SIGAR | SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

SIGAR Oral History Project (OHP)

Interview 20: Edited Transcript

Interview Date: 02/22/24

NAME/TITLE

INTERVIEWEE 20:
My name is [NAME] and I'm a senior auditor here with SIGAR.

JOB DESCRIPTION

INTERVIEWER:
What's your job description? What does that job entail?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It entails auditing, oversight and review of SIGAR reconstruction appropriation funds. So we'll go out and we'll review based on a criteria and objective that we've determined. And so, we're looking at criteria for that, addressing that objective.

And we go out and we review. We do research beforehand so we can find out what previous effort has been done on that topic or objectives. And then we go out and we see what's being done now. And we provide recommendations. Findings and recommendations.

INTERVIEWER:
And the target entities that you're auditing, we're talking about federal programs? Are they in-- under specific departments? These all have to do with Afghanistan?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes. They all have to deal with Afghanistan. Basically, there's State Department and USAID – United States Agency for International Development – funds. It's reconstruction appropriation funds used to reconstruct Afghanistan, whether we go in and we rebuild a hospital, military base, schools – anything that is constructed with that reconstruction money. And not just construction. We're dealing with programs. Education programs or health programs. So anything that that money's being used for.

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CAREER HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:
So give me a sense of how you got into this work. Where did you grow up? What did you like studying in school? Did you spend any time, after schooling, in other parts of the U.S. government or military service? What's your background?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Oh, my background started-- I'm from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Steeler country, of course. Where everybody wants to be. And I started off-- my Mom-- it started off [with] my mother. She did bookkeeping and she did bookkeeping. So that's where I got a feel for that type of work.

I-- math. I was always pretty good in math. So I went to college for accounting. And then, you know, because of the Mom thing, I was more familiar with that. So I went to school for accounting. I studied there, graduated from Clarion University.

About 100 miles straight north of Pittsburgh. It was a state college then. It's-- they've combined to be, like, Clarion University now. And I went there. Graduated there in '77. And then I went into banking. And so I worked at a small, minority Black-owned bank in Pittsburgh.

And I worked there for about-- I guess about a year and a half. And then I worked with IRS. The Internal Revenue Service. I started off as a tax agent.
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And I ended up going with the Energy Department. // I had a choice to either go to San Francisco with [the Bureau of] Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms [ATF] or go back to Pittsburgh. And so I-- of course, I went back to [the] Pittsburgh area. And then I ended up applying and I got in a job with Department of Defense. DoDIG. Inspector General. So I was working with them. And all of this time, I'm working kind of in that finance field. And so I got in there and I worked with-- DoDIG for, like, 20 years, you know. I loved that.
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INTERVIEWER:
So you joined DoDIG as an auditor.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
And so you were looking at Defense Department programs--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Correct.

INTERVIEWER:
--exclusively?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Exclusively.

INTERVIEWER:
So tell me about that job a little bit.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
That, I started out in financial-- oh, I forgot what they called it. Financial management. Doing FMS. Foreign Military Sales.* So that was our biggest thing there, working for military sales programs. And it was, you know, looking at those and same type-of-thing. Reviewing, seeing that the work was in accordance with government regulation.
[* https://www.dsca.mil/Resources/Foreign-Military-Sales-FAQ
U.S. Government's program for transferring defense articles, services, and training to [U.S.] international partners and international organizations. // The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) administers the FMS program for the U.S. Department of Defense.]
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The biggest thing that we kept trying to do was the Foreign Military Sales Trust Fund*, trying to balance that. And this thing was so big.
[* https://www.dscu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-04/12-chapter.pdf
U.S. Treasury account administered by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), U.S. Department of Defense as part of U.S. FMS program.]
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INTERVIEWER:
So it got complicated?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It got complicated in trying to balance that trust fund. It was so big, that we never really could do it.

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INTERVIEWER:
How long did you stay in that role at DoD[IG]?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
At DoDIG? I stayed in there for 20 years. I went from FMS, Foreign Military Sales, financial management. I went to-- what is it? Contract-- I forget the-- ASCPL. Now, how the-- contract administration. So I was doing more contract administration type-of-work, looking at more contracts, seeing whether the contracts, you know, they fit, or we were working according to contracts.

Then I went and I was, like, more of in the planning. The planning. So we're doing more of the overall plans for the organization. We look at proposals that came in, and we kind of reviewed those and kind of act-and-stacked them, you know, for the agency.

INTERVIEWER:
And no foreign assignments in that role?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Not in that planning role. No. And not really. And after that, I went to Readiness and Operations. I forget what the total title was.

INTERVIEWER:
Within DoD?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Within DoD and DoDIG. And more so, the readiness of a military organization's unit from an overall, not internal, perspective. From an external review.

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I went all over the world. You know? That's-- I guess, was starting to travel. I mean, we went to, you know, Germany and England, Philippines, Korea. Yeah. And I was able to see the world. I really liked that. The traveling with them.
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DoDIG, I left there and // I went to Missile Defense. The guy that was-- had went and I was with the Readiness and Operations. He went over to Missile Defense. And he said, "Hey, you can come on over here." I don't know if I was going for grade, or whatever. But that was internal review at Missile Defense. Internal review office. So we're doing more inside, just missile defense work. And so I did that about nine years, with internal review.
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I left there and I went to [the] Defense Intelligence Agency, in their audit shop. // And wasn't the greatest of experiences with DIA. And I'll just leave that at that. But after about a year and a half, going on two years, I said, "I've got to get out of here." And the only way I could get out-- I was applying for jobs. And the only way I could get out of there at that point was to retire.

So the-- I-- everything just kind of fell in place, because I had applied to SIGAR earlier, and they were just kind of coming in. And I had applied to them earlier. And then they just happened to call me back. And, so all that was happening at the same time that I was just getting hired for SIGAR. And-- I was able to leave DIA. // I retired out of DIA on a Friday and went with SIGAR on the Monday.
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I heard about SIGIR – which is the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction – from my wife, who was working with a lady who knew someone in there. So I end up knowing a little bit about

them. But I think at the same time, they were disbanding. And SIGAR was coming in place. She remembered a lady that had went over there and so she put me in contact with her. And so that's how I ended up transitioning over, and knowing about SIGAR.

INTERVIEWER:
And this was at the beginning of SIGAR's--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It was--

INTERVIEWER:
--time?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
--about the-- this was about the first year of SIGAR's time. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
So they were building an audit staff?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Correct. Uh-huh [AFFIRMATIVE]. They were building the audit staff at that time.

INTERVIEWER:
So when you first started at SIGAR, how was it different than your previous experiences in these other oversight agencies?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
For me, it wasn't that much different. I mean, because I was auditing. I was used to auditing. I was used to the process of auditing. It was, for me, just a different agency. You know? It wasn't-- you get into the process of auditing this, you know, you're starting to understand the ways I do an audit, you know, and that type-of-thing.

So I go in and it's that same thing of, you know, I've got a topic. I'm doing my research. I'm doing all kind of looking at different places. I knew the different places to look at, you know, federal regulations, coming down the-- DoD regulations or State Department regulations-- you know, directives and all that.

And so it's filling my head up with that, whatever that topic is, from those levels. And then it's going out and audit and talking to the people, you know, directly for that objective or whatever I'm looking at. You know? Identifying the findings based on that criteria that you use.

SIGAR DEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:
So initially, did you not have overseas assignments within SIGAR? You were doing it just inside the U.S.?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
I was just doing it, yes, in the office. Yeah. In SIGAR office.

INTERVIEWER:
So when did that change? Because if you walk the halls of SIGAR, it doesn't take long to find a photo of you wearing protective gear because you're in Afghanistan.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
So, when did you get your first overseas assignment? How did that come about?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It came about at so-- in the first overseas assignment is that I heard that you could go over there. And so you could go over there at that time for, like, a TDY. So I said, "That would be interesting. Never been to Afghanistan."

INTERVIEWER:
TDY?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Oh. Temporary duty. I just went over for a TDY. Temporary-duty assignment. So that's where you're going over for a real short period of time, for just a particular audit that you're doing. And so you go over and come back. I said, you know-- you can sign up.

You didn't have to go. And so I said, "Let me go on one." You know, I heard it's not bad. At that time, we didn't have all the things going on now that's over in Afghanistan with the Taliban as far as attacking or anything. So I went over there.

I went over Afghanistan on this TDY assignment. And we're on the [U.S.] Embassy [grounds] and I said, "This isn't bad at all." You know? I-- you know, we're on the Embassy [grounds]. You know? You had your meals. You-- it's all a tight-knit group. And, you know, even the going away and being away seemed to be, "Hey, that's pretty good."

So I came back and I said-- and the extra money wasn't bad at all, too. And so, I said, "Hey. I'm going to sign up for one of the longer-term assignments." You know? So that's what got me into going over there, in 2011, for a longer period of time.

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INTERVIEWER:
How long were you in Afghanistan total, and how many different times?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
I was in Afghanistan a total of three years. The first two years was 2011 to 2013. And then I went back 2015 to, I think, 2015 to '16 was that last year.

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INTERVIEWER:
So when you went over, you found that the Embassy community, the accommodations, the food, it was all kind of a closed community?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Correct.

INTERVIEWER:
Very similar to life in this country? Just transported inside a zone of another country?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Same like this country but, yes, much tighter. Much tighter. I mean, you're with the people. You're with the people you audit with. You know? So you're eating dinner in the-- they call it the DFAC. Defense fac-- dining facility.

You're eating with them. You're-- I was on-- I did a lot. You've got three groups over there. And on the Embassy [grounds], you've really got three groups. You've got the party group. You've got the church group. And then you've got the military and workout group.

You know? And so, my being a minister, I went with the Christian, the gos-- you know, the church group. And so, I got in there. I was able to do my Bible study and I was-- actually, I was in-- at the time when I went over, I was studying for my seminary degree.

So, master's degree, you know, in-- for seminary. So I was doing class at the same time that I was over there. And I'm talking about getting up in the middle of the night for a 7:00 class over in the states. You know? So that allowed me to do that.

We had a lot of Bible studies. I was even able to preach a couple sermons. And they called it The Rock Chapel. The Rock Chapel, meaning relying on Christ in Kabul. You know? So we-- that's where we had the services at.
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So I was with that group. You know, I did do some of the party groups and that. But I just found it wasn't me. You know? And then I went and did a lot of exercising. You know, I got buffed up. My wife thought I was getting all, you know, buffy.

And so, you know, that's what I did. I did the core classes. You know, you had a lot of those. You had Zumba class, and you had core class, and you had guys and ladies that were running. You know, a lot of running and that. And so like I say, you had those three different groups in there that you could get involved with.

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CONDUCTING OVERSIGHT AUDITS IN A WAR ZONE: AFGHANISTAN

INTERVIEWER:
So give me a sense of the day-to-day for the audit work that you did. Give me a sense of what things you looked into. You know, what programs you examined. And then also how was the work different, in a conflict zone? You're in a protected area, but you're still in a conflict zone. How did the work differ from your previous auditing jobs?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Well, in going out, we did-- the first thing, the audits we did, were in reconstruction. And so mine was more so contract reconstruction. Booking a contract. Contract compliance. That type-of-thing. And so, most of them, the types were whatever they built using those-- like I say, those reconstruction appropriation funds is what we looked at, we audited.

So I looked at things. Like, they were constructing hospitals. They were constructing schools. We went where they built—[something] called Kabul Military Training Center, KMTC, when they were building that. We looked at where they may have been building dams and, you know, that type-of-thing. So anything that they built with those reconstruction funds is what I looked at. The contract. Were they in compliance with the contract, with federal regulations? And that type-of-thing.

INTERVIEWER:
And so, would you actually go out in the field and look at these facilities?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes. That's-- you had to. That was the field work was the actual going out. Now you would-- before you go out, and that's even before I came into SIGAR, you went to State Department where you got the training. You got [vehicle] "roll-over" training. You got training as far as being able to identify – in

the road, maybe – an IED* or something like that, telling you how to ride in those MRAPs, of a military reconnaissance. I forget what all the RAP is. Reconnaissance vehicles.**
[* improvised explosive device]
[** mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle]

And they taught you even how to-- if you got attacked, how to pull that guy and deter it. Pull him down into the tank. So those things. You rolled over, and how to get out of your vest. You know, that type-of-thing. And so, you learned all that before you even went over.

But yeah. When you-- our audits were in the field. So you would get-- you would sign up with the security detail and they provide for you the approval to go out. And so we go out and you'd go through cities and towns. You're going through these towns, within these MRAPs. And we go out and you had one in the front.

We-- and we only would have maybe four auditors. But you were in, like, there was a tank in the front that had something. You might have been in the middle with two people and two people, and then one in the back. And so we'd go thr-- you know, with those three.

And I think maybe about a total of maybe 20 military in the total vehicles. But, like, I was telling some-- one of the military men about that, and they said, "Well, you're just seeing what you're seeing. You didn't see all the work that was done ahead of time," where they had to go make sure roads were cleared, people were out, you know, out in the outskirts watching. You know?

So we were really protected by the military. And they were really security-conscious when we would go out. And so, when we went out to a field site, a lot of times, [one of them would say,] "Sir, you've got 45 minutes." And they meant, "You've got 45 minutes." You know?

I mean, because come to about, like, 40 minutes, "Sir, we've got five minutes." You know? And, there was no arguing with them. If they came back and reported us, that we'd probably be-- get disciplined. You know, reprimanded by my boss.

INTERVIEWER:
So how did that impact how you did your job? First of all, there's a time limit, but also just psychically? You know, you're in a conflict zone.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It impacts you as far as really going. And I know one time we went-- and we pulled up to the gate of a place. And we pulled up and we were there a little while. And you could see the military guys getting nervous. And the one-- I was in, like, the second MRAP.

And that guy called up to the front. We were there for about a good five minutes, see, and it's like hills on the side. And so I guess that's kind of dangerous. And he called up to the front and said,

"What's going on? What's going on? Come on. Let's get going. Let's get going." You know?

And so we're talking after and [he] said, "Yeah, because Taliban will get a fix on you and you end up getting attacked." You know? So that's why they were conscious there. But yeah.

It was different because you had a time schedule. So you really had to go in. You really had to know, what you were going [there for; what you needed to do]. You know, we worked a plan. We worked audit plans. So, you went in. But, you know, stuff is happening at that time. So, as you're talking-- as you're talking to them, you're always thinking.

You're thinking of what's next. And you're analyzing what they're saying at the same time as you're-- you know, you're listening to them and you're asking the next question. Then you've got to kind of improvise, too, because no telling what they may say. You know?

So that may bring something else up that's really not on your script that you're asking about. So-- and you're always looking at the time, because you want to get all your stuff in. But if you don't, you always can caveat to, "Hey, we'll get back with you. Is there some way we can get back to talk to you later?"

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INTERVIEWER:
Did you ever try to, like, budget out how you were going to use each incremental, you know, minute of time in the 45 [minutes] that you had? Like, would you, like, make a to-do list of things you had to do when you were at the site? I'm just wondering if you had—

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Well—

INTERVIEWER:
--to do it that granularly?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Well, we had our audit plan. And you had questions from that. That's kind of your outline. But, like I say, as the audit was going on and you're talking to them, then, you know, depends on what they said. May take you to another part of your audit plan, that was going by your objectives.

So you had questions. So it's kind of granular in a sense. But it was also, kind of, fluid with, you know, depends on what they said. You know? Because they may say something that [makes] you [go], "Wow. Hey." You know, based on the requirements and that-- you know, as far as construction.

Then you came back and you talked with either-- I forget the military group that was there. I forget the military group that had oversight in Afghanistan, you know, because we went out and talked to either a professor or somebody that dealt with the school or the administrator for the hospital.

But we also had to talk to either DoD or State Department, who was from the government side and see what they were doing as far as implementation and oversight. You know, as far as overseeing the project. So they had a lot of the say.

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INTERVIEWER:
So how easy was it to set aside the security concerns? You're in these protected vehicles, these armored vehicles. And you have a job to do, but the military that's guarding you is sometimes looking twitchy.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
How easy was it to set aside the security concerns and stay focused on your auditing job?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It's kind of hard. It's kind of hard. I mean, because, you know, it's kind of comfortable, but it's hard because you know you could get attacked. The—and, you know, the Taliban is out there. Even though we weren't in [a situation] as hostile as it is now, it was still like our boss, the IG*, always told us: "Do not get complacent. Do not get complacent."
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

That, he kept drilling into us. Because you-- it's easy to get complacent on the Embassy [grounds], I mean, because we were gone. You're eating. You're-- you know, you're going, working out. You're doing all this other stuff.

Only a few times that we got attacked, you know, when I was there. So it's kind of hard. But you go out on your jobs and you're out in-- you know, you're out in their territory. So it's kind of hard. And you know military are-- they're kind of jittery, too, you know, because they're going out all the time.

So you're doing your job, but you're kind of, like-- you know, kind of queasy a little bit, too. But you start getting comfortable, and that's the part like my boss was saying. You've got to be careful that you don't get too comfortable. You've got to always remember that you're in a combat zone.

INTERVIEWER:

So when those armored vehicles would cross back into the Embassy territory after a field work trip, would you feel some relief?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I definitely felt relief once we got back in. Once we went back through, and we went back through the gate, I was very relieved at that point, because we went through towns. I mean, we went through towns. And it's funny. I was remembering one time, we went through this town and the kids were throwing rocks at our MRAP. You know?

So, I mean, things like that. And, I mean, we went to the KMTC, to Kabul Military Training Center. And when we went in, they were building it. But we went in and there were [Afghan] troops right there. I mean, these guys were going-- the troops-- and, I mean, they had rifles.

I don't think they had anything in it, but I didn't know. And we're coming past and I'm going, "One of these guys could, like, snap out and start shooting us." So that's a kind of [the] little fear I had at the time while we were doing the audit. You know?

I mean, we were in-- we were in places. We were out there. And we don't know if somebody's up in the hill or something. You know? Or we could get attacked. You know? And, I mean, we had trained for if something happens. So it-- something could happen. So you did have a little fear as you were doing it-- doing your audit.

INTERVIEWER:
So I'm imagining it's a pretty human reaction to have relief at the end of the--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
--the field work trip. You come back into the Embassy community zone that's more protected. // When you started these trips, at the beginning, would you have any dread about, "Oh, I've got to--" you know, "I've got to go out and take some risk in doing this oversight work"? Is that something that would naturally occur? Or was it more just, like, "I've got to do my job"?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
It's, "I've got to do my job." For me, I've got to do my job. Yeah. I mean, you're always nervous about it. But I've got to do-- hey, you know, we signed up. And they told us that I volunteered to go there. You know? I went. Although I went under TDY, the temporary-duty assignment, where it was a little bit, but I-- you know, I made the choice to go back for the year. You know? And so, it could happen. And they tell you, "It could happen." You know?

And, yes, you're nervous. But it's a job I've got to do. And I guess, for where I'm at, you know, I'm saying from a mind standpoint, a religious standpoint, this isn't my world anyway. So I've just got to say it like that. You know? Yeah. And I'll leave it right there.

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INTERVIEWER:
In all your field work trips, did you ever experience any kind of attack?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
No. Not-- not on-- not in the field. Not in the field. The only attack we had was we were on the base.
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When I first got there, the first-- when I first went out for the-- went there for the long-term, the week I got there is when they had-- they were building a hotel next to the [U.S.] Embassy. And I remember looking at that.

And, I mean, it was so close. It was like, from going-- looking across the street. because, I mean, the Embassy wall is there, but right on the outside of the Embassy, as soon as you went out the Embassy, you were in the middle of Kabul. You know?
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But they were building this hotel right next to there. I'm going-- I came out [of] my room. You're looking right at the Embassy-- I mean, at the hotel, and I'm going, "That's crazy." Well, that same week that I got there, that's when they attacked the Embassy – from that hotel. And I was sitting, thinking myself, "What have you gotten yourself into here?"

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INTERVIEWER:
When you were over there, about how many audits did you work on? Just ballpark.
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INTERVIEWEE 20:
Probably about a good 12 to 15. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
So across those 12 to 15 audits, you know, were there any that stood out that either stayed with you, made an impression on you, taught you something, or that you felt was a particular accomplishment in terms of, you know, this agency's oversight eyes on that particular thing?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
I think the one that I really-- that I remember-- and we were going and we were doing-- they were build-- we were building a school for the Afghans. And when we got over there, they didn't have the school. We were just starting to build it.

But you looked and you'd seen the youth that were there, and it was a huge tent. And all these youths were packed into this tent. And you could see that they were intent on learning. And then you heard about how they walked for a mile or something, or miles, to go to school.

And the thing I think one of the biggest is the young ladies, now that you knew-- young girls were being able to-- that were at the school that I now know, you know, the importance of what we did in building that school. And we went back, I think, years-- maybe went later when I went back, you know, to kind of look back at it. And you-- we-- I was proud. I was proud of what we did and building that school for them. You know?
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INTERVIEWER:
When you were at the school site, they were starting the construction?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Correct.

INTERVIEWER:
So you were-- were you examining the contract?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
We would examine the contract. Right. And—

INTERVIEWER:
So you were walking around the construction site, you know, comparing details in the contract with what you were seeing?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
With what I was seeing. // In that one, we found that everything seemed to be according to the contract. And so we-- and even-- and the thing was that they weren't finished. So you had more of your laying the ground work, that type-of-thing, and then just starting to build.

But when we came back and we looked at it later, everything-- I think everything was still good. Maybe some little things, but nothing major. And a lot of your major may be that they really didn't do the first ground work. And so that ground would shift in that, because they didn't do the work right.

And I know one place we went, and it wasn't a school, but one of the other facilities, we went and went back, and that ground had shifted and you had cracks almost about that big in the building. It was almost you had to condemn it.
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INTERVIEWER:

The cracks that you found, how wide were the cracks?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
The cracks in this building were about a foot, I'd say, wide. I mean, very wide to where it was no, like, little cracks you could fill up with some putty or something. I mean, you had to condemn the building.

INTERVIEWER:
It sounds like there was a pretty big engineering flaw--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
--underneath that.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
There was a big engineering flaw with that. // We went to a training site. Not the KMTC. Not the tr-- mili-- but another one we had built. And, I guess the thing I didn't like with that is we went back and there was, like, black mold on the top of the roof. And we had people living in there – we had to tell them, "You're--" and people were living together. You know?

We said, "You guys've got to get out of here. This-- this is not good." So I know we wrote that up, you know, as far as the black mold being there and people were living in there. But that's-- I guess that's the one thing out of-- I guess I got-- you get a little bit upset [about], is that the money we put in to some of these places – I'm talking about, you know, millions, hundreds of thousands of dollars, millions of dollars – and you go back and see the place just tore up. You know?

You get kind of-- [*SIGHS*] you kind of sometime[s] look and say, the money we put in, how much-- how much did we really need to put in? You know? I know we said, what, over – well, if they look at everything, over a trillion dollars. But you look and you say, you know, some things – did we need to give them that much?

Take, for instance, when they were doing the KMTC.* We went in there, and they were building this place. Well, they had came to and they got it from based on West-- was it West Point? And based on that.
[* Kabul Military Training Center]

But, you know, it never-- your politicians or whatever, their people came over. And the price kept going up, because they'd seen something else that they wanted. And they put it in there on to the contract. They kept having contract changes.

And so we had to stop. You've got to stop. You know? This-- the money was getting too out of hand on it, so we had to stop that. You know? But, I mean, there's things-- like I say, did they really need that, because we wrote it up – they had gooseneck faucets.

And so the Afghans didn't know how to use it. So they were trying to pump them. They thought it was a pump. And so they were breaking that. So we had to recommend a different type of faucet for that, you know, because they didn't know, you know, how to use it.

Some of the toilet facilities we were getting was getting U.S.-type of stuff that they weren't accustomed to, so they were putting rocks down in the toilet. You know? You looked at what they were used to – and that was a building with a hole in the ground. You know?

And upgrading that was getting to put something underneath to clean it out. The-- you know, to clean out the feces, or whatever. So that was an upgrade. So some of them having toilets and-- that they didn't know how to use.

So you look at it and you say, "What we gave them, did we need to give them to that level, to U.S. government-level?" Could we have given them something kind of little lower, that they would be able to maintain?

Case in point, as one place we went to-- and I forget the name of that place. But I went in, and they had, what was it, 10 generators. I mean, and these things were huge. They were huge. I'm talking about the generators had to have been, like, about-- each generator had to have been about, oh, three, four feet wide and about maybe six to eight feet tall. And I asked the guy. I said, "How many of these do you need?" He says, "Oh, we only need two. We only needed the one and maybe one for a backup." And so, of course, we wrote that up. And we were saying it was a waste.
//
And the technology, they couldn't maintain it. They didn't have-- you know, they didn't have enough of the skills to maintain it. One of the things, we were building so much, we built so much that they didn't have the technology, enough of the technology to take care of all of what we built.

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INTERVIEWER:
During all the time that you were there, what did you start thinking about in terms of, you know, what are the obstacles to doing good oversight auditing work in a conflict zone, in a war zone?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
The obstacles are doing it fast. You really don't have the time, during the field work, to really sit down. So a lot of it had to come back with questions and going back out to the people with questions. So being able to actually see the change.

So that was kind of the obstacle. Just the pace. It was a faster pace than when you're back home, you know, and able to call. But the one good thing about it, that it was an obstacle, we could always go back to the military group that had-- was supposed to be the government oversight. The U.S. government oversight. So we were really dealing with them to go back and find out.
INTERVIEWER:
So you were dealing primarily, I would assume, with other Americans. Is that—

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
--correct?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

INTERVIEWER:
And what kind of reception did you get from them [to], "We're the oversight guys with SIGAR. We'd like to come and see you?"

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Uh, you weren't being welcomed. That's for sure. But it wasn't hostile. I think we had more of a hostile relationship, and I don't know why – because, like I say, the environment was so close at that time. It taught you a little bit more about auditing.

I knew in auditing before-- when I went out, and more so with DoDIG and that, and we went out, and maybe it's because I was a younger auditor then, and you're finding everything. Your thing is to find everything. So you're finding little nitpick things, you know, and writing them up.

And I think that's where a lot of auditees kind of get mad, because they're-- we're finding nitpicky things. And-- but you learned over in there, because you're-- like I say, we're eating with them. I had church with some of them. Some of them – the people that were with State Department or DoD – they were in the choir with me, you know? So I got to know them.

So it changed my auditing technique somewhat, to where – those little "nit-noy" things, I might tell them about that. I didn't have to write it up. I didn't have to write up everything. And then I was a little more seasoned then, that I knew I didn't have to write up all the little things.

So it built up a better relationship, because it was more close-- it built up a relationship, really, with them because we-- it was so close and confined. And you work with them. You worked out with them or you had church with them. You know?

So you're building up-- you felt you didn't have to. I mean, you're going to see them. And we did our job. I know one guy. We were-- you know, he was with State Department. And I-- one of them, had to write them up. But, he understood-- and he understood I had to do my job.

And, in fact, what it allowed is that they would talk to you and give you things. You know? Talk to you about things. So it was-- I think you got things where you wouldn't have, if it was just that how I did [it] in DoDIG.

[AT DoDIG], I came in, and [said,] "We're here to help." And they're [like], "Yeah." And then I was writing them up for little stuff, and they're-- and they know it's like "nit-noy" stuff. Come on. You know?

But there-- and like I say, I was getting seasoned – that I knew I didn't have to-- if it's something that I knew it was, "Hey, I've got to write this in," they knew it, and I think they received it a lot better as well, as we were able to talk and they were able to [realize], "O.K., yeah." You know?

INTERVIEWER:
So it sounds like building a relationship with the people who you were auditing and overseeing actually helped improve the quality of the oversight.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes, it did. It did. That relationship was key. The relationship, within my-- I repeat – was key for them providing to us. And, like, it really builds on that: "We're here to help." You know? Because they knew I wasn't-- and I talked to them about it. Let them know the regulation, what it's saying and, you know.

INTERVIEWER:
So is that a positive-- possible positive consequence of doing oversight in a war zone? Is that, because you're closer together, because you're mixing socially, because you have to, you're in the same community, it creates the conditions where you can have an actual relationship that can be conducive to getting more of a free flow of information--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
--that--?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah, it is. It's very conducive for that. Depends on how you handle it. You know? Some people go and they still want to hammer them, you know, because they're not involved with them. You know, they may go to be in the cafeteria at the same time, but they're not interacting with them. So they're going out and still doing that same type of auditing.

INTERVIEWER:
Was there a feeling that, you know, even though I'm here to oversee you and I'm here to audit you, we're all on the same team, so to speak? We all work for the U.S. government – and the goal is to do this stuff right?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah. And that's it. And I think as you explained to them why you're having to write this up, and what the impact [is] in that, yeah. And they're giving you kind of-- because they're in there. They're doing the work. So sometimes the process and procedures, they were able to explain that better – of why they're doing it like that. And you may see that, and say, "Oh, O.K." So you're more so writing it up as a management improvement. Something like that.

INTERVIEWER:
Now were there any examples of the opposite kind of experience, where somebody that you were overseeing or auditing used the conditions of the combat zone to evade oversight, or to make your job more difficult instead of easier?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
No. Only in delaying. You know, they-- so they-- they'll try to delay us in giving us information. But no. I didn't run into too many--

INTERVIEWER:
Must be pretty standard--

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah. That's standard. Yeah. That's standard.

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BEST QUALITIES FOR OVERSIGHT-IN-A-WAR-ZONE AUDITORS

INTERVIEWER:
If you're looking at the kind of qualities, talents, skills that make for a good oversight auditor, how would you describe those? Who does that job over there well in a conflict zone? What kind of people?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
A person that goes and they can see what is going on, understand our mission, why we're over there, but also can go over there and see what the people are experiencing, and be able to see how we're going over and the-- why we're here to help, how we're coming to help.

Not looking at-- and like I say, as we went back and seen how stuff was misused or whatever, but that we went and we actually did help. You know? I think-- I think that's the thing. You go over there.

Somebody that wants to read, you've got to be wanting to read. You've got to be wanting to read up on it as much as you can, to understand what it is that's-- past audits that's going on there. So reading is pivotal.

And I tell people, and that's not only in that. It's in every-- anything. You've got to really-- you've got to learn to read. You've got to read everything. And, you know, everything on that objective. Everything about that audit. So you come into there with a full understanding of what it is, and then being able to think. Critical thinking. I know that's one of our top things.

You've got to be able to [be] quick, because you've got to be on your feet when you're out there, because they're asking stuff. And, like I said, you're taking that down, trying to, you know, did I-- like you say, "Am I answering the question?" You know, "Oh, well, wait – maybe I needed to ask this, to further build on that." You know?

So you're in your mind. You're thinking about your finding and you're, you know, "Hey. Was that good enough? Did I need to go, 'Oh, they said this'?" You know, "That goes to this, down here. They kind of jumped ahead of me."

So now I've got to kind of pivot and go and answer that, or else I've got to go back to it. You know? And you're all-- especially in the field – you're dealing with time. You're dealing with time, although you know you can go back to the U.S. government oversight agency and ask [for more]. But yeah.
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It's that reading. It's that understanding [the] objective that you're doing. And it's being able to think on your feet – critical thinking and analysis.
//
For someone that wants to do auditing in a war zone, I think first you have to understand you're going to be in a war zone. And so auditing is fine. You might like auditing. But you've got to remember you're in a war zone. And so you've got to understand that, you know, anything can happen.

Anything can happen. So you've got to really understand that. You've got to understand you're going to be away from your family for a long while. That takes a toll on some people. So you've got to-- just, you know, communicating. I'd come home and-- you know, my wife had been taking care of the family.

I come in and I'm only going to be there for 20 days or so. So I'm coming in and it's a totally different dynamic, you know, where I'm coming in and I'm, you know, trying to take over stuff and they're saying, "Well, Mommy said we don't got to do that. We've been doing it like this."

And, you know, so you lose some of that. You lose some of that. So I'm saying, from a male perspective, and being head of the house or whatever, you lose some of that. And you've got to understand that, that you're only there for a little while. But, you know, there's a rich reward, though, in it, too – because you're making some pretty decent money while you're over there. Yeah.

But it's different. It's a different thing for somebody who wants to go over there, they've got to understand that being away from your family, being-- trying to take care of your family at the same time, things come up and you can't really do anything about it, you know, unless it's really critical. Then you get leave to go back home. But a lot of stuff that's happening and the things that are happening-- for family dynamics, you can only give advice at that point. You know?
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INTERVIEWER:
It's helpful to have a strong partner.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yes. Definitely helpful to have a strong partner. Yeah.
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INTERVIEWER:
How did your wife feel about when you went over there?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Well, that's a, kind of-- two sides of the coin there. My wife feared, and was afraid. I think my parents were more afraid. My parents would-- they would hear the news, as well as my wife. Something happened – and they figure I'm always right there in the middle of it. And so I think that, for them, it really was a fear, you know, for them and, really, my parents. It was a fear, you know, I guess being older or whatever.

Anything on the news, anything happening, they think I'm right in the middle of it. I'm-- I've got to call. I've got to call home. So a lot of times, if something happened-- and they were hearing about a lot of stuff sometimes on the news before I hear about something that happened in Kandahar. Well, I'm up in Kabul and they're hearing about it on the news. And I'm finding out from them. You know? And so yeah. So it's-- it's hard.

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SIGAR OVERSIGHT AUDITS: SUCCESSES?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
For me, the biggest success was the friends I made, the Afghan friends. Great-- great people.

INTERVIEWER:
People who worked in the Embassy community?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah. Within the Embassy. People that worked for SIGAR. More so, people that worked for SIGAR, the Afghans-- that I really got to know. They knew I was a Christian minister, and I knew they were Muslim. You know? And we talked. We went to eat. You know, they didn't-- they couldn't get in the DFAC-- the Defense-- the Dining Facility, but they had a pizza place, and we'd go to eat. You know?

And so I got to know them and got to know, even, I mean, their families – pictures of their family. And then we talked about that.

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You build an affinity for the people. But you've got to remember you're there to audit. You're doing a job. You know? And you can't-- you can't get but so all wrapped up in it. And there's been people that got wrapped up, and they go out into the neighborhoods and all that.
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But no. It's a great thing to be able to do that, to be-- a different experience. It's a different experience – and very rewarding and rich.

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I was asking one of the Afghans, "How do you live here? I mean, you're walking down the street and all of a sudden, boom. Something blows up." He said, "Well, what do I do?" He said, "I can't stay in my house." He says, "I go. I've got to live my life. And I've just got to keep a watch out."

The Afghans, even in our office, didn't really socialize with each other outside of the office. So when they-- you know, because they really didn't know each other. They didn't know whether somebody may have been working there and they was from-- with the other side. So they didn't really have such tight allegiances with each other outside of the office.

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You could say they're a "Fifth World" country trying to become a "Third World" country. And we pumped "First World" money in there, and expected there to be no graft and corruption. But the people, themselves, were good people. And I just think they got caught up with that almost a Hatfield [and] McCoy thing. You know?

We're fighting them. Why are you fighting? I don't know. My granddaddy fought, you know, the Sunnis or the Shiite and that. And, you know, I think it's going to take the-- I hate to say – those older, stuck in the ways, to die off, and these young people that are wanting freedom to fight for their freedom.

Now we've got the Taliban in there. And I think the greatest thing that the U.S. did over there is women's rights, because now the women are able to stand up a little stronger, because they-- I mean, and if you looked at Afghanistan before—

I've seen a picture. I say, "What is this?" It almost looked like Dubai and how, you know, modern and that they were. You know? So I imagine they could really look back and see how things were before. But for the women's rights, I think that was our greatest accom-- U.S.' greatest accomplishment. And I wish we could have kept going with that. And I think that-- that would have made a big change in there.

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WHAT DID SIGAR DO WELL?

INTERVIEWER:
What did this agency do well?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
This agency, SIGAR, I think is-- I love it. SIGAR's a great-- and I loved the IG.* I loved the IG.* He's got the FITB. "Fire in the belly." You know? And-- you can see the passion in them, because I was here before the IG* came, the previous IG that really didn't have an understanding of auditing in that.
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

And I guess it was new. All that was new. Good gentleman. But, you know, when the new IG,* the IG* that's here now, he came and he had understood that oversight and that review, because he had come from that kind of environment, you know, before. // He had the fire. And he had the relationships. So he had those relationships on the heel and be able to do the job and that would get us out there. And so I love it about that, and I love it about this agency.
[* John Sopko, former Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2012-2025]

And also with this agency, because I'm on the Diversity and Inclusion Council. And like I say, this agency's diverse. And say I-- I mean, although we've got the diversity and inclusion, I don't know, maybe there are some African-Americans that have problems. I've had no problems here in SIGAR. I've had opportunity to move up. Did I take all of them? No. That was my choice.

But, I mean, we had a-- Black young lady that was the AIG for audit. You know? Assistant inspector general for audit. You know, young lady, you know, that was African-American. So, you know, the opportunity's here. Our present-- our budget [director]* is a Black young lady. You know? So those opportunities are here for African-Amer-- for any person that's not, you know, white – is here.
[* SIGAR Director, Resources Management and Budget]

And these-- because it's a small agency, some people expect more. But you've only got so many spots. So but, I mean, the-- I did not see-- I didn't see the prejudice or nothing. And, you know, so I really liked that about this agency. A great agency. Yeah. It's a great agency to work for.

WHAT COULD/SHOULD SIGAR HAVE DONE BETTER/DIFFERENTLY?

INTERVIEWER:
What should SIGAR have done differently, have done better? Either external or internal. You know, things about the way it was put together originally. Anything.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
That's kind of hard to say.

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INTERVIEWER:
Were there any frustrations in terms of doing the job that might have been specific to the agency? // You know, some of the people [SIGAR current and former employees that SIGAR Public Affairs interviewed] brought up sometimes the-- you know, the timeline on projects, they had issues with that. Or someone else said, not enough people. You know, wished SIGAR was bigger.

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
Those are just some examples of what—

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Yeah. They're-- Yeah. I guess one of those. Yeah. Which is-- as far as timelines could be looked at, some of the managers. You know? Their skills could have been better, you know, as I looked at, because I was more seasoned by the time I came here. But those are all things that work out in the agency. So that's why I didn't look at those. This-- you know, I got here. I do my job. And I do it the best I can.

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AFTER U.S. WITHDRAWAL / AUGUST 2021

INTERVIEWER:

I've asked this question also in every interview. You know, August 2021 happened. How did you feel, after everything you'd worked on, all the people you met? How did you feel seeing how things ended up?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Mad. Mad. A lot of money poured in there. It's a lot of money. Like I said, probably more money than we needed to pour in there. But we did pour in a lot of money, for it to be handed over. Could we have gone in and-- I don't know. You know, maybe the way to warfare isn't what we needed to get-- we went in with-- and I have-- so I'm not up in the defense world. I mean, the high defense world. That's the planning. But maybe we needed to go in and do warfare like them [the Afghans]. More of that guerrilla-type warfare. Maybe a bigger, like, special ops type of warfare, you know, to really root out Taliban, but then it's an ideology, you know, that you're fighting against.

And if government's not helping-- I'm talking about the Afghan government, you know, where the people can trust in that Afghan government, then Taliban was taking off out the-- in the outskirts, in the rural areas and getting people confident in them and paying people and doing for the people what the government, Afghan government probably should have been.

And so they kept biting off those pieces on the outside. And the only thing that the people could see was that people in Kabul are being taken care because the government's in there. People in Kandahar are being taken care of because the government's there.

But "us guys out in the rural areas" – they don't like us. But "Taliban takes care of us. Taliban takes care of our problems. Taliban pays us money to be a part of Taliban. The Afghan government doesn't." So it is kind of hard – once Taliban did take over those little pieces and start coming north, you know – for it to stop the wave after that point.

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WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LESSONS LEARNED?

INTERVIEWER:
What were your lessons learned in Afghanistan – about Afghanistan, about oversight, and about what you and SIGAR were able to accomplish?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
Hmm. About Afghanistan? [*WHEW*] How do you deal with these-- that type of conflict? I-- you know, that's-- how do you deal with Afghanistan itself? Russians had been over there. Got kicked out. We go over there. We're going to change it. Did we? Somewhat. Just didn't get enough time to take root.

And I don't know whether we could change. I don't know. So how do you do that? You know?

SIGAR going over there, a great thing. You know? Us going over there, it's great. I mean, we're showing we're the face on what we were going over there for.

Us. Not SIGAR, but DoD and the State [Department] who's building it. You know? And so, yeah. So we're doing and we're helping-- letting them see that, hey, we're here. We're here to bring you that freedom to bring, you know-- that you don't have to go and rely on Taliban.

But it's hard, because we're talking to the people that are in Kabul. We're talking to the U.S. government. The people could see things. They could see what we're building. They could see what U.S. is doing, you know, but they weren't seeing, I guess, that much from their government.
//
INTERVIEWER:
As far as the American public is concerned, what do you wish they would understand about this agency and the kind of work it does?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
I wish the American public would understand that the work we do in overseeing it, that we are overseeing, as we say, their money that is being used effectively, our busi-- where it's [being used] effectively, efficiently, and economically-- and that we're doing that, the job we're doing.

We're holding the U.S. government because – as I say, the U.S., the Army, the Navy or whoever, DoD, State Department, USAID – you know, United States Agency for Development – we're holding them accountable as being the government agency that's actually doing the right on-the-ground oversight of these contractors that's doing the construction.

And we're holding to make sure that they're doing their oversight to make sure that, you know, everything is going according to the contract. So I think SIGAR's work is great – to make sure that the U.S. government agencies are doing what they're supposed to be doing.

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WHAT DID SIGAR ACCOMPLISH IN AFGHANISTAN?

INTERVIEWER:
Bottom-line: at the end of all of this, what do you think that this agency accomplished – for the American people in Afghanistan?

INTERVIEWEE 20:
For the American people? First, for the American people is the guarding of the money, overseeing of the money, and making sure not only the money, but then, for the people, overseeing the construction work that was done and making sure that the construction work that was done was

quality construction work according to the contract, according to-- or whatever is the policy, that they're adhering to some policy in that. So I think that's what SIGAR does. That's what SIGAR does for the American public, that we're guarding the money. Guarding the money. Guarding the work that's being done and making sure that it's being done correct.

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