

Interviewer:

Good afternoon. Today, September 10, 2015, we're in the West Point Center for Oral History with Marine Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Robert Darling. Good afternoon, sir.

Robert Darling:

Good afternoon, Dave. Great to be with you.

Interviewer:

Thank you. Could you please spell your last name for us for our transcribers?

Robert Darling:

Darling, just like "Oh my" - D-A-R-L-I-N-G.

Interviewer:

Okay. And sir, tell us a little bit about your background. About your childhood, where you grew up -

Robert Darling:

Sure.

Interviewer:

And what made you interested in joining the military.

Robert Darling:

Sure. I was born in Patchogue, Long Island, back in 1965. Moved to Newburgh, New York, where I spent my whole growing-up life there. Went to Balmville School, North Junior High School; I did a few years at New York Military Academy during seventh and eighth grade, so then I went back to North Junior High School, N.F.A., Newburgh Free Academy, and then I went to Iona College in 1983.

Interviewer:

All right. And what did you major in?

Robert Darling:

Economics. I wanted to be the world's greatest stockbroker, and the quickest way to that path was through economics, and Iona was the choice.

Interviewer:

Okay. How did you end up in the Marine Corps from there?

Robert Darling:

Well, I tell you what, I had no aspirations of military service all growing up. I had an uncle who was a Staff Sergeant in the Marines on my dad's side. And then I think he had a Navy Captain as well; his brother was a Navy Captain, a Weatherman for the Navy, and that was it. And my brother, my brother Dennis, who's about ten months older than me, joined the Navy when I was in high school. But my dad, yeah, I guess my dad was in the Navy for a few years, way back before I was born.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

Other than that, that's it. We were going to go off and do business and all this. Well, I was a freshman at Iona, and all of a sudden, 1983, October 23, Beirut bombing happens. Everybody on campus is talking about the Beirut bombing. It was a shock. They said we lost 240 service members in that blast and 220 of those were Marines. So naturally, in college we're sitting around talking about that, and we're like, "Well, what are the Marines doing there? Why were so many Marines in Beirut, Lebanon, at this time? What was the mission of the Marine Corps? I thought the Marine Corps was an amphibious force. We're not at war." I really didn't understand why they were deployed, so I started getting more in tune with world events, geopolitical situations, and I wanted to know more about the Marine Corps. Well, as time went on, my freshman year, my sophomore year, all of a sudden I started my junior year, I saw two good friends of mine that had just returned from Officer Candidate School. They were part of the Platoon Leaders class. They went down to Quantico, Virginia. They had their heads shaved. They lost a lot of weight, they're in great shape. And I went up to them going, "Hey, what's the story?"

“What’s the deal with you two? What happened?” You know. “Well, we’re joining the Marine Corps after graduation. We went to O.C.S. You can do it too, Bob. Now you know they’re offering aviation contracts and whatever you want to do.” So immediately I was intrigued. I had the Beirut bombing on my mind. Now I’m intrigued. I see two friends doing it. So I’m saying, “That’s it. I’m going to go find out more about this.” Visited the Officer Selection Officer in New York City. He told me I got to get my grades up, got to get the credits done, you know, got to compete for this slot. It’s not a gimme. And got to take the A.S.V.A.B., got to do all those things that are required. In the meantime, went and spoke to my dad, my mom, told them what I wanted to do, what I wanted to try to do. Ultimately passed the test, passed the interview, got a slot for it was June of 1986, ten weeks’ Officer Candidate School. Went down there, they tried my mettle, I passed the test. Came back in August 17 pounds lighter, new focus in life, wanted to be a Marine Officer. Went to my senior year, got it done, and I was commissioned on board the U.S.S. Intrepid on June 6, 1987.

Interviewer:

Wow. That’s fabulous. June 6 too, huh?

Robert Darling:

June 6.

Interviewer:

That’s pretty appropriate.

Robert Darling:

Yeah, pretty appropriate day in history.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Well, that’s fabulous. So you didn’t do R.O.T.C.

Robert Darling:

No.

Interviewer:

You did O.C.S. as a college student - that’s great. And how was your early Marine training?

Robert Darling:

Well, you know, tough, as you would expect. But I went down to the Basic School, Second Lieutenants all go to the Basic School. We learn how to be Platoon Commanders down there. And then from there everybody branches off into their own military occupational specialty. I, since I had a flight contract, from there went down to Flight School. It was jets, props, or helos. You have to compete for all that. I didn’t know what I wanted to fly at the time, when all of a sudden when I was at the Basic School - matter of fact, I was doing a Platoon Leaders’ exercise, and I was doing a nine-line brief. I had a section of Cobras under my control. We’re supposed to put ordnance on target, and this godlike Captain came over the radio and said, “Hey, Lieutenant, don’t worry about it. Just tell me where you are, and we’ll figure out where the target is.” And I’m like, “What does he mean by that?” “Sir, I’m on hill Alpha Bravo 106,” and sure enough, this Cobra landed on Hill Alpha Bravo 106. This Captain jumped out, he came over, and I was hooked. I said, “I want to be you.” So I was destined to be a Cobra pilot at that point. So sure enough, all through Flight School I was just competing for Cobras.

There was two Cobra spots available the day I got close to my Winging, one at West Coast, one East Coast. I got the East Coast slot. My life has turned out just the way I planned it.

Interviewer:

Okay. So it seems like fortune was smiling upon you the whole way through.

Robert Darling:

Well, you know, you only hear the good days.

Interviewer:

Sure, yeah.

Robert Darling:

I won't bore you with the bad days.

Interviewer:

Of course.

Robert Darling:

But it did work out. My perseverance, my drive to be a Cobra pilot, to get through Flight School. There was no band and parade when I graduated Flight School. I was the middle of the pack my whole way through, but it did work out. And I was assigned to H.M.L.A. 269 on the East Coast in Jacksonville, North Carolina, to go be a Gun Runner.

Interviewer:

Okay. So what was it like to fly a Cobra?

Robert Darling:

You know, unbelievable. I always tell folks that don't fly that it's like driving a Corvette at full speed. You feel the torque in the wheels, and the torque in the main rotor, and you're carrying all the ordnance you can carry. You're going out to blow something up, go on back to get more stuff just to go out and do it again. So it was a thrill of a lifetime; I truly enjoyed it. My first deployment was Desert Shield-Desert Storm right out there. I did it right after Saddam invaded Kuwait the first time, August 2, 1990. Went out there for eight and a half months. We flew a lot of rear area security. Right up then it was a 100-hour ground war. We ran in like everybody else, got a couple hours of combat time before everybody pulled back out. When I got home, I initially thought, "Hey, that was pretty cool; I want to go again." And sure enough, Somalia kicked off in 1993, and I deployed back to Somalia, Africa, with 24 M.E.U., 2-4 M.E.U., and we did our job out there, too. We chased bad guys around. We almost got General Aidid when he was wanted as a war criminal.

And right after we left, they had Black Hawk down, so it was a pretty significant event in our life. I came home from that, I was a Cobra Flight Instructor. I became a Military Recruiter up in First Marine Corps District. I got to fly college kids around in helicopters and planes, and try to get folks interested in Marine Aviation, when in June, 1998, I put a package in for Presidential Service down here in Quantico, Virginia, with Marine Helicopter Squadron One, H.M.X. One Squadron, and got picked up for Presidential Service. Which is really unique as a Cobra guy to get picked up for V.I.P. transport -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

Like that. It was a new challenge, and I was pleased to do it.

Interviewer:

What was it like, flying V.I.P. Service?

Robert Darling:

Well, I tell you, there's no yanking and banking. There no flying everywhere as fast as you can. It's all about being smooth, and you know, as gentle as you can for the V.I.P.s in the back. But I got to tell you, going worldwide with the President and Vice President, and some of the Cabinet members, and when the Pope comes to town, he flies with H.M.X. One, and all the dignitaries, it was really an honor. It was really kind of a cool experience.

Interviewer:

And I know you've probably met a whole bunch of interesting people. Who was the most interesting person you met, or who was the most engaging? And they could be different people for those two.

Robert Darling:

I got to tell you, though, President Clinton was the most engaging person. Every time he got in the helicopter, he would come up to the cockpit, and he was genuinely happy to see you. To the point where you're like, "I think he and I might be buds," you know. He put everybody at ease. He was just terrific to be around. And everybody really enjoyed

working for him. And I could tell you the same thing even for President Bush, when he came in. The most interesting person, though, had to have been - there were so many other folks that came to town. I was almost going to say the Pope, but I got bumped off that mission.

Interviewer:

Oh yes?

Robert Darling:

I wanted to fly the Pope, but it's amazing -

Interviewer:

Now, when would that have been?

Robert Darling:

This is before Benedict, so.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

So this is you're talking about 1999, 1998. This is - who's -

Interviewer:

Yeah. John Paul II?

Robert Darling:

John Paul II. And naturally, I got bumped off John Paul II, because - and he's a rock star.

Interviewer:

Yeah, of course.

Robert Darling:

So - and then all of a sudden in October of 2000, I got ordered by the Commanding Officer to go be part of the White House Military Office.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

That is - as the Marine representative inside the White House, it is an honor. But it's a non-flying billet, you know. It's one of those bittersweet type things. I get to work in the White House, but I'm not flying anymore. And my job was Logistics, so everywhere the President goes, worldwide, in advance of him are his limosines, his helicopters, his phones, Secret Service, snipers, doctors, food - whatever he needs has to go in advance of the President. So the minute he steps off of Air Force One, all that hardware and all those people are in place, fully rehearsed, so he can execute his political agenda. You know, we're there to support him.

Interviewer:

Right. And you had to have several packages, right, because he's moving from place to place to place, and so you had to leapfrog packages, correct?

Robert Darling:

That's absolutely right. So we had so many C-5, C-17s, 141s, 130s, everything at our disposal, that we could keep up ahead of the President. And to your point, we can't outrun Air Force One, so if he's going to do multiple stops, I have to leapfrog all those Presidential packages all over the place. So the Logistics trail was tremendous, and you know that was a great experience, too.

Interviewer:

What was your most challenging trip that you were planning for the President?

Robert Darling:

You know, we're going to talk about September 11, but -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

Post-September 11, President Bush did a Japan, Korea, and China swing. And because they were happening so rapidly in succession, there was no way to be out in front of Air Force One the whole time. So we put a package in Alaska. I had a package in Japan. I had to move Alaska to Korea, Japan to China, and then I took Korea, moved to Hawaii. We had tanker support over the Pacific. We had - basically, the Air Force was at our disposal while the President did that East Asia swing, and I was -

Interviewer:

Plus you're dealing with a date line.

Robert Darling:

Oh yeah. And back-ups, you know.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

So we can't say, "Hey, we're broken; it's going to be another day till we get a part." No, we have back-ups to back-ups, so it was over 125 heavy-lift transport aircraft to support a 3-nation swing.

Interviewer:

Now, I suppose when you say, "I'm doing this for the President," no one tells you "No," right?

Robert Darling:

They wanted to tell you "No" off-line, you know?

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

There's a lot of angry folks off-line. You're putting a lot of people out. But ultimately, the military says, "Aye aye," and we just go above and beyond for the President.

Interviewer:

Right. Now, it sounds like you've been telling me what a typical day at your job was like. Is that about accurate, or what would've been a normal day for you doing your job?

Robert Darling:

Sure. In Airlift Operations a normal day is there's about five or six Aviators in there. We had one Marine, but there was two Navy, two Air Force. We had some enlisted folks helping us out, and what we would do is rotate. So one week you're doing Logistics for the President. The next week you're doing Logistics for the Vice President, and you're responsible for his movements. We have somebody responsible for the First Lady, some White House Congressional delegations. For example, if a Congressman is going to go, or a Senator's going to go overseas, and he's going on behalf of the White House, we treat them as if the President or Vice President's going. We give them the full support.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling: If they're going on their own, they're on their own. But it's so much interaction with the Air Force on so many different levels that we liked to rotate those assignments, and we do them weekly. So the week of September 11, I was responsible for the President's trip to Sarasota, Florida. That was my week. It just happened during my week.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

So I moved all that equipment I just described to you down to Sarasota, and I was waiting for him that morning to get wheels up on Air Force One coming back to Washington, D.C. Then I would clean up Sarasota and move all that equipment either to the next location, or

bring it back to Andrews.

Interviewer:

And was it a 9:00 to 5:00 job, or it sounds like much more than a 9:00 to 5:00 job?

Robert Darling:

It was - when you were on call, when you were with the President, especially that week, it was 24/7. They even put a secure phone in your house.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Robert Darling:

And you would take the planning kit home, and you're up all hours of the night if you have to be.

Interviewer:

Sure. Did you ever travel with the President, or was it -

Robert Darling:

Yes.

Interviewer:

All based out of your home?

Robert Darling:

No. We had the privilege of traveling with the President, so we actually got a chance to ride on Air Force One.

Interviewer:

Nice.

Robert Darling:

And I know first class is cool, but until you're on Air Force One, you haven't really seen first class.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

Everybody's seat was a La-Z-Boy recliner, and the cookies were the size of pancakes. I mean it was really the place to be. But any time you did an advance trip - sometimes you would go out in front of Air Force One - we got to travel doing that.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

You know, to make sure the airfields are suitable. There was a lot involved.

Interviewer:

And then that's bringing in your expertise as an Aviator -

Robert Darling:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And all that.

Robert Darling:

Where are we going to park the C-5, C-17s, back-ups? What other they're H.L.Z.s, helicopter landing zones, do we have here?

Interviewer:

Yes.

Robert Darling:

You're working with Secret Service, you're visiting hospitals, you determine motorcade routes. There's a lot of pre-planning that goes in that.

Interviewer:

Wow. Now, the morning of September 11, it started out just like a normal day for you, right?

Robert Darling:

Normal day. Got in there by 8:00 in the morning. We usually huddle up about 8:15, find out

the events of the day. We're going to talk about Sarasota. We're going to talk First Lady, Vice President. You know, go down the schedule; who's moving, who's not moving.

Interviewer:

And where was your office?

Robert Darling:

It was on the fourth deck, fourth floor of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

We're adjacent to the West Wing.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

So you see the white awning on West Executive Drive on the west side of the White House. We're the building just adjacent to that.

Interviewer:

Okay. So that's how it was in the morning. And then what happened?

Robert Darling:

Okay. We had our meeting. Everybody's on track. I'm worried about Sarasota, and someone walks in the room from the other room at around 8:46 and said, "Hey, you guys got to turn on CNN," or "Turn on the TV. Apparently a small aircraft struck the North Tower."

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

Just like everybody else, we turned it on. Crystal blue day up there in Manhattan, 78 degrees, pretty major hole in the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The Aviators in the room, one made the comment that, "That's a pretty big hole for a small airplane. There must be a lot more going on than just a pilot having a heart attack, or just inadvertently running into a major landmark like that."

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

Sure enough, while the whole world watched, we saw United 175 come into view and careen into the South Tower, at what looked like full power to us, you know. At that point, my boss, who was an Air Force Colonel, came in the room. "Eyes on me. We have a full-blown terrorist attack happening, you know, unfolding right there in the City of New York. Stand by for a lot of White House designated missions." And what that meant was if F.E.M.A. or Homeland Security now, but back then it was just F.E.M.A., if they call the White House and say, "Hey boss, I need to get up there. I got doctors, medicine, supplies," and the White House says, "Go," they become a one-alpha-one priority. We'll push baby food on the next available aircraft, get to all their folks, load it up at Andrews Air Force Base, get them out of here as quick as we can. If they try to just go their own route and call the DoD and say, "I want to get up to New York to help out," well, they're no more important than Interior, or Energy, or Commerce -

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

Or anybody else. So we were standing by for a lot of government agencies calling the White House, saying, "I want to go help."

Interviewer:

Okay. So you expected a lot of dynamic reprioritization -

Robert Darling:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Of assets.

Robert Darling:

That's right. Exactly right.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

And we're telling the Air Force, "Divert everything you got into Andrews Air Force Base. Let's start stacking them because -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

"Let's get them refueled, get them stacked, because we're going to start moving things to New York."

Interviewer:

And so this isn't just cargo. Now, are you also dealing any with combat jets -

Robert Darling:

No.

Interviewer:

Or anything like that? You're just dealing with cargo to move agencies.

Robert Darling:

That's right. We're just dealing with logistics and cargo.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

We're not doing anything with fighter aircraft at this point.

Interviewer:

All right.

Robert Darling:

So as the day was going on, we're working the phones, we're prioritizing missions, we're asking for White House Deputy Chief of Staff to review all these requests. And all of a sudden an airliner overflew the White House. This airliner was so low, and so loud, we froze in our tracks right around 9:35. Somebody ran to the window and said, "I just saw a big white jet in a hard left-hand turn heading west." Within minutes we heard breaking news, fire and explosion over at the Pentagon. So we assumed that the jet that just overflew the White House - which is prohibited air space - was the same jet that must've circled around and hit the west side of the Pentagon. And as it turned out, they were two separate jets. What struck the Pentagon at 9:37 was American Airlines Flight 77. It originated out of Dulles Airport, went as far as Ohio, came back in, right 360, west side of the building. What broke P-56 was N.A.O.C., the National Airborne Ops Center, the Doomsday plane, because everybody - some folks may know that we had a Air Force Nuclear Command and Control exercise going on that morning.

And they had this E-4B, this 747, parked at Andrews. And for whatever reason, when they scrambled - probably to get near the President during actual emergencies - they made a left-hand turn out of Andrews too tight for a big 747. They broke P-56.

Interviewer:

What's P56?

Robert Darling:

Is the prohibited airspace over the White House.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

And that's what got the Vice President and everybody else yanked up by the Secret Service and pushed underground at that time.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

So hereâ€™s this jet goes by, Pentagonâ€™s on fire. We donâ€™t have just a one-city attack, we have a multi-city air attack on the United States, when all of a sudden at 9:45, all the speaker boxes blare to life: â€œEvacuate the White House. Evacuate the Eisenhower Building.â€ First time since 1814 the White House had been evacuated.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Robert Darling:

Last time that happened, Dolley Madison was carrying George Washingtonâ€™s print out the back door.

Interviewer:

Exactly.

Robert Darling:

And here we are, 187 years later, and those same - different speaker boxes -

Interviewer:

Different speaker boxes.

Robert Darling:

Are now going off.

Interviewer:

Back then, it was a can on a string.

Robert Darling:

Yep, exactly right. There was a canary that flew by or something.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

But here we are now evacuating the White House. So sure enough, my boss, that Air Force Colonel, said, â€œYou canâ€™t stay here.â€ And I was like, â€œSir, I canâ€™t leave. President Bush is not coming back to Washington, D.C. Wherever he goes, he needs helicopters, limosines, phonesâ€ - everything I just described to you earlier. He said, â€œGreat. Then go down to the Presidentâ€™s Emergency Operations Center under the White House, the bunker complex down there, do logistics. The rest of us are going to the alternate site, and weâ€™ll come up on the net when we get there.â€

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

So as I got to the top of the Eisenhower stairs - now, I got the planning kit in my hand, top of the stairs - I had to pause for a moment. The Secret Service is really - theyâ€™re guarding a fortress, if you will, what the White House is. And they have from Lafayette Park to the park in the north there to the Ellipse in the south there, they have Secret Service in plain clothes, uniformed. They have a Crisis Action Team. They have all types of different levels of security. And yet this day, the gates to the south are wide open, the gates to the north were wide open. Everybody had an automatic weapon, and the Secret Service are yelling to staffers, â€œLadies, take off your heels and run. Thereâ€™s another plane inbound.â€ So watching these 20-something-year-old professionals kicking off clothes and shoes and sprinting off the White House campus was really just an unbelievable sight.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Robert Darling:

So I got across the street and showed my credentials. Secret Service lets me in. Before long we get downstairs. Imagine a big iron door opens, big door closes, and Iâ€™m inside the Presidentâ€™s Emergency Operations Center, or the bunker under the White House.

Interviewer:

Can you describe what that felt like to you?

Robert Darling:

Well, I tell you, I was anxious to get to work, 'cause I was concerned about making sure the Air Force was going to pick up the Presidential package. So what it was like to me was, "Hey, let's get down there. Let's get to work. Let's get the Air Force to pick up those limosines, helicopters, phones. Let's get them out to the President wherever he's going to go."

Interviewer:

Which seems to be kind of a testament to the training that we all receive that when bad things happen, you just react, right?

Robert Darling:

You react and you do your job. Everybody just kind of zones in on what needs to be done at the time, and then everybody does it. And that was my job at the time; get down there and do that. The first person I saw when I got to the bunker complex was Vice President Cheney's Military Aide. He was an Air Force Major, good friend of mine. I said, "Hey Tom, I'm here to do logistics. I'll stay out of your way." And he said, "Bob, forget logistics. Answer the phones. They're ringing off the hook." So you can imagine this Operations Center with a bunch of military members answering phones, sitting at their consoles. I looked down the line, and sure enough, near the end there was an empty chair, an empty desk, and sure enough, the phone was ringing. So I ran down there, I dropped the bag, I sit down. It's 9:52. I pick up the phone. It happened to be a direct line to the West Wing, the Situation Room. Now, that's not a hardened facility; that's a secure communications hub in the West Wing. And sure enough, the guy on the other end said, "We have another hijacked plane, 16 miles south of Pittsburgh, inbound, Washington, D.C." That was my first phone call. So I'm thinking, "Holy, holy mackerel," here. "You're going to have to just hold on. Let me pass it to the Mil Aide." And as I put my hand over the receiver there and I turned to my right, there stood Vice President Cheney.

And behind him was his wife Lynn, and then Dr. Rice and her Deputy, Stephen Hadley. Anybody who was everybody upstairs in the West Wing that was now forced underground as a result of the P-56 being violated from the E-4B was now at my console, asking about this first phone call from the Situation Room regarding this hijacked aircraft somewhere south of Pittsburgh. "Mr. Vice President, 16 miles south of Pittsburgh," you know, I relayed the message. And right away, he turned to his left, and up on the wall were these three speaker boxes, if you will, and they were direct lines to different places. When the first one came to life, it was a direct line to the F.A.A., the Herndon, Virginia, F.A.A. Command Center. The person on the other end's name was Rick. He said, "Rick, this is the Vice President. Can you confirm somewhere south of Pittsburgh, we have a hijacked plane?" "Mr. Vice President, stand by; we're checking." Sure enough, he came back and said, "They are not talking. They're not squawking. Their transponder is not giving altitude, air speed, and direction." That black box is off, if you will. "And they're way off course. Mr. Vice President, that's a hijacked plane."

Interviewer:

And at this time, all the other aircraft in America had been grounded, right?

Robert Darling:

No yet.

Interviewer:

Not yet; okay.

Robert Darling:

Now, we have the air traffic controllers, and that regional decisions are going out to say, "Ground stop at Logan. Ground stop at Kennedy. Ground stop - it's not a nationwide "Clear the skies," okay? So some folks were taking action in their region. So we had some aircraft out of the skies, but we still had 2,000-plus airliners there.

Interviewer:

So that's a lot of air traffic controllers taking initiative for what they knew was -

Interviewer:

That's right.

Interviewer:

A crisis developing, wanting to clear it. That's pretty good, too.

Interviewer:

That's right, and I got to tell you, when we reflect back on the heroes of 9/11, and you go back to the first responders that did their job, and the air traffic controllers that cleared the sky, and everyone who went to work that day in compartmentalized and focused, and did what they needed to do. And we didn't run off one runway, we did not clip one wing, we didn't lose a patient to a diabetic coma, we didn't have one snakebite victim not make it to a hospital. Everybody just rose to the challenge as Americans and did what they needed to do to get America back on its feet. It was really - you know, talk about a testament to people's professional lives and the services to American, But we have just so many professional people who just did extraordinary things that day. So that's the first phone call, passed to the Vice President. Now he gets confirmation that we have a hijacked plane. He merely turns to his second speaker box. It's a direct line to the National Military Command Center over at the Pentagon. We're looking for the other member of the National Command Authority. There's only two people in government who can give lethal offensive commands out to our fighter jets: President, Secretary of Defense.

Vice president is not in the chain of command. He's only there in case the President becomes incapacitated, or he needs to break a tie in the Senate.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling: Okay, so now he's looking for that other member of the National Command Authority. Rumsfeld is not over in the Pentagon; he's not in the National Military Command Center. At 9:03, he didn't respond. At 9:37 when the Pentagon was hit, he ran outside to assist with the wounded.

Interviewer:

Wow

Robert Darling:

So very admirable, he wants to go and help and set up a triage, but we have nobody at the helm right now of the U.S. government.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

And we have all this infrastructure, and nobody's there to give orders. So sure enough, Cheney's asking for this one-star General over there, Brigadier General Winfeld, came on the net and said, "Mr. Vice President, he's not here. How can I help you?" And Cheney - someone who was a Congressman from Wyoming, a White House Chief of Staff of President Ford, a Secretary of Defense for H.W. Bush, and now Vice President for George Bush - inserted himself back in the chain of command and said, "I want two F-15s. I want them at Otis Air National Guard Base. Let me know when they're airborne. Stand by to shoot this aircraft down." So talk about shock. This was my first phone call. I was all trained, my 14 years in the Marine Corps up to this point were, create options for the President.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

I just passed this off, and sure enough, create options - forget it. We got F-15s now airborne. They reported supersonic over Long Island, New York, five minutes away from United Flight 93. They wanted to be confirmed, weapons free to engage, and without

hesitation, they were cleared hot to shoot it down. A few minutes later - now weâ€™re all listening. Everybodyâ€™s on standby. 10:05 the satellite radios in the bunker complex all come blaring back to life. â€œAircraft down. Aircraft down 68 miles south of Pittsburgh. No survivors.â€ For a brief moment in history, we thought, on orders from the Vice President to the U.S. Air Force, we just shot down a civilian airliner carrying both terrorists and innocent civilians out of the sky over America. Cheney had his back to us. He was staring up at those three speaker boxes at the time. Everybody was dead silent. And all of a sudden, he spun around, he walked right over to my console, and said, â€œFor the Congressional investigation, state your full name.â€ And Iâ€™m thinking, â€œHoly mackerel - Iâ€™m here to do logistics.â€

And sure enough, â€œMr. Vice President, itâ€™s Major Bob Darling.â€ He goes, â€œFrom Major Darling, to the Vice President, to the National Military Command Center, we just shot that plane down. I really need to talk to the President.â€ And everybody know is scrambling. â€œAir Force One, Air Force One,â€ theyâ€™re trying to get Air Force One up on the net, when those same speaker boxes blared back to life that the F-15s never fired. The F-15s never fired. So now Cheney is standing behind me to my right, and hearing this news like everybody else, and he leans over to his wife and he says, â€œYou know, honey, however those aircraft crashed, at least we have a plane full of heroes rather than a plane full of victims.â€ And that was the kind of morning that we had that day.

Interviewer:

Thatâ€™s incredible. So that planeâ€™s down, the two have hit the Towers, the Towers have not fallen yet, have they?

Robert Darling:

No.

Interviewer:

So what happened from there?

Robert Darling:

So the Towers were in the process of falling all in the midst of this, because at 9:59, we did lose the South Tower. So we had F-15s airborne, South Tower on the ground, and we didnâ€™t shoot Flight 93 down, and it all seemed to happen in the same 6 or 7-minute time frame. And I got to tell you, when it was reported to us that the South Tower collapsed, there was disbelief in the bunker complex. Weâ€™re watching CNN, the TVâ€™s on, and everybody was yelling, â€œItâ€™s not true.â€ Maybe we lost the first ten floors. Maybe it just pancaked on top of each other. Maybe a portion of it broke off. But thereâ€™s no way in a city of 8 million, in Lower Manhattan, with 750,000 people on any given day working down there, a building with 25,000 people was going to be on the ground. People just could not come to grips with it. And finally Cheney said, â€œItâ€™s on the ground, and does anybody know how many people work there?â€ And he literally flipped over a sheet of paper, and people were yelling, â€œMr. Vice President, 7 buildings in the square, 50,000 people on any given day. We got the South Tower on the ground right now.â€ And heâ€™s doing some rough-order math. The President came up on the net right now, and he goes, â€œMr. President, we lost the South Tower. To our best guess that we have 20,000 dead Americans in New York City.â€ And hearing him just say that. And he goes, â€œMr. President, while I got you on the phone, sir, we just got word a portion of the Pentagon has just collapsed. We have 800 to 1,000 dead over at the Pentagon.â€ And then they had some words, and the President ended up hanging up the phone. And then right after that, they had an Air Threat Conference. An Air Threat Conference is the President and anybody else in this Cabinet whoâ€™s got something to say to the President; you know, the bunch of folks who can give him situational awareness type updates. Rumsfeld is now back in the building, so itâ€™s about 10:15 now. Air Threat Conference is going on. And it was when they were going around the table, when it got over to Rumsfeld, he said, â€œMr. President, I recommend that we move our strategic nuclear forces from DEFCON 4 down to DEFCON 3.â€ DEFCON 5 is peace. DEFCON 1

is imminent nuclear war. Weâ€™re going to go DEFCON 4 to DEFCON 3. And the reason behind that is whenever a DEFCON condition changes, no radios are even required. It just goes on the net. A DEFCON changes. Submarines dive. Ships get out of port. Soldiers and Marines man out. Bombers get loaded. Bases get hardened. Recall rosters go out. The United States Military just moves whenever a DEFCON condition changes. President Bush said, â€œYou know, itâ€™s a great idea; have them standby for DEFCON 2.â€ We havenâ€™t been in DEFCON 2 since 1962; that was the Cuban Missile Crisis, and that was only a North American DEFCON 2. We havenâ€™t been at DEFCON 3 since the Yom Kippur War during 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, so pretty significant event. And sure enough, Cheney turns to Dr. Rice, whoâ€™s now sitting here on my right, and goes, â€œCondi, make it happen.â€ Just like you would imagine on T.V., she picks up the red phone, calls over to the Pentagon. â€œExecutive order from the President of the United States. Move our strategic nuclear forces from DEFCON 4 down to DEFCON 3, standby 2.â€

When you heard that go over the satellite communication network to Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, and then from Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, out to our four-star Combatant Commanders, and all of a sudden you heard, â€œThis is SOUTHCOM. We are at DEFCON 3 standing by DEFCON 2.â€ PACOM, Atlantic Command, Central Command, Joint Forces Command, NORAD, European Command - it was a pivotal moment in American history when we went from taking body blows from terrorists to being an offensive lethal force. America is now going to war. We just donâ€™t know who weâ€™re going to war with yet. But everybodyâ€™s battenning down the hatches, and Americaâ€™s got a complete different posture. Sure enough, I got to tell you, Dave, two minutes later my phone rings. Itâ€™s President Putin holding for the President of the United States while I take the call.

Interviewer:

Nice.

Robert Darling:

You know? And Iâ€™m thinking, â€œNo. Itâ€™s not my job. Iâ€™m here to do logistics.â€ But sure enough, I cover the receiver, I yell out to everybody in the room, â€œI have President Putin on the phone for the President of the United States. Mr. Vice President, will you take the call?â€ You know the room goes silent. Cheneyâ€™s shoulders slump over. Like the great leader he was, he told Condi, â€œYou take the call,â€ Condoleeza Rice. So she came over and took the phone from me, and sheâ€™s talking to President Putin about the events of the day. That our Presidentâ€™s still in motion. We donâ€™t know if the attack is over yet. And heâ€™s going to call you the first chance he gets. And by the way, thank you for standing down your nuclear forces, and she hung up. And I guess later one we learn what she meant by that is when - an important part of the START Treaty, the Strategic Nuclear Alliance we have with Russia, is whenever we go DEFCON anything, Russia matches our DEFCON condition, and vice versa. Well, they decided to stay at DEFCON 4 while America went to DEFCON 3, and she was thanking him for standing down our intents.

Interviewer:

For being calm.

Robert Darling:

Yeah. â€œCause you could imagine all those people that want to live on this planet between them and us are, you know, a little concerned when -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

Two superpowers are going DEFCON anything.

Interviewer:

Wow. Thatâ€™s incredible. And so you said - so as they switched to DEFCON 3, possibly DEFCON 2, weâ€™re beginning to move to offensive planning, or -

Robert Darling:
That's right.

Interviewer:

Preparation to - so what sort of planning went on while you were down in the bunker?

Robert Darling:

And that planning - that's a great question, because that planning has already occurred in the form of OPLANs, or Operational Plans, over at the Pentagon.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

Right now. So now we're having a heavier reliance on Rumsfeld and company, over in the DoD, to say, "Hey, the President's going to want these Operational Plans brought over to the White House." But we were still reeling. We weren't quite shifted over from the attack in progress and establishing those OPLANs yet, those Operational Plans. Because right after that, we soon had - it wasn't long, 10:28, when we lost the North Tower. President's on the net, Vice President's talking to him on speaker box. "Mr. President, North Tower's on the ground up there in Manhattan, sir. It's my best guess we have 40,000 dead Americans in Manhattan." We weren't even sure President Bush was still on the phone. We thought maybe it was one of those calls that dropped off. He was speechless, really, by the whole thing. And finally he came back and said, "What's Mayor Giuliani saying? Anybody talked to Mayor Giuliani?" Vice President said, "No sir, we haven't been able to get hold of the Mayor. No report from him." "What are the hospitals reporting to us right now? What are we getting as far as dead and wounded up there in Manhattan from the hospitals?" "Sir, no reports from the hospitals yet." "Well, what's F.E.M.A. saying? What's F.E.M.A.'s assessment for what's happening up there?" And he paused for a minute, and the Vice President said, "Sir, F.E.M.A. hasn't even left yet." So it was a gut-wrenching moment when the leader of the free world is out there as President of the United States, and we had no response to the terrorist attack an hour and 45 minutes after the first attack began. We had no forces on the ground. We had disjointed fire response in the air. It just seemed like America was just back on its heels, trying to get itself right-sized, and we just weren't there yet. Finally the Vice President took the President off the speaker box, turned his back to us. They had a private moment for a second before he hung up.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

After that, after we lost the North Tower at that point, it was all about reconstituting our forces. Where are the fighters? Is everybody on the ground right now? Is the skies clear? And what's happened with the Pentagon? The Pentagon was getting carrier battle groups out of port. We got the U.S.S. George Washington out of Norfolk. We got the John F. Kennedy out of Jacksonville, and they're going to war. They just want to know who they're going to war with. The Air Force is moving. Europe is moving. Everybody's reporting back in right now. The President was moving. He went to Barksdale Air Force Base, and then he went to Offut soon after that, Home Strategic Command. And then we kind of got a sense the attack was over. President came up on the net. He's out at Offut, and he said, "I'm going to cancel my Continuity of Presidency," which separated the President, Vice President, and Speaker of the House from being in the same location. "I'm coming back to Washington, D.C. I'll be back at 6:30 tonight, and I want a second Presidential Daily Briefing." He gets a briefing every day at 8:00, and he wanted a second one that day, and it better have actionable intelligence.

So this is 9/11, where C.I.A. doesn't talk to F.B.I., D.I.A., you know, N.S.A. Everybody was still stovepiped, and "I got a secret," and now he's saying, "Break that

down. Bring that information in. I want to see actionable intelligence when I get back. And now Dr. Rice was responsible for that happening. Everybody was black Suburbans and briefcases going out to start building the President's daily brief.

Interviewer:

Okay. Now, were you a part of that brief when it

Robert Darling:

I was - they were building it as far away as this table is from me, but I was not a part of that. That was not my role. My role was still to either be a liaison between the Pentagon and the Vice President when those calls required that, or to be in charge of logistics. Where's the Cabinet? How can I get folks home? How do we move things around the United States? What needs to happen? For example, soon we learned that the F.B.I. Hostage Rescue Team, the elite counterterrorism team, was in San Francisco on a training exercise, the whole team. Well, San Francisco is also where United Flight 93 was supposed to land, so the place was full of United families and crew, grief counselors, everybody else. And when United learned that H.R.T. was there as well, they went up through their chain of command, over to Justice, into the White House, to say, "We would like to fly H.R.T. back home to Washington, D.C." The Deputy White House Chief of Staff, Joe Hagan, came over to me and said, "Hey, airlift operations guy, if we free up a C-17, does that help you?" "Should I let them do that?" "Amen to that, sir. That would be great. Let's have United take them home. I'll use this C-17 on another mission." Well, I took those guys off my radar at the time, so United Airlines became Special Air Mission 8811. C-17 got somewhere else. I stopped tracking them. Which sure enough, the President's coming back to Washington, D.C. Now we have Special Air Mission 8811 coming back to Washington, D.C. from San Francisco. And what ended up happening was almost about midnight that night, they're coming into Washington, D.C., air space. They had two F-16s on their wing to escort them in, and it looked like we had three bogeys inbound. So literally the Secret Service had to enter the residence of the President, scoop him up out of the rack to get him down to the bunker until we can sort out who these three bogeys were, and it turned out to be -

Interviewer:

Wow.

Robert Darling:

Us and H.R.T.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Robert Darling:

So pretty busy night.

Interviewer:

I can imagine. And it's also incredible to me that with the Pentagon having been hit, and trying to deal with the casualties at the Pentagon, trying to figure out what sections were damaged, that they're still able to deploy forces from there, and began getting the OPLANs or COMPLANs out and into action.

Robert Darling:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

That's amazing.

Robert Darling:

So back to the OPLANs. So sure enough, that night it was all about who was America going to war with? And that's where the Pentagon really stepped in, and that's where you have General Myers, who is now getting ready to replace General Shelton. Folks were coming over, Rumsfeld was coming over, and that's what they were doing; they were briefing the President on those OPLANs, on what it's going to look like, and how much time do we need, how many forces is it going to take, and where are we going exactly, and are we taking multiple countries, or are we going to focus on one country? And

that, you know, was the discussion for most of the evening.

Interviewer:

Right. And while all of this was happening, what was happening with your family? I mean they knew that you got up and you went to work at the Eisenhower Building -

Robert Darling:

Right.

Interviewer:

And then it was probably just silence, wasn't it?

Robert Darling:

Not all day long.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

Right after the second Tower was hit, you know, and the Pentagon was hit, actually, my wife called in and said, "Hey, the Pentagon was hit." And a good friend of hers - we have friends that worked in the Pentagon - "They can't get through on the phone. Do you know where these guys are?" I guess if you work in the White House they assume that you have the hot button to talk to anybody, and she couldn't call them, I couldn't call them, it was one of that. And I said, "No, I don't know, but I'll listen up for them and see if I can find them later on." And then sometime during the day when we were down in the bunker complex, we had a brief moment where Dr. Rice came over and used my phone, and she called her family in Alabama. And I took that quick second to say, "Hey, I'm in the safest place imaginable, but we're really busy. I'll see you when I see you." And being a military spouse, you know -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

She had, she understood, and she's like, "Just do what you got to do."

Interviewer:

But I can imagine all the spouses of all the sailors that, you know, all of a sudden their Carrier Battle Group goes out to sea, and you know, they're gone.

Robert Darling:

Yeah, they're gone. But it didn't take long. You know, military folks, we have a great network.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

And the wives have a great network, and you know, it's like I said early on in this presentation here, that the fabric of America, you know, the grassroots guys, the first responders, the military members or spouses or families, it takes them about ten minutes to ramp up. And you know they're waving the flag, and they're saying, "Go do what you got to do. That's what you signed up for."

Interviewer:

Now, speaking of the first responders, how soon after all this did President Bush head up to New York City?

Robert Darling:

Well, that's interesting, because he wanted to go right away. But the President doesn't go anywhere without a huge footprint, security footprint. It got to the point where it would've been a distraction to the rescue effort that was still going on at Ground Zero with the loss of life up there. So it was a conscious decision that "We're not going today. We're not going tomorrow. We're going to give this five days, seven days, ten days - whatever it takes. When Giuliani tells me, and the Fire Chief and the Police Chief up there tell me we're not going to add to the chaos, our

rotor wash isn't going to knock buildings down that are just teetering on the edge, we're going to go up there, and we're going to meet with those first responders. So I think it was at least a week.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

And it was then, we're taking - and he didn't want to distract folks from saving lives, and you know -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

It was still a recovery mission. It was still a rescue mission; wasn't switched over to a recovery mission at that point. So he carefully planned that trip, and then everybody went up to be a part of that, to go and meet those first responders.

Interviewer:

Now, were you part of that planning?

Robert Darling:

I went up as part of the pre-advance to the trip; I wasn't on the trip itself. But when you talk about so many life-altering events, going up there and talking to the first responders, you're talking days after folks lost 343 of their brothers. You know, the Port Authority Police lost 18 or 20 members of their team. It is a very, very sensitive time, to say the least, and you know, for us to come on up there and look for answers - you know, if anything, we owe them answers.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

And we owe them supplies, and money, and resources, and time, and help. So we went up there, and we were really on receive, and it was a very sensitive trip and we did what we could, just to support them.

Interviewer:

What was it like for you, as you were there on the advance party to prep for this mission? What was it like for you to see all this, and to talk to some of these folks?

Robert Darling:

It was really unbelievable. It was really out of a war movie, you know, type thing. There were so many things. What really struck me was blocks away from the Towers, where the Towers went down, there was water pipes or sewage pipes standing straight through the road. So when you have 2 110-story buildings coming down on top of each other, and all that reverse plumbing going up through the system and the pipes are buckling, and manhole covers are flying off, and explosions through the road, I tried to put myself in an ordinary civilian there trying to get away from Ground Zero. He must've thought it was truly Armageddon. It must've been a horrific scene for all the folks up there. Not just the ash cloud that you see on T.V., but so much more -

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

Was happening; so much more confusion. And when you think about the response that they got from the ferry boat captains, and the guys with just ordinary boats who came over to evacuate people off Manhattan Island. You know, we were very, very touched by the true fabric of America, you know, it was - opened my eyes that day. But it's not about the great democracy that you and I are sworn to defend; it is truly about the average Joe and Jane up there, who open their storefront, and open their homes, and brought down food, and did whatever they could to make someone else's life just a little bit better.

Interviewer:

So could you describe some of the New Yorkers that you met when you came up?

Robert Darling:

Well, they were - we met some folks from 10 House, and I think it's 1010 House, when we initially went up there. But they were still reeling, okay? Their building was demolished. Their doors were blown off. So I was more - I got to tell you I was more into be seen and not heard type mode.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

I was in the background.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

I wasn't reaching out to folks to kind of ask them how they're feeling just yet. It was "Where are we going to go?" I was doing my logistics role. Where's the President going to go, and how's he not going to interfere, and everybody was up there. We weren't there to interview, per se.

Interviewer:

Sure, of course.

Robert Darling:

We were just taking it in.

Interviewer:

And one of the things that struck me at the beginning of your interview is you mentioned that the Beirut bombing was something that really kind of got you interested in the Marines. And as you reflected on this, did it ever occur - or I'm sure it did - but -

Robert Darling:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you see any parallels between the Beirut bombing, the thing that got you interested in joining the Marine Corps, and what you were experiencing around September 11?

Robert Darling:

Yeah. The obvious parallel is, once again, terrorism. We've been dealing with terrorism - I know folks think it started on 9/11, but our country's been dealing with terrorists well before 9/11. The Beirut bombing was just one of them. You know, we had the Khobar Tower, over in Saudi Arabia. We had our Embassies in Dar Es Salaam, Sudan, and Kenya there that were destroyed by terrorists. We've been dealing with terrorism for a long time, and 9/11 kind of brought it home. One thing, you know, as a military man, a military Officer, you say, "You know, that's our job." We raised our right hand to take an oath to defend the Constitution, as well as these Americans, and I felt a little bit like we let them down, and we need to go clean this up, because that's their job. They're not supposed to be worried about being attacked. That's what we signed up to do, is to take care of that for them. And I remember going home, and when I saw my wife the next day, and my kids were young, seven and four years old, but I felt like gosh, this is going to be a long struggle against terrorism.

And we probably let these boys down, where they won't have a choice whether they want to voluntarily serve. There's going to be a draft. This is going to be a generational struggle and it's going to take all hands on deck, to include my two sons, whose future has now been determined for them. So there was a lot of emotion going through me -

Interviewer:

Sure.

Robert Darling:

At how this was going to affect my life and change my life.

Interviewer:

Yeah, I can imagine. When you were down in the bunker, and all the talk that was going on,

did you know immediately who was responsible? Did you all have ideas? Or what was kind of the talk that was going on about that?

Robert Darling:

Yeah, you know, so people are throwing out names. You know, people are throwing out al-Qaeda, and people are throwing out terrorism. But you know, I wasn't focused on that yet. I still had so much to do, and I was focused on supporting the President, and those were just words. It wasn't till later on, when President Bush's President's daily briefing was being rebuilt that day that it became very, very clear to everybody in the room who was responsible, where he was at, and what it was going to take to go and put an end to that. So then it was interesting to me, because then the rest is about logistics. We know who the bad guys are, we know where they are. It's one thing to launch a Tomahawk cruise missile over the horizon. It's another thing to put 300,000 troops, you know, in an Air Force, in a combat zone, and it was all about how long was that going to take. But America was determined to go to war. We were destined for war the minute that this attack happened.

Interviewer:

It's an incredible story, and you tell it in such a compelling way. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to say about this?

Robert Darling:

Well, sure. You know, one of the things I just want to tell you is that here we are 14 years later.

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

You and I are sitting in a room 14 years after this attack, talking about it as if it happened yesterday, because we're still a nation at war. We're still fighting terrorism on multiple fronts in many different countries where CNN isn't, you know? And we have 2.6 million members out there who are putting their lives on the line, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of others, whether they're F.B.I., C.I.A., N.S.A., or Special Operators around the world, doing their part to keep us safe. So I just hope as we talk about this and get more people who are aware of this terrorism that's not going away, that we somehow can bring America victory. We've got to somehow commit ourselves, adapt, improvise, overcome, morph ourselves -

Interviewer:

Right.

Robert Darling:

Into a force that's going to defeat this. You know, I'll never forget the quote that came on September 12, right after this thing, and it was from Tony Blair. And he said we had a choice to defeat it or be defeated by it, and defeat it we must. And here we are 14 years later, and we're still talking about what it's going to take to defeat it. So I hope that we're moving closer to victory.

Interviewer:

What would you tell Cadets today that are going through the Military Academy, or going through the Naval Academy, or R.O.T.C. or O.C.S. -

Robert Darling:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Looking to have a career in the military. What would you tell them about what it means to serve now?

Robert Darling:

Yeah. You know, we need these Millennials right now more than ever, because they're out-of-the-box thinkers. They're not conventional. They're not rigid. They didn't come up a certain way. They're kind of free thinkers, and if we're going to win this war, it's going to be on them. They're the ones that are going to pick up the baton,

and theyâ€™re going to carry it across the finish line for us. And we really need them to come up with new and innovative ways to find out who are enemies are, and come up with ways to defeat them. And maybe thereâ€™s a cyber front to that, maybe thereâ€™s a financial front to that, maybe thereâ€™s a kinetic conventional front to that, but these young Cadets, these Midshipmen, these Airmen who are coming out of the Service Academies today, weâ€™re going to look to them to say, â€œHey, weâ€™ve had 200 years of conventional military training right now. Weâ€™re just moving our force over to this asymmetric warfare, guerilla warfare mentality, and weâ€™re going to need your help to do that.â€ So itâ€™s just so imperative that we get the best and the brightest.

Interviewer:

Yes. Now, to get back to your, just briefly here, what did you do after the White House in your career?

Robert Darling:

April of that year, I took orders to Naval Postgraduate School. I went and got an M.B.A. in financial management, and then my follow-on tour was in the Pentagon as a Program Manager for the Navy and Marine Corps Flying Hour budget. I was the Flying Hour Program Manager. So everything that flew, everything on Carrier Aviation to Marine helicopters, we would find and make sure that they were trained and ready to deploy.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

And then from there, I retired in 2007.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Robert Darling:

October of 2007.

Interviewer:

And what have you been doing since then?

Robert Darling:

I now have a small company. Itâ€™s called Quantitative Analytics. I have some employees that do both logistics for the government as well as we do budget and planning work for the planning program budgeting and execution for the Navy, and weâ€™re chasing government contracts, so Iâ€™ll keep my ears open for the next one.

Interviewer:

Well, best of luck to you, sir.

Robert Darling:

Thank you very much.

Interviewer:

And thank you so much for being here with us today.