Oral History interview with Burt Lund, retired DEA Special Agent

Interview conducted July 1st, 2026

Burt Lund (00:00):

My name is Burt Lund, 29 years of service with DEA, and I started out before that with (BNDD (Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs).

Question: Why is the Global Nature of DEA's Mission Important?

Burt Lund (00:13):

I think you have to go back a few years in order to answer that question. Back in the late '60s and early '70s, we finally realized that the scope of drug abuse in this country had far outweighed what we thought the amount being used was. It became evident during the first seizure when they seized — in the French connection case — and they found 60 pounds of heroin, and they thought that that 60 pounds could shut down New York for a month. Later on in reality, we found out towards the end of 1960s, early 1970s, that production levels were much higher than they thought. And we also realized that we could never be a viable enforcement program without including other countries as our partners. The amount of drugs that came in over the years turned into a worldwide epidemic.

(01:10):

Other countries were involved. Some of the countries had assets, and they had the ability to fight this problem. There were smaller countries that didn't have that ability. So in the late '60s, early '70s, the mines got together in Washington D.C. and they came up with this international mobile training program where they at least gave some of the smaller countries an opportunity to be trained, to learn investigative skills, and to learn how to gather intelligence. So that became the crux of a lot of the mobile programs that we had going on. And that was how we sort of... We developed backdoor resources where we could go back to these countries and talk to the people we worked with and gain intelligence and gain information in order to help fight the problem.

Question: How Do DEA's International Operations Help Improve the American Peoples Safety and Security?

Burt Lund (02:07):

That sort of piggybacks on question number one. And basically it was by working internationally with host countries and drug enforcement units, DEA helped to train and to assist them in their program development to fight narcotics and illicit drugs that were being produced and

distributed within those countries. We helped to teach them how to interdict shipments. If you could interdict the shipment of drugs before it reached the shores of the US, it was a win proposition. It saved time, it saved manpower, it saved resources far more than what we were doing here in the country as far as our enforcement efforts. We were able to stop the drugs before it hit the shores, thereby releasing some other guys and other agents to do other work and to travel abroad to other countries and work with those enforcement agencies.

Question: What was Snowcap?

Burt Lund (03:09):

Snowcap was a program. It was a counter-drug operation designed to eliminate basically cocaine production and labs within South and Central America. It was a joint combined operation. What happened there was around, I want to say 1987, President Reagan came out with a presidential directive, and it made drug interdiction and drug enforcement a national security issue. Once that happened, and it became a national security issue, that opened up the door for the military to get involved in the drug war. Before that, we couldn't go to the military for assets. We couldn't go to the military for training. We couldn't go to the Department of Defense. Basically, if we requested something for the Department of Defense, they would send us about a hundred pairs of fatigues, some combat boots and said, "Sorry, this is all we can provide you." Now we actually have a chance to be trained.

(04:07):

We had a chance to go out and to work with the military people out of the joint operation services, particularly JSOC, which is the Joint Special Operations Command, which was headquartered at the time in the Pentagon. Some of our counterparts working in Snowcap were the Border Patrol, the Coast Guard, United States Air Force, United States Marine Corps, the host country, indigenous police, their military. So it was a combined joint operation and a combined enforcement operation.

(04:51):

The regions were basically Bolivia, Peru, let me see, Guatemala. We had some cursory operations going in Ecuador at the time and a few in Central America, Belize was one country in question. We had snow cap teams in Bolivia. We had them in Peru. Peru was exceptionally dangerous because the team was located in an area called the Huallaga Valley in Peru. If you go back and you read the history of what was taking place in the Huallaga Valley, it was the home of the Sendero Luminoso, which was a Maoist insurgent group of about five or 6,000 people. And they were very, very violent and they were responsible for approximately 69,000 murders. We were building a base camp right in their backyard. So that called for some other training

and some other equipment that you would not normally find in a law enforcement situation. Those were the basic countries we operated in.

Question: What was Your Role in Snowcap?

Burt Lund (06:10):

In order to answer that, I have to go back before I actually got to Snowcap. I had applied to be a team leader in Snowcap around 1988. I called up Frank White, who I knew, and I told Frank I wanted to be a team leader. I knew I had my rotation tour as a GS-14 coming up very shortly. I didn't want to sit at the desk. I thought this would be a great opportunity for me to get out in the field to learn something new. When I talked to Frank, he said that all the team leader positions were closed, but when I got to headquarters to talk to him and he would keep my name in the back of his head, about two months later, I got my transfer notice and the transfer notice said, "You've been transferred to Operation Snowcap as a staff coordinator and to report on such and such a date." I showed up, I met with Frank.

(07:00):

Frank said that he had some plans for me, but for the present, I was going to be the Bolivian Snowcap coordinator and handle all the operational activities going on in Snowcap in Bolivia. He gave me a packet of material about this high to read, and I was supposed to get myself familiarized with the material and how it pertained to Bolivia and what the operational activities were in Bolivia at the time. For two weeks, I went through and I read everything I could read about Bolivia. And after about two weeks one day, Frank came into the office and he said to me, "I just had a meeting. Come on, sit down for a while." So I came into his office and Frank normally wasn't a talker. He was pretty tight-lipped, and he told me to close the door, which is always Frank's way of saying this stays between us.

(07:55):

I sat down, and he said to me, "I just came back from a meeting at the Pentagon." He said, "And we just got approval to send a team of Snowcap agents through Army Ranger School." I thought to myself, "Well, why is he telling me this?" And he said, "What we're going to do is we're going to take a team and it's going to be a trial team. We're going to send the team through Army Ranger School. We're going to analyze the results, and if it meets our requirements and what we need, then we'll continue with the program. I'd like you to be the team coordinator of that." He said, "You applied to be a team leader, so this is your chance." I sort of looked at Frank and I said, "Army Ranger School?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "Frank, I'm 41 years old." And he said, "Don't worry about it. You're good shape. You'll do fine." And if you knew Frank, you knew that was pretty much the end of the conversation. So as I'm walking out of the office, he said, "Now go out there and let the Rangers know that Snowcap guys are good guys and do your thing." I

said, "Okay, Frank, I'll be happy to." As I walked out, his very last word of advice was, "Whatever you do, don't embarrass us." So that was my inroad to being a team leader. I had a team now. It was going to be in Columbus, Georgia. We were going to go through Army Ranger School, and about four days later, I'm on my way down to Columbus, Georgia. I met that night with my team. It was about 12 or 14 Snowcappers. We sat down, we had a few beers. We talked about what was about to come.

(09:30):

The next morning at 6:30, there was a bus out front. We got on the bus and it took us to Fort Benning, Georgia, where we went to this area called the Harmony Church area. We got out of the bus, there was a big sign, Fourth Ranger Training Battalion, and our first experience upon setting feet right there in the Ranger training camp was about five or six Ranger instructors came out. They told everybody, grab your bags, and in typical Ranger fashion, they don't point anywhere. They say, "Grab your bags and move that way." They pointed to a building and they said, "When you get to the building, there's a yellow line. Put your bags down in front of you, put your feet on the line and stand at attention," which we all did. About a minute later, this gentleman, an army sergeant comes walking around out of, I don't know where, and the guy looked like he was right from central casting.

(10:26):

He looked like he could have been a mass murderer or joined the army, and thank God he joined the army. He was a sergeant major and he looked really rough. His name was... I forget his name. It was command sergeant major, whatever his name was. And he started out in a very low tone of voice and he said, "You guys are now Rangers. From this point on, you answer to me." He said, "If any point in time you feel like you want to drop out of this program, you're free to do so, but until you do so, you belong to me." He said, "Now, I want you to grab your bags, go into that building behind you, put on your PT gear, come on back out and stand on the line." And he said, "You've got five minutes." We just sort of stood there looking at each other, and then all at once, after about five seconds, he screams out in a voice, "What the *expletive are you waiting for?" It was like, "Oh my God." So we all ran into the building, and about that point in time, I though to myself, "Oh, this is great. Just nine more weeks of this." So we all got dressed out, came back out, stood on the line, and that was the beginning of our entry at the Ranger School. We did the PT test, three-mile timed run. We did pushups, sit-ups, chin ups, and anybody that didn't pass the course or pass the test had to do remedial physical fitness work, which I can tell you, you didn't want to do. That was my first experience, and then we went through Ranger school. Ranger School was really unique. For the first time, we were taught combat operations. Now, this wasn't typically something that DEA agents got involved in, but

this was a whole new ball game. We learned combat weapons, which was every machine gun, every automatic weapon that the Rangers issued at the time.

(12:23):

We learned about explosives. We were taught how to use C4, how to use det cord, how to blow things up, basically. We were taught how to use Claymore mines, which is an anti-personnel mine that you plant if you're in an ambush situation. We learned how to do fire maneuver. Fire maneuver is a combat technique where you can outflank your enemy. We learned how to do land navigation in a jungle environment. Also, small unit tactics, how to move on a patrolling situation, how to outflank your opponent, how to set up ambushes, how to pull back and break contact from an ambush, some other things we did. That was the initial phase of Benning. That lasted for three weeks. The next phase was the mountain-climbing phase, and we went to mountain climbing school. And of course, we learned repelling. We learned how to do mountain climbing work, how to repel out of helicopters.

(13:32):

We were repelling out of a helicopter at 160 feet in the air. The one thing they wouldn't let us do is parachute jump. There was no need for that, and we weren't going to be calling in artillery. So those were some of the things that were cut out of the program. Again, this was a trial program, so we wanted to see what worked and what didn't work. We were taught night operations. We were taught camouflage techniques. We were taught combat medical life support, where we gave each other IVs.

(14:05):

Probably one of the most unique things, we were brought out to a combat infiltration course, and the combat infiltration course, if you could imagine a football field from the goal line to the 50 yard line, at the 50 yard line, there were two Ranger instructors who had machine guns set up in a barricade position, and they had a bar underneath them and a bar on top of the barrel, and they could only depress down to about 36 inches above the ground. Between the starting point or the goal line and the machine guns, there were a series of potholes about every 10 yards. There was barbed wire strung about a foot and a half, two feet off the ground. There were water puddles and hazards and mud, and you were told before you started this course that they were using live ammunition, which they were. So the object of the combat infiltration course was that you had all your combat gear on, you had to get down and crawl, and when you got to an obstacle, you had to go underneath the barbed wire, crawl through the mud, go through the water, and at the same time, they're flying live rounds, machine gun rounds at 36 inches above your head.

(15:31):

Now, we were told if you start to panic, whatever you do, don't stand up. Just lay there on the ground and we'll get to you. While this is all happening, you had Ranger instructors along the side throwing quarter pound blocks of TNT about five yards ahead of you and about five yards behind you, and these explosions were going off to simulate a real combat course. So as we would crawl along, every time you got the barbed wire, you'd have to roll over on your back, take your rifle and push up on a barbed wire so you could slither underneath it. Every time you did that, you looked up and you saw this tracer fire going over your head, which looked like it was about a foot over your head. In reality, it was probably two or three feet, but it certainly looked like it was a lot closer than it was.

(16:18):

We were able to get through that. Nobody got injured, so that was one of the more memorable things about Ranger training. The last thing that we went through one time or during the final phase was what was known as the Trail of Tears. This training took place in a swamp in England Air Force Base, and a lot of it, we went out for two or three days at a time. It was the last week of Ranger training, and we were beat. We were really tired, and we're moving along at night about two o'clock in the morning, and the water is about chest deep.

(16:54):

One of the agents that was in my team, a guy by the name Mike Forte, he was about five seven, the Rangers gave him the M-60 machine gun to carry. The M-60 machine gun is about 27 pounds, and with the ammo belt, it's about 30, 31 pounds. Now, Mike is about five foot seven. The gun is about three quarters of his size, height-wise, and we're going through this water, chest high deep, and I step into this hole and the water comes up to my neck. Well, I was able to get through that, and it was so dark, it was 2:00 AM in the morning, and it's just as I got my footing, I hear a *kaploop* and I hear gurgling and bubbling, and I turn around and I see Mike's cap floating across the top of the water, and I see the barrel of his machine gun about six inches above the water line.

(17:45):

So I reached back, I pulled that gun up, and Mike was attached to it, and I got Mike under the arm, and I pulled him over to where he could stand up, and he looked at me with such a look on his face, and he looked just like he was beat up, and he just looked right into my eyes and he said, "Why didn't you just let me die?" It was one of the funnier times that we had at the time. We just laughed about it. It was about four days left for Ranger School, and we knew that this would be over pretty soon.

(18:17):

That was some of the things we went through in Ranger training, and I can tell you that there was probably no DEA agents that were ever trained as thoroughly in combat operations as Snowcap agents were at the time.

Question: Who Were DEA's Partners in Snowcap?

Burt Lund (18:35):

We had partners, first of all, from the Department of Defense. A lot of the training, jungle school in particular, was put on by the Seventh Special Forces Group out of Fort German, Panama. A lot of the guys went to Jungle Training School. It was a two-week school sponsored by the Seventh Group. Later on, we began to work very closely with the Seventh Group because we needed commo support out in the jungle and we needed real medical support. Now, Special Forces medics are trained physician's assistant. They can literally operate on you. They can open you up if need be. They can do surgery. The guys are just unbelievably talented when it comes to medical support.

(19:19):

So we had one of those guys on each team. SEAL teams, I think it might've been SEAL team two. We had a couple of Navy SEALs working down in the area of Bolivia called the Trinidad, which was where the waterways were, and they did some small boat operations and did some training of the indigenous people down there, and they worked hand-in-hand with the DEA Snowcappers that were stationed in the Trinidad area. The customs BORTAC unit, which is the border patrol part, their tactical group were actually embedded with us, as well as a group from the Seventh Special Forces. The times that I went down to Bolivia, they were down there and they were training the UMOPAR, which were the Bolivian Special Forces right there in our base camp. I have some photographs of these that I can provide you with.

(20:18):

One of the things that Frank had told me early on was that once I went through this training, he had some ideas about how I could deploy because every position was taken up as a team leader. What he wanted me to do was work as a coordinator in Snowcap, but in the event that one of the supervisors or team leaders had to come back for court or had an emergency, then it would be a smooth transition because I was already Snowcap trained, had already been to Ranger School, knew how to work all the weapons, knew how to plan the operations, so I would just simply go down and take his place until the team leader could come back. So that was my job. I filled two roles there. I worked as a coordinator and went back and did some of the Snowcap things. You would ask me, and I'm going backwards here, but you would ask me what my role in Snowcap was, and I just told you about the Ranger School. I wanted to get back and

tell you some of the other things that I wound up doing over the course of three and a half years that I was in Snowcap.

(21:30):

Besides being a stand-in team leader in emergency situations, I was the headquarters coordinator for ops out of Bolivia and later on out of Peru. I did that for about a year and a half, and Frank came to me and said, "Listen, we've got some new guys coming in. I want them to get acquainted with these countries." *coughs. Excuse me. He said, "I'm going to take you and I'm going to put you in and make you the logistician." Well, there was a guy by the name of... Oh, I forgot his name right now, but he was getting transferred out, so I took over all the logistics of Snowcap, which was an absolute nightmare. It involved getting ammunition purchased. We were actually purchasing things like belts of ammunition, grenades, explosives, C4, and we had to find ways to get this into the country through the State Department, and the State Department was kind of a reluctant partner, but they agreed to a lot of the things that we needed.

(22:34):

So the Air Force would fly a lot of our stuff in, in C-141 cargo star lifter planes, which I also have photographs of. The Coast Guard was a big partner in Snowcap, along with the intelligence agencies. We were finally getting some good quality intelligence out of the three letter agencies that everyone knows, CIA, DIA, NSA. We were getting some actionable intelligence out of that. We were getting some actionable intelligence out of, I don't know if it's classified or not, but one of the offices that controls the satellites, and we were getting some information and targeting packages. For example, satellites would fly with the jungle a hundred miles from a major city, and they would find a heat source in the jungle. Well, what's a heat source doing away from anywhere in a triple canopy jungle? Then they came up with a profile of where a cocaine laboratory or a cocaine-based laboratory would possibly be concealed in the jungle, and they came up with three parts of the profile.

(23:43):

Number one, there had to be a heat source. Number two, there had to be a waterway to get the equipment back into the laboratory somewhere close to the heat source. And number three, there had to be a clandestine runway, somewhere near the other two in order to fly the coca base out and fly it into Columbia. If we found those three things in a profile, chances are that there was a cocaine laboratory or a cocaine-based laboratory somewhere in that general vicinity. So we started developing targeting packages with the intel community. And of course, we worked with the United States Marine Corps. United States Marine Corps was a big partner to us because we did all of our mount-out training at Quantico Marine Base. Mount-Out

training is where about a week before you actually go into country, it's a refresher course, how to clean the machine guns, how to load the belts.

(24:35):

You want to make sure that you're up to current with explosives. You want to make sure you're up to and qualified with using things like det cord, which is a cord that explodes. You want to make sure that you're up-to-date and qualified with grenade procedures. Grenades have a four-second delay. You want to make sure that you don't think it's a six-second delay. So we had to go through all these things again every time you went in the country. They had mount-out training at Quantico Marine Base, so they were a big partner to us. I mentioned the Air Force already. They were our transports. They were our Uber people. They took us out and they flew us back a lot of times. So these were some of the groups that we worked with, SEAL Team, Green Berets, Border Patrol, Coast Guard, Intelligence Community, Air Force, Marine Corps, United States Navy, State Department. And that pretty much was our partner's time.

Question: What Were DEA's Greatest Assets in Snowcap?

Burt Lund (25:39):

Absolutely it's people. Undoubtedly, it's people. Every Snowcapper was a volunteer, which means they had to accept a couple things. They had to accept a possibility that they might leave, go into a jungle and not come back. It was a whole new ball game down in the jungle. There were diseases down there that we had never heard of. We had Snowcappers coming back with blood disorders from parasites. We had to send them to Walter Reed Army Hospital and get them infused with all sorts of different antibiotic cocktails. If you were in the Peruvian branch of Snowcap and you went to Peru, you're in a base camp where occasionally the Sendero would fire rifle grenades into the camp. They had these rifle grenades called Instalaza that occasionally at night, two, three o'clock in the morning, they'd be firing them into the center of the camp.

(26:34):

And of course, all of our barracks were sandbags around the outside. So the first thing you had to do was hit the deck because you had about a four-foot-high sandbag revetment around your barracks. So those were problems that we had to deal with. We had barbed wire entanglements around the camp. We had to clear fields of fire so that we could have machine gun placement so that you had interlocking fields of fire. These were all things that you're not going to learn at the DEA or the BNDD Academy. So we learned how to set up machine guns at different level, at different points so that they had interlocking fields of fire. So if one machine gun went down, the other one could keep firing. These were all things that these people had to

learn, and they did it willingly, knowing full well that they were going into a hazard environment, and I can't say enough about the Snowcappers.

(27:37):

They were trained in skills that no other agent had, I mentioned that before, but they did it willingly. They're people that to this still today I'm still friends with. It was, for lack of a better term, and I know this term has been beat to death, we were truly a band of brothers. If you were in Snowcap, there was no distance too great that you wouldn't go to meet a guy if he was in town or to have lunch with him or to have a beer with him. So greatest assets, people. The next greatest assets, Department of Defense, Ranger training units, the Seventh Group Special Forces, SEAL teams. These were people that initially, when we went to Ranger school, they weren't real happy with us. We were civilians and we were interjecting ourselves into their Ranger training, unheard of. Occasionally a CIA guy or someone who was an intelligence community asset would go through Ranger School, or they'd have a Navy SEAL, or they'd have a Marine Corps enlisted man go through Ranger School, but we were civilians.

(28:50):

We still had our hair, some guys had beards and we weren't looked on favorably until the very end. And at the very end, just about every Ranger instructor I know came up and they said, "You guys are some pretty good guys." In one case, the sergeant that I told you about, he and I became close and he actually gave me a Ranger coin, which for him, most of the other sergeants looked at me and said, "Dude, you must have done something great to get on his board." So we developed friendships with the actual people that we worked with that were outside of DEA, and they were some of our greatest assets. And finally, there were a lot of people that were not in favor of Snowcap. They thought that it was going to end horribly. They thought that there was going to be a lot of agents killed in the process, and they distanced themselves with the program.

(29:50):

The people who were in favor of it, I can't say enough about, the Frank Whites, the Charlie Lutzes, the guys who saw Snowcap, for what it was, as something that we were going to take enforcement to a new level. We were going to go into the backyard of the trafficker. We were no longer going to let him come into our yard. We were going into his yard and we were going to take it right to him. We were going to destroy his lab. We were going to break his bank accounts. We were going to take his money. We were going to arrest his people, and we were going to disable his laboratories for the next six months. And that was a real hurt to those guys. So yeah, Snowcap guys, Snowcap trainers, Snowcap, people in cooperation with Snowcap, greatest asset cyber men.

Question: What Were DEA's Greatest Challenges in Snowcap?

Burt Lund (30:47):

I can do an hour just on that. The challenge is, if you came into Snowcap towards the later years in Snowcap, 93, 94, everything was working well. It was an oil machine. It could run itself. The coordinators didn't have a problem getting things taken care of. They got equipment into the country, no problem at all. Everything was already greased. If you got into Snowcap during the initial stages of Snowcap, there were challenges that were, for lack of a better word, daunting. I got in there about 1988, the end of 88 and the beginning of 89, and we were still trying to figure out ways to get food to the guys in Snowcap because a lot of the agents were, as I said earlier, were coming down sick from eating on the local economy. And before they went to Snowcap, they had packaged up boxes of tuna fish, of canned chicken, of pork and beans and food that they could send down to themselves to avoid getting sick. Well, we were finding out the food wasn't getting to them.

(32:06):

In the early stages in Bolivia, guys were living in tents. They had no defensive perimeters around the tents. They had no walls. These facilities were being built. So we had to sit down and figure out ways to get things like concrete. How do we get concrete into these areas? How do we get people to build these things? Who do we get to build these things? Who can we trust to build these barracks and these quarters? It was just overwhelming. We'd go out to lunch, myself and the other coordinators were John DiGravio, Steve Castille, and Mike Long. John DiGravio was running Bolivia at the time as the snow cap coordinator of Bolivia. I was taking over his position. Steve Castillo was pretty much the guy that was one of the first guys that actually deployed. He was getting ready to go upstairs to the 12th floor to be, I think it was Terry Burke's horse holder.

(33:03):

You had Mike Long who was handling everything in Peru, and that was a nightmare because they were trying to get a 3,500 foot C-130 capable runway built by the base camp. And as we were trying to build the runway, they were getting shot at, they were getting sniped at.

(33:24):

They'd come out and they'd lay some concrete and the Sendero would play some Semtex and they would blow it up. So we'd have to go back and do more concrete. And these were things that were totally out of our lane. We had no idea how do you order concrete? Where do you order concrete? How do you get it to Peru? How do you get it through the State Department? We would go to lunch, and we'd talk about these problems. And usually about every time we got back from lunch, we had the problem solved, and we would take it to Frank and we'd say,

"Frank, listen, I think we can do it this way." And he'd say, "Write it up." And we'd go, okay. So we would write it up and think, okay, we got it. And Frank would take it, sign off on it and send it upstairs to Chuck...

(34:05):

Oh, Chuck. I forgot his name. It was Frank's boss. So we would send it upstairs to Chuck. Chuck would take it, read it, call up Frank, say, "You think this will work?" Frank would say, "Yes." Chuck would send it up to Terry Burke, who was in charge of Operations at the time. Terry Burke would sign off on it and the first place he would send it is to the lawyers. The memo would go to the lawyers, come back to us, all red lines, do different things, and we had to go back and rewrite it. So this went on, I mean, time and time again, but we kept plugging away at it. We kept writing up these things, sending them up the ladder. Ladder would say, "Okay, we can do it. Send them over to lawyers." Lawyers would say, "Yes, maybe. We'll check and see. Check with State Department." So then while we're doing that simultaneously, we're starting to work with all these new partners, Department of Defense, the Army, the Ranger Corps, SEAL team, Seven Group Special Forces. Well, now we have to develop standard operating procedures because our standing operating procedures are entirely different than what the military uses. So we had to come up with standard operating procedures and memorandums of understanding that somehow bridge the gap between those two things. So in 88 and 89, we're writing. We were writing volumes. We would send it over to Pentagon. Pentagon would look at it, send it down to Seventh Group Special Forces. They would write a response. It would come back to us in channels. It was an absolute nightmare and things moved slowly. They moved turtle slowly, and we would be writing up more memorandums of understanding. I think I must have written, I don't know, a hundred memorandums of understanding.

(35:50):

And one of the things that we really had to get together was our rules of engagement. DEA's rules of engagement are when you can use your weapon, when you can't use your weapon, certain operational techniques. The Army's and the Marine Corps and the SEAL teams in Seventh Group, entirely different standard of operations, and I guess entirely different operating procedures, entirely different ways as far as what was approved and wasn't approved. And we had to somehow come to grips with that. So that was a nightmare. The challenges were a lot greater in the beginning than they were later on in the end. Of course, in 94 when the plane went down, that all changed.

Question: What Kinds of Specialized Gear Did You Use During Your Snowcap Tour of Duty?

Burt Lund (36:52):

One of the things that we had was that we had to practice with what's known as spies rigs. It was basically a parachute harness, and you had a rope coming out the back with a clamp on it. And when they wanted to get you out of the jungle, the helicopter would fly over and we had to practice this and train in this. The helicopter would drop out what looked like the old time gym rope that you climbed in high school, but every 10 or 15 seat, it had a D-ring woven into the rope and you would take your hook off your harness, snap it into the rope, and then once everybody was snapped in, you'd stand in a line, everyone in the same line holding the rope.

(37:37):

And as the helicopter took off, the first guy would go up, then the next guy would go up behind them on the rope. And as the helicopter raised in altitude, they would take one by one the guys up and you had your weapon with you and the helicopter would take off and you'd be flying below the helicopter and that's how they would extricate you from a jungle environment. That's what we trained in. Now, we never used that, but that was trained in Ranger School and that was kind of unique because here we are flying back at about, I'd say a thousand, maybe 1200 feet high and you're just hung by this harness on the back of your back and the only way you can control yourself is you put your hands out. If you wanted to turn left, you put your left hand out and your body would turn. If you wanted to turn right, put your right hand out, your body would turn. So that was one of the unique training things and one of the training pieces of gear that we used.

(38:31):

Night vision goggles. We learned how to use night vision goggles and use them in a combat environment, which is a little bit different than using night vision goggles just walking along the street. Night vision goggles were used in the blackest pitch black, but yet you could see outlines and silhouettes of people and they were green. So you had to get used and your depth perception was off. So you had to learn how to use night vision goggles and maintain depth perception, which was kind of interesting.

(39:06):

Those were some of the high points as far as specialized gear we used. Of course, the radios and the comm gear, and we had a comm guy from the seventh group with us, but he taught us everything we needed to know about radios. Oh, one of the points I missed about training, one of the big things was land navigation. We had to go through and learn land navigation, but not just land navigation, say in an open field, you had to learn land navigation in a triple canopy jungle, which you can't see any terrain features, you can't see the mountains, you might not be able to see the sun. You have to go by a compass, you have to count your pace, you have to have pace speeds and count your paces to a certain point. It was really, really hard to navigate in jungle environment.

(39:55):

The other thing that was really crucial was we were taught survival, evasion, resistance and escape. That's a survival school. It taught you how to escape from being a hostage or prevent being taken prisoner. It taught you how to survive out in the elements. When we went through the school, we had to harm animals. We had to kill animals. They took a snake, they skinned the snake, they put it over a campfire. Everybody got a bite of the snake so that we could say that we were snake eaters and that we tried it. And sure enough, it does taste like chicken. So those were some of the things that we did that were really unique.

Can You Describe a Memorable Operations Moment You Experienced During Snowcap?

Burt Lund (40:43):

I was in headquarters and we had gotten some recent intel from one of the agencies that said that there was going to be some type of violent protest taking place at the base camp in the Chapare in Bolivia. And Frank called me into his office and said, "Listen," he said, "I just got this notice. It's classified and it looks like there might be something going on in Bolivia and they might try and overrun the base camp." Well, this was a first for Bolivia because we could expect that in Peru, and we had the gear and we had the equipment to repel that. But in Bolivia, we were kind of short on equipment. So he told me, "Listen, I want you to get down to Fort Belvoir right away." That was where our ammo bunker was. He said, "I want you to load up." Well, I took another Marine with me.

(41:33):

We went down to Fort Belvoir, and we had a pickup truck. We loaded up with gas masks. We loaded up with tear gas grenades. We loaded up with vests, bulletproof vests, or flack vests. We loaded up with ammo, belted ammo, 5.56 belted ammo because we had some squad automatic weapons down there that carried 5.56, and they carried hundred round belts. So we took cases of that down there. We took cases of grenades, we loaded that up, fragmentation grenades, the real thing. And we loaded the truck and we put the placards on the side, and then we drove the truck to Andrews Air Force Base, and we had another vault there. And then at a given time, Frank had me meet the DEA Merlin plane, and we loaded the plane. And you see, we could take all this stuff into country now because all the early legwork and the memorandums of understanding with the State Department and with the host country Bolivians and with the Bolivian DEA office and with the ambassador, they had already been taking care of, all these memorandums of understanding back in 87 and 88.

(42:51):

So we had already laid the groundwork for this. We couldn't have done this without laying all that early groundwork. And we used the DEA Merlin. He flew us down. We landed in a Panama

airfield, flew into Bolivia, and we got all this out to the base camp. We got the base camp all ready. We had the defensive fields of fire set up in case they tried to break through the wire, in case they tried to crash the front gate with a truck loaded with explosives or anything. God must have been watching over us because none of that happened. They got down there, they marched up and down in front of the base camp. They sang some songs. They had a couple of speakers that were yelling and chanting and throwing things over the barbed wire and giving us the normal gestures that you would expect.

(43:39):

And about four hours later, they all just slowly disappeared in the jungle. I never knew where that many people came from. There must have been about 5,000 people out there that day, and I had no idea how they got out to where the base camp was in the middle of the Chapare, which was the jungle in the low lying area of Bolivia. But we came through that, no problems whatsoever, but we were prepared. Frank couldn't have sent anybody else down there with his stuff that wasn't Snowcapped, that wasn't Ranger trained. So because of Frank's foresight and getting at least one coordinator Ranger trained, then he had somebody that could go into country and could handle all this stuff and had the knowledge of operational knowledge and the training to do all that. And Frank had the foresight to do that, and I was fortunate enough that he picked me.

Question: Tell Us About Your Snowcap Team

Burt Lund (44:35):

I was a fill-in team leader, which by the way, that never really materialized because all the team leaders never got called back for court. They never had any family emergencies back home. So I would go down to Bolivia and Peru for two week periods at a time, just to observe the operations, and Frank wanted me to stay current on the operations in case I had to go down there. Well, I couldn't stay current on the operations and more importantly, intermingle with the host country government officials. I had to learn who the head of the UMOPAR was, which again was the Bolivian Special Forces. He had to meet me. There were some things that had to be done as courtesy. So I would go down there maybe once or twice every three or four months and meet up with these people just so that I kept current on what was happening in the event that I did have to go down there.

(45:40):

So I got to meet all the teams and work with all the teams. I went out on operations. I have photographs of us going out operationally. As a matter of fact, these are stacks of photos that are all Snowcap related photos of the buildings, photos of the teams, photos of the equipment. So afterwards, if we need anything, we can discuss that. But I got to work with just about

everybody in Snowcap, either in country, going on a couple operational things. When I was down there for the two week periods or back at headquarters, I went out with the mount-out training, and every training cycle I was there at Quantico Marine Base doing the mount-out training with them. And I was also, I forgot to mention, part of the Snowcap assessment team. Every time we had new agents that came through that wanted to be Snowcap operators, they had to go through a week-long assessment.

(46:40):

A lot of times the assessment was at Fort Benning. A lot of times the assessment was at Quantico. And there was a team of about five of us, and as the new agents would come aboard, we had an assessment schedule where they had to do pretty much what we did in Ranger School. They had to do the PT test, they had to do the runs. A lot of the tests were taken from Special Forces training, Green Beret training. We had a guy that was assigned to us from Delta, and I don't want to mention his name, but he was assigned to us. He was a Colonel, great guy. And a lot of the assessment programs he helped set up because your programs that challenged you both mentally and physically, for example, one of the challenging programs was you reported at a certain time and place and you were given a 35-pound rucksack and a rifle. You were told you had to go run down the road and you had to go down there and you had to be at a certain point down that road that you didn't know where it was. So you had to go down this road, and you had a certain place to be, and you had a certain amount of time to get there in order to pass the test. So some guys started off running, some guys started off walking, but there was a time element. If they walked too long, they didn't pass the test. If they ran too far and they got exhausted, and they couldn't make it, they didn't pass the test. So it sort of was a mental thing where you had to figure out how am I going to do this to make the time to a destination that I don't know and pass this test?

(48:19):

Well, the obvious answer was that if you walked the uphills, ran the downhills and the flats, you could make the time. And the distance was 12 miles, but they didn't know that. And if guys made the time, they did it by running the flat areas, jogging with 35 pounds on the back, and then walking the hills, getting their breath, and then jogging back down the hill, which was easier because you had to wait on your back, and then jogging the flats again till you got to the next uphill. And by doing that, you could make the 12 miles and make it in the time limit. And at the end of 12 miles, one of the other instructors would simply step out the woods and say, "Okay, you're done." So it played with you mentally. A lot of people couldn't master it, couldn't wrap their head around it, and they would drop out because in order to accomplish something, you should know where the goal is, where the end sight is so that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Didn't exist. You had to be able to deal with it mentally and wrap your head around it.

(49:27):

So that was one of the jobs I also had, and that's how I got to meet all the Snowcappers. I was part of the assessment team that did that. I remember that it was somewhere around... They gave you about, because you had the pack on your back, I think they were giving you 12 minutes a mile. So if I remember correctly, that was about it. It was about 12 minutes a mile, and you had 12 miles to go. Yeah, I think it was 12 minutes a mile. And it could be done. I mean, it was a challenge, and that was the whole part of it. It was challenging, but it could be done. And that was taken, believe it or not, right out of the Special Forces Q course that I think they still use today at Fort Braggs.

Question: What Do You Think Were the Major Snowcap Victories?

Burt Lund (50:14):

The victories were psychological to some degree because for the first time we felt like we were doing something. We were there in the trafficker's backyard. We were there where he slept and ate. We were there where his families lived in that country. And to some degree, that caused them a great deal of concern. And we knew that for sure because they started putting bounties on Snowcap agents. And we got that word through the intel community that there was a bounty on Snowcap agents if any of them got caught, and the narco traffickers put that out. So we knew we were hurting them. And of course, that was a great deal of satisfaction to us. And if you told the Snowcap agent there was a bounty on you, it was basically like, "Really? How much? I'll get so-and-so to turn me in. We'll share in the fronts." That's the kind of guys they were.

(51:12):

They would laugh about it. So nothing bothered them. And to hear there was a bounty on them just made them prouder. Some of the victories were that when we started keeping statistics, we were eliminating literally tons of cocaine base, which is... It takes 10 kilos of cocaine base to produce one kilogram of cocaine hydrochloride. So we were hitting these cocaine bases and we were stopping them, the transportation of the cocaine base going into the cocaine hydrochloride labs in Columbia. So we took down a lot of labs.

(51:52):

Statistics were being kept and the amount of cocaine base was being taken out was more than, in some cases, more than we were seasoned in different areas in the states. And again, one of the big things about international work is that you stopped from coming to the states. You've eliminated all those police departments that had to make undercover buys of two and three grams. I mean, you're taking down 800 pounds of cocaine base at a time. That's 80 kilograms of cocaine that you're taking off the streets. So those were some of the things that when we

started looking at statistics and headquarters started looking at statistics, even the people that weren't pro Snowcapers said, "Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, they're doing okay." It was reluctant, but they were like, "Yeah, okay. Well, yeah, it's working." So those were some of the things we did.

(52:50):

Relationships with host country participants. We got to meet some of the guys we worked with in the [unclear] part. In Peru, it was the PNP, Peruvian National Police. They worked very closely with them. We developed these relationships where now if we need anything, we no longer had to go through the Lima Office and Mike Kane. Sometimes we could call the... If we knew the guy well enough, we could call him directly and say, "Hey, listen, I need a photograph of this guy. Get it for me." And we had the ability to do that. And which by the way, let me just mention one guy's name, Mike Kane. Mike Kane had Peru at the time, and he was the country attache during Snowcap, and I can't say enough about Mike Kane. Mike actually had his family in Peru, and the Sendero blew up a colonel or someone in a high military rank who lived about 10 houses down from Mike.

(53:47):

And when the explosion went off, it was so powerful. It took parts of the house and blew it onto Mike's house, and Mike had to get his family out of Peru. So that's the type of things that we were dealing with down in Peru. Mike got his family out, and I think at the time I was the Snowcap coordinator, and I told Mike, I said, "Mike, I'll meet your family when they get here. I'll get them set up anything you need." And that was the type of things that Snowcappers did for each other. And of course, Mike was in favor of us coming into Peru, and he sort of made things easier for us in Peru.

Question: How Did Snowcap Help Advance DEA's Mission?

Burt Lund (54:24):

For years, DEA was the only agency that was accepted into foreign countries. The FBI wasn't accepted. We had complete control of the narcotics enforcement in most of the foreign countries that we worked in. The reason why they didn't want the FBI wasn't anything negative about the FBI. It was purely that the FBI had an intelligence collection function, and a lot of the countries viewed the FBI as an intelligence agency as opposed to a law enforcement agency. And they had concerns that they were coming there to do some spying work or whatever, and that was the word that we got and why they didn't want FBI. Later on, through memorandums of understanding, and the fact that we now had John Lawn working as our director, that was all cleared up. And of course, we started out having FBI agents actually in DEA offices over in the embassies.

(55:24):

But the overseas work and how Snowcap related to that, we came out of that whole era with a great deal of respect from people who many times took us for granted in the State Department. When the State Department found out what we were doing and how we were doing it, and the fact that we were doing it with a lot of professionalism and that we were doing it with a lot of good relationships we were developing with the host country law enforcement, host country military, they actually, it was a rewarding thing. We started to get a lot more respect and we worked hard for that respect. But when it finally came, it was a good feeling. It made us feel good to know that we had done something. Now, of course, tragically in 94 when the plane went down, all of us who were in Snowcap at the time knew that it was going to be over.

(56:30):

We knew that we lost five agents, five good agents. One was one of my best friends, Frank Fernandez. Frank and I used to ride motorcycles every weekend. We'd jump on our hollows and we'd just drive in Northern Virginia. You go down to the countryside and you go get lunch, and Frank was one of the greatest guys I ever met, and we lost Frank.

(57:01):

Then we lost four or five other good people as well. One of the guys that was on my Snowcap team that went through Army Ranger School, the very first Army Ranger School, which let me say this is going to piss a lot of people off, was by far the toughest Ranger School because it was an assessment. We were going to have a backend analysis of it, and every school that went through after that had it much easier than we had in that first school. We had no days off, and every Ranger School had weekends off after that. So we had a great deal of respect given to us because of that. But once the plane went down and we lost all the people we lost, Juan Varez was on my team on that first Ranger School, and Juan was one of the pilots in the plane, so it went down.

(57:54):

So we lost another good Snowcapper that he got through that whole first Ranger school, and I have photographs of Juan and myself going through the Ranger school. So we came out of it with a lot of victories, came out of it with a lot of prestige, came out of it with a lot of good memories, and unfortunately came out with a lot of sad memories.

Interviewer: Sorry for your loss.

(58:20):

It was everybody's loss for the FAST teams, because a lot of that work had already been done for Snowcap, and a lot of those memorandums, understanding, were used as boilerplates for getting the FAST teams up and running later on, years later, after I left the agency. And I can almost guarantee, because of the operational techniques that I've seen them use and read

about them using, that a lot of the operational techniques, a lot of the procedures, the standard operating procedures and the rules of engagement were taken from things that were already prepared and were in the files and in the archives for Snowcap. And I firmly believe that was one of the ways that the FAST teams got moving so quickly.