pedro and finish the load, and then head out. That was for exercises. There was enough cargo for actual—for a combat load, that they could do it all right at Oakland Army Base. Each port would get a ship.

01-00:29:44

Lage:

Now were you there when Desert Storm started?

01-00:29:49

Compisi:

I actually had signed out on leave on August 6. And I think that line in the sand occurred five days later. I was up in Lake Tahoe. My replacement was in, so that was okay. I was in transit in effect.

01-00:30:02

Lage:

So you didn't see the—

01-00:30:05

Compisi:

The buildup at Oakland Army Base. I saw it starting to build, but no ships had arrived yet. So that was interesting. But I went to Okinawa from there. Let's stay here for a while? Okay.

01-00:30:15

Lage:

Okay, we need to go back here, yeah, because I don't have a good sense of what the Plans and Strategic Mobility does.

01-00:30:19

Compisi:

So that was for every major war plan that we could be expected to support—and principally it was all war plans, because the Army, at that time we were prepared to support I think two and a half, two large and one medium size conflict. In order to do that all forces basically had to be employed. So it didn't matter if the war that we were planning for was in Korea or if it was Southwest Asia or if it was in Europe. Because we still had some remnants of the Cold War up through '88 at least, right? The wall didn't come down till '89. So we would plan for how do we move forces from all the western states or down to Beaumont, Texas where we also had a port by the way. I forgot to mention that. Reason I forgot Beaumont is during my tenure Beaumont was part of Eastern Area, then it was part of Western Area, and then later it went back to Eastern Area.

So we would have to plan for how would we move the forces out of Fort Lewis, how would we move the forces out of the Presidio. Not just the active duty, but National Guard. Based on the troop list.

01-00:31:25

Lage: You're talking about people here.

01-00:31:27

Compisi: People and equipment. The people was more of an air mobility command responsibility, because they would typically fly the people. And the equipment would be brought to a port. And the war plan would say which ports for what units. And then how we would handle that, what capacity did we have, how long would it take us to load out, what was the size and type of ship we would need to handle that. And so we did that on an ongoing basis. Because you have to update the plans every two years. And so we had marine cargo specialists, not the same kind. These were planning marine—transportation planning specialists that worked for me and colonel, who would do all that planning. And we had a secure classified area where it would be like the operations center, so that if the flag went up and we had to start operating, then all of a sudden we'd be operating in a classified mode. We would move into the operations center that we maintained. And that's where the CG would come for his morning and afternoon briefing.

We did that obviously during exercises to train. But we also maintained it for the purpose, if any war event kicked off.

01-00:32:40

Lage: And did you as part of this job relate with all the other areas? There must have been a lot of joint planning.

01-00:32:50

Compisi: Yes. Through headquarters, MTMC in Washington, we would have joint planning sessions where we'd make sure we understood what was chopping where. It was typically west and east of the Mississippi in terms of areas of responsibility. But again there was planning that would be brought down. And we'd have to feed stuff back up. Because the Joint Chiefs of Staff had a joint planning and execution system that we would feed all this information into so that they could provide strategic lift planning. So they would know how many ships, how many airplanes, how much highway movement do we need to support, both here as well as on the reception end.

So if it was Korea, Pusan and Seoul, Korea, how much could they handle coming through? How many transportation units would have to be deployed to support that and once the materiel arrived actually move it out of the port of Pusan? So of course we were involved in Pusan because that was part of our responsibility. Whereas if we were moving stuff by rail from here to Beaumont or to Jacksonville, Florida or to Baltimore or Charleston, South Carolina, then Eastern Area would have to plan on that deployment out of those ports and arrival in Europe.

01-00:34:01

Lage: So something like Desert Storm, would that be by rail to the east coast or—

- 01-00:34:05
Compisi: It went all ways. We only have so many military ports. So we exercised all of them. And sometimes based on where the unit's parent organization was, people from southern California, the Marines, a lot of that was either loaded on ships right there in Long Beach, but some of it was railed to Beaumont, because it was easier and faster than going around the Panama Canal.
- 01-00:34:34
Lage: And were you planning for something like Desert Storm? Was that part of the plan?
- 01-00:34:35
Compisi: Yes, yes.
- 01-00:34:37
Lage: Probably always that's on the—
- 01-00:34:37
Compisi: Yes. For a long time we had op plans that were related to Southwest Asia. But they weren't always necessarily related to Iraq, as you might guess, since 1979.
- 01-00:34:55
Lage: Was part of this planning on updating technology? You mentioned earlier I think before we were on that there was some problems with Desert Storm in terms of the technology and tracking shipments and that.
- 01-00:35:06
Compisi: Well, at the time we were there obviously Desert Storm hadn't occurred. But there was technology advancements, both in terms of our classified communications equipment—it was really the first time that I had seen the use of the Internet for email. That was starting to become common on a desktop version. We'd been using electronic messaging, but it was very difficult. You actually had to prepare a message on a specific form that could be optically read and scanned into a machine at the IT department, which would then feed it. And it would go to one destination and then it would be distributed by hand.
- 01-00:35:48
Lage: It's amazing to think of really. It wasn't that long ago.
- 01-00:35:49
Compisi: No. In fact when I started at the readiness group at the Presidio I had my first laptop. It was actually a transportable computer that had a printer built into it and a dropdown keyboard, because we were doing these organizational surveys. And so they issued us this Panasonic Senior Partner so we could do it, and then crunch the numbers when we were done. So that's in 1983, which tells you—computers had been around for a while. But that was very early in the life of personal computers.

By the time I got to Western Area in '86, three years had evolved, email was starting to become more common. And in the military MTMC was one of the leading organizations to get that, because we had an interesting funding mechanism that allowed us to spend money where we needed to, because we recouped it from our customers. So as long as we could handle enough cargo that we could charge the Services, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, they paid us on paper to move their cargo. And we could then take that and use that “profit” to buy equipment we needed to maintain our operation.

They called it the industrial fund back then. So because of that type of funding MTMC was very advanced in introducing desktop computers, personal computers to everybody's workstation. And we were doing that. Part of Plans was working with IT to distribute that to all our subordinate commands.

01-00:37:23

Lage:

I wrote some of this down. The Automated Army Cargo Tracking LOGMARS and CODES, computerized method of stowing—

01-00:37:32

Compisi:

Right. We used all those.

01-00:37:36

Lage:

Now were those developed by the Army or were they developed outside?

01-00:37:37

Compisi:

Well, CODES and ICODES were developed at the University of California Long Beach by a company that was sort of an offshoot of the university. In fact maybe Cal Poly was involved as well, because it was very complex computer algorithms for CODES because you're stowing a ship based on the dimensions of the equipment that had to be loaded. So they would quantify how many trucks, how many trailers, of which specific type of truck and trailer, because they all have different dimensions. And the ships' decks, some of them had slanting floors and ceilings. And so CODES had to take all this into account. So it was developed on the Army's dollar, on MTMC's dollar, but it was a semi-commercial, quasi-commercial company, which is now fully commercial. We work with them now, CDM Technology is the name of the company.

And then the LOGMARS was an Army standard. And in fact it may have been a Defense standard. But it was the logistics marking and reading symbology, which was the first use of barcodes for labeling cargo so you could track it with a handheld device that would read it, which was an early AIT, automated identification technology. RFID that I'm currently working is another AIT.

01-00:38:55

Lage:

That you're working with.

01-00:38:59
Compisi: Yes.

01-00:39:00
Lage: Same idea but just more sophisticated.

01-00:39:01
Compisi: Same idea. A little more sophisticated. Hands-off.

01-00:39:04
Lage: You mentioned that with Desert Storm—and also Mary Myers mentioned this to me. But when it got to its destination people didn't know what was in the cargo.

01-00:39:17
Compisi: Right. And a lot of it didn't even get to the destination because the MTMC people in Saudi Arabia didn't—or in Kuwait—in this case Saudi Arabia didn't know where the stuff was supposed to go.

01-00:39:27
Lage: Now what happened there? What was the breakdown?

01-00:39:29
Compisi: They would put it out in a marshaling yard as they were waiting for a lift to move it, and then they would lose identification information, because it was inside the door. So once it left the port—

01-00:39:41
Lage: So you didn't have the computerized technology then or—

01-00:39:44
Compisi: No, not beyond the port. So once it left the port to go to a marshaling area to be moved by truck to go inland they lost visibility over it.

01-00:39:56
Lage: Oh, wow. That was a major breakdown it sounds like.

01-00:39:58
Compisi: Major breakdown, yes.

01-00:40:01
Lage: Is anything like that in the works today?

01-00:40:02
Compisi: What happens partly is when you have an emergency deployment like that there are certain organizations like DLA and the—Defense Logistics Agency—so they provide all the common materials that all the services need. Toilet paper, food. Everybody eats the same food. MREs. They understood and the Pentagon directed that they push so many days of supply. By pushing it meaning no one has to ask you for it, because we're telling you we have 100,000 soldiers that are going to be there, and they're going to be there at

least for thirty days. So we need food, toilet paper, repair parts even. Things that we know commonly they're going to consume. Bullets. So just push it. And we'll sort it out when it gets there. Because that's the fastest way to get it there is just to push it.

At the same time the units that were arriving were starting to generate requisitions. "I need this." They'd send in a requisition. And ocean transit anywhere to the desert was fourteen to twenty-eight days depending upon where it's coming from. So a period of time would go by, they would get no status. "Where is this? Well, guess it's not coming. I'll requisition it again."

01-00:41:20

Lage: And some of it had already come on the push.

01-00:41:22

Compisi: Some of it had already been sitting there. Exactly. So there was definitely a breakdown. And it's happened probably in every war where we've had the ability to push, not just waiting, that we end up with duplications and triplications and stuff excess sitting there. And General Pagonis wrote the book Iron Mountain. That's what it was. Mountains of containers filled with stuff that nobody knew what to do with. And they didn't want to take the time, because they were just pushing stuff forward. And even when they got to the port, what they knew had to move, they pushed it. If they didn't know for sure and it required—basically they call it frustrated cargo. Means you have to research it. "I'll research it when I have time. I'm going to push the stuff I have that I know where it's going."

01-00:42:04

Lage: Right. And you know what it is.

01-00:42:05

Compisi: Right. And we're much better at it in the Army. I say we. The Army is much better at it now partly because of Savi Technology.

01-00:42:14

Lage: And Savi is where we're sitting today, right?

01-00:42:15

Compisi: Yes, exactly.

01-00:42:20

Lage: Okay. Anything else to tell me about that period of time?

01-00:42:26

Compisi: Well, I became familiar with the subordinate commands, which included an intermediate level command, which was in Pusan, or actually in Seoul, Korea. And it was the MTMC Pacific, was the name of it at the time. And they had responsibility over Yokohama, Okinawa and Pusan, and an office in Guam. So Western Area was here in Oakland. They had the Ocean Terminal Bay Area as I said. They said Seattle. They had Beaumont. They had Long Beach.

But then they also had this full colonel headquarters in Seoul who did both planning with Eighth Army in Korea as well as command and control of the ports out there, who were commanded by lieutenant colonels. So I became very familiar with that. And during the time I was in Western Area they moved that headquarters from Seoul to Hawaii. And in my mind at that point I thought, "Gee, it would be great someday to go out there and command a battalion someplace or brigade headquarters."

So anyway then my life, when I left Oakland Army Base, meaning the Military Ocean Terminal Bay Area, I was fortunate to get selected for lieutenant colonel O-five command. And the command I got was the port in Okinawa. So I still stayed under the Western Area umbrella. And so I got there in September.

01-00:43:55

Lage:

And did your wife and daughter move out with you?

01-00:43:55

Compisi:

Well, my wife did. The same August that I moved there my daughter graduated high school, and she was going to Boston College. So my wife went with her to Boston College. The same day she did that I got on the airplane and went to Okinawa. And about four days later after orienting our daughter she flew 10,000 miles leaving her only child in Boston to go to a total foreign culture with Okinawa. So that's a different story.

01-00:44:21

Lage:

Did she work there?

01-00:44:22

Compisi:

My wife? She did part-time at the naval regional hospital, which was very good for her.

01-00:44:27

Lage:

Did she have to leave the Army then?

01-00:44:29

Compisi:

She had left the Army when I came back actually from Leavenworth. So she did her three years and said, "This is not working. I'll get a civilian job." Which she did. So the last four years in California she worked at California Pacific Medical Center, which was called Pacific Presbyterian at the time.

01-00:44:48

Lage:

Okay. So you're in Okinawa.

01-00:44:51

Compisi:

Yes. And I got to deploy the Marines to Desert Storm. So I had got there by September 5, was the change of command. And we instantly got the warning order that the three—almost losing the terminology here. But the three, the Marine Expeditionary Force III MEF, which was based in Okinawa, and its force support command, were deploying to Desert Storm as well. So the ships

started arriving I think on September 19, which was two weeks after I got there. And the cargo started rolling in almost immediately to stage at the port in Naha. And we spent the next several months basically working fourteen-to-twenty-four-hour days with shifts loading out ship after ship of Marine Corps equipment, naval construction battalion equipment, and ammunition at the ammunition piers in Okinawa. So we were very busy. I think we loaded thirteen ships in a very short period of time.

01-00:45:54

Lage: That's huge, isn't it?

01-00:45:56

Compisi: Yeah, it was huge. So I didn't miss it.

01-00:45:57

Lage: Now did you say you were in charge there of the whole business?

01-00:46:00

Compisi: Yes, I was the port commander. So my boss was the one-star in Western Area. So when we said I stopped reporting directly or having direct interaction with Western Area, that's true when I was at the ocean terminal in Oakland. But then I was back reporting directly to two more generals. So General George Landis took General Larson's place. So when I left he was in charge. He was in command. And then he gave up command about a year later. And General Mike Dan Kelleher took over.

01-00:46:36

Lage: How much difference do the generals in charge make in how the thing ran? You sounded like John Stanford did.

01-00:46:43

Compisi: John Stanford had a huge difference in making the workforce cohesive and take pride in Oakland Army Base and in Western Area. General Larson was very much a soldier's general. He was an aviator also by the way. So they all had different personalities. And they all had strengths that did something different for the base and for the people at the base. So General Larson though, he was just a standout, because of just his personality. But they were all I think terrific. I enjoyed working for all of them. And I think they all had a positive impact on Western Area's evolution.

01-00:47:28

Lage: So they do come in with an agenda or a style or what would you say?

01-00:47:32

Compisi: They come in certainly with their style. I'm sure that as a subordinate to Headquarters MTMC, which three of them went on to command, Stanford, Farmen and Larson all became two-star commanders of Headquarters MTMC. So I don't know what kind of marching orders they may have received from their superiors at MTMC Headquarters. I'm sure there was something that they were told, "This has been an issue, you need to focus on this, see what

you can do about that." Sure, they all had that. Because as part of MTMC, we had performance things that were looked at. How much time were household goods sitting in the warehouse? Which was one that I certainly attacked when I got down to the operational end.

Because stuff would sit there and people would ask, "Why are these household goods still sitting here? This is supposed to be temporary storage. The stuff would be sitting there for years.

01-00:48:21

Lage: Things supposed to be shipped out to folks all around the world?

01-00:48:26

Compisi: Yes, yes. But storage though. So if I'm deployed to a place where there's no housing, as a military member I can store my household goods for the duration of that deployment. So a lot of it was people had gone to Germany, and they could only take so much household goods into the quarters there. And they would leave the rest behind in storage. Or maybe to Korea or maybe to Japan. Because the quarters were smaller.

01-00:48:51

Lage: But then when they come back maybe they don't claim it?

01-00:48:54

Compisi: Yeah. Did they come back? Are they still over there? Have we extended it to keep the clock running? What's going on? And sometimes when they would come back they could leave it in storage for up to three months automatically, 180 days, with a request, while they looked for housing back in America. Well, if they weren't in a rush to get it and it was free storage, they'd just let it sit there. But we had a requirement to move it out, because we were paying in some cases commercial contractors to store it as well. So that was one of our measurements, keeping stuff moving, not having it sit. Both cargo as well as household goods. And privately owned automobiles, we also handled those.

01-00:49:32

Lage: And in Okinawa you came in new to the port or base. What should we call it?

01-00:49:38

Compisi: Right. We called it a port.

01-00:49:41

Lage: Okay. And in the midst of this buildup to this huge operation. How did you affect the operation? What did you bring to it in that short of a time?

01-00:49:53

Compisi: I think one of the biggest things was keeping the morale of the civilian workforce. They recognized that I came from a MTMC background. They recognized that I understood stevedore labor. Even though the contracts were different with the Okinawan stevedores. I think they recognized that I

understood enough to be not making stupid decisions and to listen. And I think my RREO and my OESO training again made me a good listener.

01-00:50:19

Lage: So that human relations helps with the command post.

01-00:50:21

Compisi: Exactly. Because again mostly civilians. Although in Okinawa we had I think thirty soldiers who were mostly cargo documentation. So I had Okinawan civilians as well who had been working solidly since World War II, had been working for the US Army there. There was a Hawaiian American who was Okinawan in heritage who was there since probably the early fifties. And she was in her late seventies. And Miss Lillian. She was an icon. And she was there. But so I established I thought very warm relations with some Okinawans, thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed as—

01-00:51:03

Lage: Was there complexity in all those relationships?

01-00:51:07

Compisi: Absolutely. So again heritage, we celebrated Okinawan Heritage Week as well as during our different national heritage weeks that the US celebrates. We would make sure we brought in the Okinawan heritage to be part of that. And they were very proud and willing to share both food and dance and culture. It was wonderful. It was a great experience. So I think being sensitive, open, interested, helped in terms of improving morale and keeping morale positive.

01-00:51:37

Lage: Because they had to work really hard.

01-00:51:38

Compisi: We were working long hours, yes. And certainly the labor laws were different. But people are positive and interested in supporting it. And there's a very serious antiwar culture in Okinawa, as a culture, especially since World War II. But these people knew they were supporting the American war machine. And so whether they had personal feelings or not they seemed to keep it to themselves, and they did high quality work. They were great people.

01-00:52:05

Lage: Did you have to worry about the relationship with the community outside the base?

01-00:52:08

Compisi: Yes. Because of the antiwar feelings. And the governor of Okinawa, who had been elected I think just before I arrived was on the platform of getting the Americans and for that matter the Japanese military out of Okinawa. So he was always pushing, "We need Oakland Army Base"—or excuse me. "We need the Naha military port back. We need the Americans to leave and give it back to us. You don't need that big acreage." Whereas the acreage was

justified based on supporting a move into Korea if we ever had to go back to Korea. Because during Vietnam Military Ocean Port Naha was a large logistics base supporting first the Army, and then later as the Marines moved in the Marines, either in Vietnam at that point or preparations for Korea, and any South Pacific islands where we might have to go again. Which at this point I think the whole rebasing of the Pacific is now starting to firm up. And we'll probably have a lot of people leaving Okinawa. It takes time.

01-00:53:18

Lage:

So did you deal with the local government?

01-00:53:21

Compisi:

Yes. The senior Army guy on the island was a full colonel. And he was up at Torii Station. And he had responsibility for the four Army battalions that were on Okinawa from an administrative perspective. I still reported to my one-star. The other three commands, one was a quartermaster battalion that did petroleum operations. One was a signal battalion that did long line telecommunications. And the fourth was a Special Forces group. So we all had our individual operational chains of command that owned us. But from administrative control, making sure that we didn't cause any political uproars, we were all under the umbrella of US Army Japan and this 06, this colonel, reported to them.

So he would make sure if Naha was the issue, he would invite me to sit down with the governor of Okinawa. We would talk through interpreters. Or through the mayor of the city of Naha, through interpreters. And we would make nice and be polite.

01-00:54:19

Lage:

Interesting work, I bet.

01-00:54:21

Compisi:

It was awesome, yes.

01-00:54:21

Lage:

All in the midst of getting the Desert Storm business coming and going. Did you also get the move back from Desert Storm?

01-00:54:31

Compisi:

We did some of that, yes, because that was a very short war. So yes.

01-00:54:36

Lage:

Thankfully so.

01-00:54:37

Compisi:

Yes, thank God. So yes, about less than a year later the Marines that we had deployed the construction battalion, they all redeployed back in. And then we did the reverse. And Naha Port was very busy. It was great. Because in the midst of all this demonstration and "We want that port back," we were able to

show, and we took lots of pictures, with a small element of the Marine Corps, one shipload would consume forty acres of the space. We had 120 acres.

01-00:55:07

Lage: One ship would use up forty acres to get it loaded and unloaded.

01-00:55:11

Compisi: Forty acres of staging—yes, exactly.

01-00:55:16

Lage: Okay. From there you went to Hawaii, is that right?

01-00:55:21

Compisi: Not directly. From there I got selected to go to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. And we spent a year there and that's when I got my second master's degree in national security studies.

01-00:55:33

Lage: And how did that happen? How did you happen to go there?

01-00:55:37

Compisi: Because of my background in marine terminal operations I specifically indicated that I would—the Army got I think fourteen seats a year to that. It's called a senior service college. The Army has their own at Carlisle Barracks. The Marine Corps has their own. The Air Force has theirs at Montgomery, Alabama at—I can't remember the name of the Air Force base. And each of them has a few seats available for other services. That helps to create jointness. And I had heard about Newport and that the school was great, and it awarded a—you got a master's degree out of your studies. All the schools didn't do that at that time. So I asked if I could get—if I got selected could I go to Newport. And they said yeah. So we got to go live in Newport. Our daughter was still at Boston College. So that worked out nicely.

01-00:56:21

Lage: Oh, that's nice. So I can see there's a little planning here in this.

01-00:56:25

Compisi: There's always a little planning, yes. You help align the government's—the Army's needs to your personal desires. If you can do that it's a successful career. So yes, we got to spend a year there. It was awesome. We got there in October. We left in the following October I guess. And that's when we went to the Pentagon. I got assigned to the Pentagon. And I spent the first—

01-00:56:46

Lage: Now when was that? What time period?

01-00:56:49

Compisi: That was from '93. The school was '92 to '93 and the Pentagon was '93 to '95.

01-00:56:57

Lage: And what did you do there?

01-00:56:59
Compisi:

I was the head of the transportation policy branch within—the Army Chief of Logistics had a Transportation and Troop Support Directorate. So the directorate had a one-star and two senior SES, which are general equivalent civilians. And so I was one of the branch chiefs.

01-00:57:22
Lage:

Were you a colonel by that time?

01-00:57:24
Compisi:

I was a colonel, yes. When I left school I became—got promoted right after I got to the Pentagon. And while I was there we decided that—there was a strategic mobility branch and a transportation policy branch. But there was nobody who focused on transportation logistics automated systems. And I had shown an aptitude in the past for technology. So they said, "We need to create a transportation systems branch. All the money that we spend on systems will be funneled through you. You'll be responsible for checking on CODES—" ICODES at that point. "And the worldwide port system—" which was MTMC's. "And other transportation-focused automated systems and make sure that we're getting bang for the buck, make sure they're spending the money and we're getting performance and all that."

So I took people from both divisions and created this branch and did that for a year. And the senior civilian, this SES that I referred to, Mark O'Konski, who was a transportation civilian if you will—that was his area of expertise—he was guiding me in that. Well, then he left and went to become the director of the Logistics Integration Agency, which was a special branch of the Army staff set up to identify and then push into Army logistics new technologies. So after he got over there for a few months and he said, "Would you want to come over and be my deputy," I said, "That'd be great."

So they were in Alexandria, Virginia in the Eisenhower Office Building, which is a GSA building. So I went over there and I spent the next two years as the deputy of that organization. And we had probably \$120 million a year to manage from the Army Strategic Mobility Program, which was an offshoot of Desert Storm, to find technologies that we would integrate. And one of the technologies that we integrated was RFID. And we helped—

01-00:59:23
Lage:

Would you say what that is again?

01-00:59:26
Compisi:

Radio frequency identification technologies or devices.

01-00:59:30
Lage:

Which helps identify and track.

01-00:59:32
Compisi:

Track containers, right. And you can put the contents inside. And we helped the Army set up what is now called the ITV Network, In-Transit Visibility. So putting together my Army career, when DLA would load a container— Defense Logistics Agency—at one of their depots, they would put one of Savi's tags on that container and write all of the contents on the tag. And they would have a reader at the gate, one of these readers, and there would be a reader at the aerial port, and a reader at some of the MTMC military ports. And as that container left the depot the information about that container would be sent to a server. There's four of them now globally, ITV servers. And that information is then accessible by any soldier who has an account, and he can search based on his requisition number. He can search based on the stock number of the product. He can search if he happens to know what container it was in, he can search on the container number. And then he can find out where his requisition is anywhere in the ITV Network. Is it still at the depot? Is it at the port in the US? Is it at the port in Saudi Arabia? Has it passed a reader on its way into Iraq? And he can get visibility over his cargo in transit, because of the technologies that we developed when I was at—that Savi developed, but we integrated at LIA back in 1997, '98 and '99.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 compisi_john_2_01-07-09.mp3

02-00:00:00
Lage:

Okay. We're back on tape two with John Compisi. You were just talking about the new technology that you integrated in the service. And it was developed by Savi, which is where we're sitting right now, where you're working. And I wondered. Was Savi the only one that came up with that or—

02-00:00:26
Compisi:

I think because I sort of walked in on it. Savi was the leading provider and developer of active RFID, which is a tag that has a battery in it, so it's got its own power, and it has a wide range. It can transmit and be received up to 300 feet away from the tag to the reader, which was very important. And there was no other technology at that point that was employing RFID in that manner. RFID, you've seen it in FasTrak or whatever, E-ZPass. It's the same technology.

02-00:00:58
Lage:

Is it also what UPS and FedEx—

02-00:00:59
Compisi:

They use barcodes. They use barcodes and scanners. And it's all local to the truck and the driver. Then they upload via some wide communication. I don't quite honestly know. But their device for reading is all barcode, which requires somebody to read it. Unless it's in a warehouse where they've got readers set up alongside conveyors. And I've been to their facilities. That's one

of the good things about having been at LIA. We went to the different logistics experts like FedEx and UPS and saw how they did it to see if it was something we can bring in the Army. But the Army's requirements had to be mobile. They had to be in austere environments where you didn't have a lot of power, you didn't have communications networks. And Savi provided an infrastructure that was easily deployable, that was not overly expensive. And it was very localized so that you could control it. And so they were the only provider at that point. And they helped—the actual server software that the Army developed was developed by contractors for the Army, not by Savi.

So what they got from Savi was the readers and the tags, operating on a very common frequency that had very wide range, would pass through buildings. It's the same frequency that your garage door opener uses. So it was very common. It was unlicensed. So you didn't have to pay for licenses to operate in that spectrum. And widely accepted internationally.

02-00:02:29

Lage:

Does it have security implications? Would it help to make ports secure?

02-00:02:33

Compisi:

It has security implications, but the reason it was not—from a risk perspective, meaning that the enemy side could read and know about what's in your containers. The protocol between the tag and the reader is proprietary to Savi. It's protected. And we guard it—Savi guards it like the crown jewels.

02-00:02:55

Lage:

So outsiders can't break it.

02-00:02:58

Compisi:

They can't write the protocols to read those tags. And if the tag gets a read request from a 433 reader that doesn't know the protocols, it's just going to ignore it, like that does not compute. So it's been widely accepted. The Defense Department certainly has concerns at some point that as the technology proliferates that may happen. But right now it's quote not encrypted. It's just written in computer language that's got a protocol to it, proprietary.

02-00:03:28

Lage:

It's an interesting example of the military and the private contractors. How they work together.

02-00:03:35

Compisi:

And MTMC was a wide and early user of RFID because it helped improve their knowledge at port operations. So they've been using it for at least ten years, maybe fifteen years.

02-00:03:51

Lage:

I'm asking you now from your civilian job. Is any of this being adapted to provide better security at ports, civilian ports?

02-00:03:59
Compisi:

Yes, yes. And it's not germane to Oakland Army Base, but I can show you where we've developed RFID tags that actually slide onto a container door. And actually you close the other door and that tag has an arm on it that when you close the other door it triggers the arm. And then you lock the door electronically. And if anybody opens that door without unlocking it with a proper device, that tag will send out an alarm date-stamped that says, "At this date and time." And then you can infer from previous reads what the location is. "Someone unauthorized opened this container." And even if they close the door again that record is there and the tag will continue to report that it's been tampered with or opened, unauthorized opening, until someone resets it with the proper electronics.

So we've been employing those. And DLA is using them right now on an exception basis. But pretty soon—well, Central Command has just come out with a mandate that said, "All containers leaving Iraq starting in the spring will have"—what they call "container intrusion detection devices that are compatible with the Army's ITV Network." That narrows it down. Savi is the only one that can produce them.

02-00:05:19
Lage:

That's good for your business.

02-00:05:21
Compisi:

It is. But there's a new contract. The RFID III contract was just awarded. And Savi licensed out that protocol really under pressure from the government to open up competition. So we participated in an International Standards Organization review over the past couple years to establish an ISO standard for the protocol that's based on Savi's protocol. And if anybody wants to make tags and readers that follow the ISO standard we will sell them a license, which one, opens it up, which hopefully will drive down for the government and for civilian businesses, drive down the price of the devices, because more people will be competing to create them. And Savi's benefit from it is they sell the license and they get a small royalty if anybody successfully sells it, which we hope they do. That's my paid political ad.

02-00:06:11
Lage:

That's good. We need that. Okay, so I think we've said enough about Okinawa, since we're trying to concentrate on—and then you went to Washington, and then what happened before you came—

02-00:06:23
Compisi:

Well, then I was fortunate that I was selected for a brigade command. And they asked me if I had a choice where I'd like to go. And so we moved to Hawaii.

02-00:06:35
Lage:

Another nice place.

- 02-00:06:35
Compisi: To command what at that time had changed names from MTMC Pacific to the 599th Transportation Group, which was the heritage organization that had been in Korea that moved to Hawaii that was commanded by an O6. So I became the 599th Transportation Group O6 full colonel commander responsible for all the ports in the Pacific, reporting to Headquarters MTMC at this time because Western Area had already been closed. Oakland Army Base still existed but Western Area MTMC had closed probably in the mid 1990s..
- 02-00:07:16
Lage: It might be '95.
- 02-00:07:18
Compisi: That sounds about right. The second BRAC probably closed it.
- 02-00:07:21
Lage: No wonder I get so confused because there's so many closing dates given and that's why. One is the Western Area and one is the actual base.
- 02-00:07:30
Compisi: Right. And in '97 I had just taken command. They were closing Eastern Area. So Eastern Area lasted a little longer. It had been started earlier for that matter. And so, yes. '95 is about right. So yes, so I got my dream, and we got to go live in Hawaii for a couple years. And maintained or reestablished my relationship. Although at LIA I had a close relationship with all the MTMC people, because we were there both in the Virginia-Washington area, and we were providing funding for some of their programs. So I got out to Hawaii and very humbly accepted the responsibility for Okinawa, Pusan, Yokohama and the office in Guam.
- 02-00:08:16
Lage: So you were then head of all those bases, I see.
- 02-00:08:19
Compisi: So I don't think anybody in the Army except maybe an infantry officer who grows up in a division and then comes back to that division at different levels of command has had the opportunity to stay within an industrial type organization like MTMC so much of their career and to hopefully benefit the organization because of that experience. But I love the people and the organization. And I think it's been great. And I had the fortune to be part of it when I think it was the heyday of MTMC, which is now SDDC.
- 02-00:08:52
Lage: Now why do you say it was the heyday?
- 02-00:08:55
Compisi: Because of jointness, because of the US Transportation Command, which was established in 1987, they took the responsibility for being the single transportation provider for the joint community. And so the Army contributed

MTMC as the land and sea proponent for TRANSCOM for cargo movement. Military Sealift Command had some of that, but they gave part of that to MTMC to be more purely a Navy command. But Air Mobility Command, which used to be called Military Airlift Command, is the Air Force component of US TRANSCOM. And over time US TRANSCOM has—and I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm just saying it's sad from a personal perspective. Drawn to Scott Air Force Base in Saint Louis the headquarters and planning elements of MTMC to bring it in closer alignment with US TRANSCOM. Air Mobility Command Headquarters was already there. In fact when they established TRANSCOM they took it to Scott, because the commander of Air Mobility Command was an Air Force four-star, and he became also the commander of US TRANSCOM. Shared it with two hats. So it's evolved that way.

02-00:10:09

Lage:

So it's lost some of its identity.

02-00:10:12

Compisi:

It's lost some of its identity. It's lost some of its overall manpower. They closed the two area commands. They had shifted the operations of MTMC, then SDDC, down to Fort Eustis. And that was not a bad move, because Fort Eustis is the home of the Army Transportation Corps. And then what was left in Washington was the headquarters level, not the operational level. Now that's been moved to Scott. When they did that, basically I think there was probably 150 people at the Hoffman Building that were MTMC Headquarters. And my numbers I'm sure are off, but they're about right. Of the maybe ninety positions at Scott that they could have moved, they wanted to move, I think twenty people went. The rest of them retired and ended their careers. So going back—so anyway I spent the two years, and this relates. I spent the two years, enjoyed being in that environment, having the opportunity to continue my MTMC experience and working for a couple different generals. Had been asked as I was ending my command tour to come back to Washington and be the chief of staff at Headquarters MTMC.

At that point I was approaching twenty-eight years in the Army, and I knew I could only go for thirty, unless I got selected for general, which was low probability. There just aren't that many TC generals. And I had worked with Pacific Command, which was the joint command responsible for all the Pacific. If there was a position for me in their joint staff as the head of Strategic Mobility and Transportation, which I was well prepared for, having been at Western Area and in Okinawa. And they said, "Yeah, we'd love to have you." And the three-star Army general that was part of that command endorsed me. My branch said it was okay. But the commander at MTMC said, "No, you're the best guy for chief of staff at Headquarters MTMC, and I want you to come back." And he's a good guy, and I worked for him in the Pentagon before this. I said, "General Montero, I appreciate that. I'm honored that you've asked me. But two more years in Hawaii to finish my military

career, it's a great opportunity for me and for my wife. I really would rather stay here." He said, "No, you got to come back, it's either that or—" I said, "You know my alternative is to retire." And he said, "I don't want you to retire. I want you to come back." I said, "Sir, I'm not coming back."

02-00:12:48

Lage: You didn't want to be in Washington it sounds like.

02-00:12:49

Compisi: I didn't because I knew we were going to retire to California and it was senseless to me to move my wife and all of our household goods for two years back to Washington. We had sold our house there when we left. To just then end up having the Army move me to Hawaii—I mean to California. But he was trying to do what was best for the Army in his view, which was his responsibility. And I was at that point trying to do what was best for me and my family. So we said, "I'm going to draw up my paperwork and retire."

02-00:13:18

Lage: Oh, my. So other than that you could have had two more years in Hawaii.

02-00:13:27

Compisi: Well, if he hadn't insisted yes, yes, yes. But that wasn't my choice. I either had to go where he wanted me to go or get out.

02-00:13:33

Lage: It sounds like it is the Army way. You seem to just take it.

02-00:13:38

Compisi: Well, he was trying to do what was best for the Army in his view. And I'm honored that he thought I was the best guy for the job, but I didn't appreciate on a personal level that he knew what I would do if I didn't go. I just think he called my bluff and thought I would go.

02-00:13:56

Lage: But you weren't bluffing.

02-00:13:56

Compisi: I wasn't bluffing. And we talk now still. "So is Linda still mad at me?" Said, "No, she's forgiven you." Because it was probably the best thing from a personal level. Because we got back into these other jobs, which are not important. So we got out. What is important is that I think he recognized that and the full colonel who was commanding Oakland Army Base at the time—this is July of 1999—had a new assignment. She had to go to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

02-00:14:23

Lage: And now who was that?

02-00:14:25

Compisi: Who was that colonel? Susan Halter.

02-00:14:29

Lage: Susan Halter. So she was the last commander except for yourself.

02-00:14:32

Compisi: Right. And she was going to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

02-00:14:35

Lage: Had there been women there before? Was that unusual?

02-00:14:38

Compisi: As commander? There'd been women officers there before but I don't think there'd been a woman garrison commander, base commander. So she may have been the first. And so she had to leave. And so General Montero said, "Look, John, you've only got a couple months before you have to give up command in Hawaii, and I'm wondering if you would be dual-hatted and go to Oakland and spend really all your time there. You can take care of your responsibilities in Hawaii remotely and go to Oakland Army Base, take command, and basically close it down gracefully and turn the keys over to Jerry Brown and work with AAFES." There were some nettlesome problems. The Army Air Force Exchange System had warehouses on the base, and they were being basically forced to move off unless they could work a deal with the city to improve to get a rent that they were willing to pay, which the city wasn't forthcoming with that. They either wanted them out or they wanted some outrageous amount. So we had to negotiate that. So I felt fortunate that I came in, I didn't have a dog in the fight so to speak. But it had to be negotiated before we could close the base. So it put some pressure.

02-00:15:52

Lage: Okay. Well, tell me about that process, who you negotiated with, and—

02-00:15:57

Compisi: Well, I more or less facilitated between—because it was my objective to close the base. That was my charter. Gracefully. To negotiate between the city's designated administrator for the acquisition of the property and the AAFES exchange people who were responsible for their facilities. And of course they were in no hurry. They said, "As long as we're getting it for free why should we rush?" But there were lots of issues around electricity, who was going to pay the bills, the different rates. Because as Oakland Army Base we had special rates from the—I even learned about this. They called it the power management people who are at this level. It's a board that manages all of the Western Area power for the grid.

02-00:16:40

Lage: For the Army.

02-00:16:41

Compisi: Not for the Army, no. For the grid. And so they would give the pricing associated with the transmission lines. And I can't remember the name of it now. But I laugh every time I see them mentioned in the newspaper for some other reason. But we had to talk to them because Oakland Army Base got

reduced rates because it was a federal government entity. But as soon as it was transitioning to the city it was going to change to basically full price. And the exchange was benefiting from that as long as they were on the base, but once it became the city's, then their utility bills were going to go up. So it was complex negotiation, but we got it done. We had to stay on it closely and try to keep people talking to each other and not ignoring each other's emails and communications. But we finally got that done.

02-00:17:27

Lage: And how did it get resolved? Did they stay there or did they move off?

02-00:17:32

Compisi: They negotiated an extended period, I think six months, but they did move. They moved to Tracy to the—

02-00:17:38

Lage: To the depot?

02-00:17:39

Compisi: —DLA depot out there, yeah.

02-00:17:41

Lage: And did you have any interaction with Jerry Brown?

02-00:17:43

Compisi: Yes. At least three times. We went to the city hall twice. Partly to brief him on where we were on the whole handover and that whole process of shutting the base down. And then another time to brief him on the closing ceremony, which he graciously appeared at. And I think he's a brilliant man, and I think he probably spoke virtually extemporaneously after having listened to my fairly emotional farewell to the ghosts and citizens of Oakland Army Base, many of the people I had worked with from '86 to '88—or excuse me, to '90—were there. People I knew in Western—at Headquarters MTMC had come out and were there. People I knew from all of my different MTMC assignments were there.

02-00:18:28

Lage: Yeah, so it was an emotional—

02-00:18:30

Compisi: It was very emotional for me and for many of the people there to see it being closed. And I experienced it at the Presidio too, which was not very much fun. So yeah, that was the times. And so he came to the closing ceremony as well in September of '99. And he was very gracious like I said.

02-00:18:51

Lage: Well, you said he listened to yours and then?

02-00:18:51

Compisi:

He listened to my presentation and he listened to General Privatsky, who was the MTMC commander at that point, the two-star. And basically took threads from what we both said and put together a very coherent five minutes or less eulogy really to the proud people of Oakland Army Base who had contributed to the life of the city and to the country through their contributions and their blood, sweat and tears.

02-00:19:19

Lage:

Interesting.

02-00:19:20

Compisi:

It was. He did a great job.

02-00:19:23

Lage:

Now in your meetings with him about the issues that you had in common, was he on top of things or interested?

02-00:19:28

Compisi:

He was way above things, as you might suspect. We were talking about here in the next thirty days, because he was already talking about the Oakland Military Academy, which I understand has been very successful as like a military high school. That was put on the base, which was one of his pet things he wanted to make sure was done. But he was thinking in second- and third-order issues and challenges and asking his staff, "What about this?" It was like we're still over here and he was like two years down the road. Which is probably why he's been as successful as he has been, because he thinks pretty cerebrally, pretty far out. He's a visionary kind of guy.

02-00:20:10

Lage:

Interesting. Did you have any other memorable interaction with the people having to do with closing the base? When I talked to Mary Myers she sounded like there was really a community there.

02-00:20:25

Compisi:

It was. Particularly the garrison. Because you asked about that. There was the ocean terminal, which was the operating command by an 06. There was Western Area, which was policy and planning and strategy for all of the Pacific. When I was at Western Area—I sort of skipped over this. In the Plans and Strategic Mobility we had to interact with all the western states and their emergency management and transportation agencies, because they were responsible for the highways in their states and the bridges. And we built together basically coordination plans for how to make sure as units moved from Washington State and they were going to Texas, to make sure they got clearance to move through those states on those state highways and things. So anyway it was very interesting.

But then as those commands slowly moved away and what was left was this shrinking but very family-oriented group of people who represented Oakland

Army Base, many of whom had been in the commands, but then as the jobs were eliminated either because of seniority or because they desired to remain and not move to Washington or wherever, they just sort of collected into the garrison. Which didn't have a lot of transportation jobs, but it had the typical base support jobs. Running the transient—the lodge if you will. The Oakland Army Base lodge or inn.

02-00:21:50

Lage:

Now the lodge? The officers' club? What is the lodge?

02-00:21:51

Compisi:

It was at one point the officers' club, but then it became a transient hotel. Not transient meaning people off the street, but people moving through. Military or government civilians moving through could stay. Yes, so they ran a lodge, and it had some of the trappings of an officers' club. And it had been the officers' club. But closing that down. And they also had the gym and the bowling alley at one point and the commissary. So they had to manage all the buildings and infrastructure.

02-00:22:24

Lage:

So the infrastructure was left but not that much of the job of the operation.

02-00:22:29

Compisi:

Right. By the time I got there most of the operations other than maintaining the facility, they were closed up. The bowling alley was closed. The inn, I think it might have still been open, but it was closing quickly from July. AAFES was still operating. The commissary had closed. Army Air Force Exchange System. The PX, yes, commonly known as. Post exchange. The commissary was closed at that point. And people were looking at it for I think the food shelter. So most of it was basically closed up. It was just locking the doors, finding ways of clearing out equipment that belonged to the Army that was still there, furniture.

02-00:23:16

Lage:

You really there at the last.

02-00:23:20

Compisi:

Yeah, like being at that commercial company the last couple months.

02-00:23:24

Lage:

That you told me about.

02-00:23:26

Compisi:

On tape one.

02-00:23:27

Lage:

No, we didn't record that though. From the earlier time when you were there, would you have anything to say about the base as a community? I know you didn't live there, but did you see either the civilians in and out?

02-00:23:40

Compisi:

Well, yes, because as duty officer, when you were the Oakland Army Base duty officer, everybody on the Western Area staff, everybody at the ocean terminal, all the officers and NCOs participated in the duty officer, which was if you were the duty officer you actually stayed at the inn. They had a room set aside. And you were there from the time work shut down—so you'd go over there around three-thirty in the afternoon. You'd get the briefing, and you were responsible for checking certain things through the night. You had an NCO, noncommissioned officer, who worked with you. And you would check the club, you would check. Because there was a club that was very active back then. It had formerly been the NCO club I believe and had become an all ranks club. And they were very liberal at that point because of the smaller population of military people, to open the doors to civilians to come in.

02-00:24:31

Lage:

Civilian employees or people from the community?

02-00:24:32

Compisi:

Civilian employees, but it was very liberal. So the club would be hopping on Friday nights. And it was the Oakland Army Base commander and his staff that were responsible for the club. And they would have bands in there or a DJ, and there would be 250, 300 people in there. It was hopping.

02-00:24:53

Lage:

So if you were the duty officer you'd check that out.

02-00:24:57

Compisi:

You would make a walk through a couple times during the night and make sure everything was—

02-00:24:59

Lage:

Now how often did you get that duty?

02-00:25:00

Compisi:

You'd probably get it every forty-five days, because there wasn't so very many of us commissioned officers. So yeah, you got to see the community at work. And I had people who worked for me who lived in the quarters there on the base. So military families there. And they did their best. It was a small base with limited resources. But they did their best to make it a quality place for people to live.

02-00:25:26

Lage:

What did you see in terms of interaction between the civilian employees and the officers? Not just the officers, the military.

02-00:25:34

Compisi:

There were some great relationships. Drew Day, I don't know if you've heard that name. He was the head of IT. Very sociable and participated. When there was officer level things socially the senior civilians were always invited. And they participated. There was the—and I'm drawing a blank again. I wish I

could remember. But there was the guy responsible for the financial part, they called the RM, the resource management chief, Reuben Barkley I think was his last name. But his first name was Reuben. And his wife was a civilian over at the garrison. She was a financial person. And they very much participated at the officers' club with the military. And there were retirees who were part of the community too. Lloyd Yonkers. I don't know if that name has come up at all. He was a retired Army lieutenant colonel or colonel who was working as a—I don't want to call him a salesman as such, but he was representing transportation services companies, commercial, that would do business with Oakland Army Base, Western Area MTMC. And I still see him. And he ended up marrying—I almost want to say Mary Miner. Mary Miner. Different Mary. And she was an employee. So they were obviously a family themselves and part of the broader family. And besides Lloyd there was Dick Bergson, a retired Army colonel, still lives in San Francisco. But he was working for a transportation company. He had been the head of inland transportation, which is the highway and rail stuff, for Western Area, when I first got there. And then he retired and he came back basically representing transportation companies who were doing business. So the family relationships continued even when you left the military. So yeah, it was very close-knit, and very longtime friends. And I still see them.

I belong to the National Defense Transportation Association. And many of those people still belong over in the area, like Fred.

02-00:27:35

Lage:

Interesting. Now did you have a chance to observe gender relations? It sounds like more and more women were coming into positions of responsibility. Maybe on both the civilian and the military side.

02-00:

Compisi:

Well, certainly on the military side. But the military population shrank over time, just because there was more emphasis on putting military people in military organizations, real full military organizations. And they kept losing that structure in MTMC, which was not a good thing, I don't think, long term. But anyway so on the military side there was some of that certainly. I think Sue Halter was as I said the garrison commander. My job in Hawaii has since had two females who've commanded it. The commander of Headquarters MTMC once removed, maybe two in a row though, were female generals. So that certainly changed in the military side.

02-00:28:29

Lage:

Did that happen just smoothly? Or were there people grumbling about these women?

02-00:28:33

Compisi:

No, I think smoothly. Yeah, the military since 1948, the military has been very flexible in adapting to the realities of political American life. So I think they've gone smoothly. And certainly the women who've risen to those

positions have had to be very sharp to be able to get there. So I think it went smoothly, yes.

02-00:28:58

Lage:

I think it's inevitable that we're going to end up with a different policy on gays in the military at some point. Do you think that will go as smoothly?

02-00:29:07

Compisi:

Probably. I think people in the military are just a microcosm of American society. And in many ways they're—I'll show my prejudice. They're a very good microcosm because of certain constraints on who can come in in terms of certainly attitude, high school degrees, people who are motivated to do something with their lives. So it weeds out part of the American population who isn't necessarily going to contribute. Not to say that everybody in the military is a topnotch citizen. That's not true obviously. But I think just like a private school ends up with—it's a microcosm but maybe with some different characteristics. I think the military is a microcosm. Some of the studies I've seen recently about who makes up the military—because in the political campaign there was comments about yeah, it's only the poor and the ethnic minorities are serving in the military. Not true. There is more college-educated people in the military than in the general population. More people in the military come from homes of—not affluence necessarily, but upper middle class and above than in the general population. So that's not a truism that only the poor and the downtrodden and the minorities are serving in the military.

02-00:30:31

Lage:

Forced to go into it because there's nothing else.

02-00:30:33

Compisi:

Exactly. And it's just not true statistically. So anyway, back to your question about the civilian workforce. There were an awful lot of civilian workforce who were women and who were moving up into the different—through promotions through the organization. Even when I got there a woman who's just passed away, Diane Bacon, was the head of contracts. And she again—this family stayed in touch. A Navy captain who retired out of MOTBA, the ocean terminal, lives up in Seattle. We still exchange Christmas cards and we haven't seen each other since 1990.

But Diane was the head of contracts, which was a senior position reporting directly to—or one step removed from the general. The head of inland traffic when I left was a civilian woman. So I think that's part of the overall evolution in the federal government.

02-00:31:31

Lage:

Well, one of the things we noticed as we've been interviewing this wide range of people, that the base was a place of opportunity. Maybe the Army as a whole. A place of upward mobility.

- 02-00:31:42
Compisi: I think the Army as a whole, absolutely.
- 02-00:31:43
Lage: And the emphasis on education. Is that something you observed? People being encouraged to further their education?
- 02-00:31:50
Compisi: Absolutely. Training and education. People were very much encouraged to take courses. The Army would subsidize some of the coursework as part of their annual training. They would be encouraged to take civilian courses. And they can be subsidized for a certain amount of dollars every year for civilian education. And definitely encouraged upward mobility. That's how you got promoted, was by showing that interest in self-development, personal development.
- 02-00:32:14
Lage: And then on the civilian side too.
- 02-00:32:19
Compisi: Absolutely. That's what I was talking about specifically. Yes, absolutely. The Army at large and Army civilians, and I think Defense Department. I'm sure that the Marine Corps, the Navy, the Air Force have differences. But the Army is very egalitarian especially compared to the Navy. I'm very proud of the Army.
- 02-00:32:36
Lage: I can see, I can see. So is there anything else you want to say—I want you just to briefly tell me about postretirement. But anything else that I might have overlooked or that comes to mind about—
- 02-00:32:51
Compisi: I don't want to get maudlin on camera.
- 02-00:32:54
Lage: It's okay, you can get maudlin.
- 02-00:32:55
Compisi: No, I won't be. But it is a very—I have very strong emotional attachments. I can't drive by the base without looking off and seeing the warehouses.
- 02-00:33:07
Lage: Well, what did you think about the closing? I guess that's something I didn't ask.
- 02-00:33:11
Compisi: The actual closing?
- 02-00:33:12
Lage: No, not the ceremony. The decision to close it.

- 02-00:33:16
Compisi: It was probably financially from the Army's perspective a good decision. The real estate was very expensive. The location was expensive. And the bases in the Bay Area. More upset about that, when they closed the Presidio and they long before closed Hamilton Air Force Base. Then all the Navy stuff was gone. The city and the area, because of their own political bent, forced the military out.
- 02-00:33:47
Lage: You do see it that way.
- 02-00:33:49
Compisi: I do. I see it not so much because—from a financial perspective yeah, the Army needed to get out. But the political—as politicians could help hold something, because they hold the purse strings, they can cause something not to close. They can also cause something to close by making it untenable for the military to stay.
- 02-00:34:13
Lage: Were there specific decisions that politicians made, you think, local politicians?
- 02-00:34:16
Compisi: Absolutely, yes. In the time of Art Agnew, which was in the late '80s, and quite frankly Dianne Feinstein and Nancy Pelosi, who wasn't a politician then, but Barbara Boxer were all very much anti bringing the *Missouri* to the San Francisco Bay Area. They were very much into why do we need all this military stuff around here. They threatened, "Let's not have Fleet Week."
- 02-00:34:42
Lage: They would do this in Congress?
- 02-00:34:45
Compisi: They would do it in Congress. Well, Dianne Feinstein was the follow-on mayor of course and then later went to Congress. But I think those politicians created an environment at that time that was very dis-inviting, if you will, for the military to make any effort to stay. Or if the military had curried any effort on the political side—because we have congressional liaison—to help support something that the military needed to do in that area or wanted to do, if they got a cold shoulder, after a while it says, "Okay, well, we can save a lot of money, let's just close those places, and we'll consolidate somewhere else."
- 02-00:35:20
Lage: Did Ron Dellums have a role in Congress as far as you know?
- 02-00:35:28
Compisi: He was the representative, right, from the Oakland district?
- 02-00:35:31
Lage: Yeah, from this area.

02-00:35:32
Compisi:

Yeah, I think he probably did. And I think many of them have regretted what they did from the standpoint I think particularly for Oakland there was a huge—I won't say huge, I don't know the numbers. But I'm sure there was a significant loss of jobs that if they have recouped by now didn't happen immediately. And certainly there's been some wonderful things done with closed military bases. I can't name any, but I'm sure there have been. Well, I think the Presidio is being handled very well, in my view partly because of the Phillip Burton-supported legislation that said that the Presidio, if it was no longer needed by Defense, no longer needed by the federal government, would become part of the Department of the Interior for a national park, but had to be self-sustaining in twenty years. I think we're about five years away. But they've done some great things to preserve the appearances of the base, to keep that open space for the city. And so they've done great things.

Oakland Army Base was an industrial site. Wasn't a lot of opportunity there to create a park. Although there was some green space.

02-00:36:38
Lage:

They're trying.

02-00:36:38
Compisi:

Are they? I'm glad to hear that.

02-00:36:40
Lage:

Yeah, they have some shoreline park.

02-00:36:41
Compisi:

That's great. That's a great thing. But I think the loss to the Bay Area at large from that military complex that supported Oakland Army Base, gave it a reason for being. I think that's been missed. And it's going to take a long time. But change happens. Change happens when you're not doing something else, right?

02-00:37:06
Lage:

Right. And you did live in the Presidio.

02-00:37:09
Compisi:

Yes, I did. My family lived there for seven years and I was there for six.

02-00:37:12
Lage:

And you must have liked it very much.

02-00:37:13
Compisi:

We loved it, yeah. Another place we drive by, look up at the quarters that we lived in, and our daughter's bedroom, which she could look out her bathroom window, she was on the third floor, and could see Alcatraz.

02-00:37:26
Lage:

Now you mentioned your daughter went into the Army. Tell me about that.

02-00:37:31
Compisi:

Oh yes. So she started college in 1990 and we sort of encouraged her to apply for an ROTC scholarship, telling her that if—she had narrowed it down to UC San Diego, which was a great school. We would have been perfectly happy for her to go there. Or Boston College. She was accepted into both, and several others. And so she decided, I think partly because she knew we were going to Japan, and so she would be sort of alone, and most of our family are from the east coast area—in fact her godfather uncle took her on a college tour, one of which was Boston College, and she decided to go to Boston College. And we said, "If you're going to Boston College, you need to take this ROTC scholarship, because that's an expensive school." So she did reluctantly. And she excelled. And when she graduated, the ROTC Department—I was at the Pentagon at the time—invited me to come and be the commissioning speaker, which I was proud to do. And so I was able to commission my daughter at that time as a second lieutenant in the Military Intelligence Corps of the Army. And so her assignments. She went airborne, so she jumped out of perfectly good airplanes as a training thing. And I got to see her do that at Fort Benning. And then her only assignment on active duty, other than a few months at Fort Huachuca was at Fort Hood in Texas. And she stayed in long enough to become a captain. But she met her future husband there. And since they've gotten married.

They got married in '99, which was when we were closing Oakland Army Base, right after that.

02-00:39:09
Lage:

And was he in the Army?

02-00:39:11
Compisi:

Yes, and he is just now leaving the Army actually April 1. He's an infantry officer and had spent two tours in Iraq, one tour in Afghanistan, and decided that his family was more important than sustaining a military career. So at twenty years he's retiring. But he actually started working here at Savi on December 1.

02-00:39:31
Lage:

Oh, really? It's all in the family.

02-00:39:34
Compisi:

His retirement, we try to plan these things. Yeah, we wanted our daughter close by with our grandchildren. And so the only way they could do that is if he had a good job in northern California. So I asked my boss to interview him, and he liked him.

02-00:39:45
Lage:

Good, good. So tell me about how you ended up at Savi just quickly, because I think it's interesting what military officers do and how they use their expertise.

02-00:39:54

Compisi:

Well, I had indicated to you, Ann, that my first job out of the military was for this company Metrocom that was a wireless Internet up-and-coming company. They really had a great technology. And huge investment from Paul Allen and WorldCom. But they were peaking too soon. The dot-com bust came. And within almost two years of me joining that company they went out of business. I don't take responsibility for that.

02-00:40:22

Lage:

Now you weren't using—I'm thinking the military.

02-00:40:26

Compisi:

At that time I was using only my personal military logistics experience on deployment. But it was not a military-oriented company. It was totally commercial. And the guy that actually hired me though, we were lieutenants together in Germany in 1972. But he got out after eight years in the Army. We had stayed in touch through the years. And he had actually come to Hawaii in July of that year, '99, just before I came back here, and said, "I got a job I'm holding for you." I said, "You got to hold it till October, because I can't get out till then." And he did. So I worked for them. We ended up closing that company because they went under.

And here I was in the Bay Area with no real contacts in the business world. Most of my Army friends were either back east—and my civilian friends from Western Area MTMC, many of them had retired. I certainly knew them through NDTA and I tapped into them saying, "Do you have any leads for me to get a job?" And so I had stayed in touch with Vic Verma, who was one of the cofounders of Savi, because he had also been undergrad at Florida Institute of Technology. I met him in the Pentagon in '95, '96 when I was working with LIA. And so I called him up and said, "Vic, this is John. I know Savi does business with a lot of logistics companies. And I'm not looking for Savi to give me a job. But I'm wondering if I could talk with you and maybe you could point me through your network to some companies that might be interested."

And he said, "Come on in." So in March of 2002—excuse me—I spent ten minutes with Vic. And he said, "You need to talk to my director of operations." And I went and talked to him for about forty-five minutes. And a week later I got an offer to come and work at Savi. And that was going on seven years ago.

02-00:42:15

Lage:

Great. It sounds like a very interesting company.

02-00:42:19

Compisi:

I love it because Savi has two other transportation colonels, one of whom worked at the ports in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm, who are long friends of mine, they're working in the eastern offices of Savi. Our biggest customer

is the Department of Defense. And I'm always coming across former MTMC people who are now civilians, former MTMC people or TRANSCOM people at Scott Air Force Base. So it's a way of doing good things for soldiers in a civilian life. It's great.

02-00:42:51

Lage: Now what is your role here?

02-00:42:54

Compisi: I am the vice president of Global Solutions Consulting. So in the sales organization the sales guys are salesmen, but they don't know the technical aspects of the solutions that we have, the products. And so they will incorporate my people to support them when they're actually getting into technical discussions with a potential customer.

02-00:43:14

Lage: To support the customer later?

02-00:43:16

Compisi: Well, we have a services team that does that. Although they always reach back to my people too, because they met them first. We try to help them. So yeah, we have a lot of contact with soldiers. My guys on my team have been to Iraq and Afghanistan helping demonstrate Savi's products or help them learn to use them in the desert. So some of the people on my team are former military. Some of them are not. Some of them never knew what the other end of a rifle was. Two people in the United Kingdom working with the military for the UK. In fact I spent six months with Savi deploying our solution into the UK back in 2003. I have people in Singapore who support Australia and Asia. And then I have about four people here and five people on the east coast. And it's just a great group of people. And it's very much again, because of the environment within Savi, we know who our customer is, and having been acquired by Lockheed in the last two years just continues that. Lockheed is obviously the biggest defense contractor I think in the US. So it's a great association.

02-00:44:25

Lage: But you say it allowed Savi to keep its identity and organization.

02-00:44:28

Compisi: Yes absolutely. We remain Savi Technology, yeah, it's great.

02-00:44:33

Lage: Okay, well, this has been really interesting.

02-00:44:35

Compisi: It's been fun for me.

02-00:44:38

Lage: Thank you very much. We are back on because John remembered something that I completely neglected to cover, which is the—

02-00:44:50

Compisi: The Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

02-00:44:54

Lage: How did that affect things?

02-00:44:54

Compisi: It was very interesting. And I'll only take a few minutes, Ann, because I know time is short. But it was obviously the first day of the World Series between the Oakland Athletics and the San Francisco Giants. And many of the people at Oakland Army Base lived on the East Bay side. Many of them lived, or some at least lived on the Presidio and over at Fort Mason. And most of us didn't want to get stuck in the World Series traffic, which we thought was going to be an issue. And fortunately for me I left work about ten minutes to five and crossed the Bay Bridge and got home without knowing there had been an earthquake at all. Fortunately God was looking out I guess. I didn't leave ten minutes later. I think it was 5:04 p.m. that the shock hit and the bridge collapsed, that one section. As it turned out, my wife was down at the exchange on base at the Presidio, which is on the landfill area. She had a much different experience. She was in an absolute panic, because my daughter was at school and would normally walk home onto the Presidio. So she didn't know where she was and she didn't know where I was, and she was trapped in the exchange for a little while, and then came screeching home wondering if we were home, hoping we were.

Meanwhile, the helicopters are circling. We start hearing sirens. But we have no electricity, so we don't turn anything on. We have an aftershock. And then we finally realize. Well, back to Oakland Army Base. It turns out that a young lawyer named Steve Park was on the staff there, lived in the East Bay, and was one of the first on the scene when the highway, the 880 section there, the Cypress section, collapsed.

02-00:46:32

Lage: Which was fairly near.

02-00:46:35

Compisi: Right there. On Grand Street as you were leaving the base you were up on the Cypress section. And Steve was right there rescuing people in the immediate aftereffects. And many people from the base were involved in responding to that disaster.

From the base's perspective, anybody that didn't live on the East Bay side, which included General Larson, who was the CG—he lived at Fort Mason—were told not to come in in the immediate, because there was all the issues of we don't want to congest the highways, we want to let the emergency response people determine what in fact was going on. There wasn't even necessarily a route that you could get there on surface roads. So we were all told to stay home. Anybody that was still there basically got sequestered there until it was

either—to oversee the base and make sure there was no looting there, because we were responsible for people's cars that were being shipped, and people's household goods, and so there was a risk. So they stayed, some of them. Steve got an actual—Steve Park got recognized for his heroism. And I think a couple other people might have. And anyway though ultimately when it was determined that there was—when we were given the go-ahead, which I think was the following Monday, to come back in, we carpooled, trying to make the best of it. And many of us carpooled—

02-00:47:55

Lage: And you must have had to go way around the Bay?

02-00:47:58

Compisi: We did. We tried the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge one day. We tried the Foster City, the bridge down there, another day—I guess the San Mateo Bridge. It took us two and a half hours minimum each way each time no matter which way we went. But the general was forward-looking. And he asked his contracting officer to check out one of the evening cruise boats to see if we could sign a contract to provide ferry service from Fort Mason to my pier over at Oakland Army Base at the MOTBA piers. And he was able to negotiate that. So for the next thirty days we actually cruised back and forth.

We would marshal at Fort Mason at six-thirty in the morning and ride the ferryboat over. And then at four-thirty or five-thirty we would take a bus down to my pier, we'd load up on the ferryboat, and come back.

02-00:48:50

Lage: That's a nice way to go.

02-00:48:52

Compisi: It was a great way to go. It was cool. It was starting to get cold. The first couple days the general wasn't on the boat. He was back in Washington for a meeting. And we suggested that they open the bar. For a price of course. We had to pay our way. And they did. They were very accommodating. But when the general found out he said, "Look, I already stuck my neck out hiring this boat. I don't need it to be the party boat for Oakland Army Base. So there'll be no more bars being opened." But we were able to get back and forth to work.

And amazingly the civil construction people in thirty days had the bridge repaired, and life was somewhat back to order. Now there was damage on the base. My pier cranes that were on rails, one of them jumped the rail. There were cracks in the piers. Obviously they were on piers in a landfill area, so it was inevitable that it would happen.

02-00:49:44

Lage: Yeah, that whole area is landfill.

02-00:49:47

Compisi:

Yes. So there was several million dollars' worth of damage done to some of the buildings and the pier structures that it took them a couple years to totally restore. Fortunately when Desert Storm hit we were back in business adequately so we could support that. But there was always concern about running all those tracked vehicles out on those piles to load them on the ships.

02-00:50:07

Lage:

And no one was injured in the collapse of the Cypress.

02-00:50:10

Compisi:

No one was injured in the base. And from the Oakland Army Base correct. No one from the base was injured. But it was quite an exciting and historic period again.

02-00:50:19

Lage:

Right. I'll say. That was something to live through.

02-00:50:22

Compisi:

Yes it was. Thank you.

02-00:50:26

Lage:

Okay.

[End of Interview]