

Hui-Jen Shiau

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Part 1

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by Matthew Gipson

Edited by Leah Cohen

Produced by Brad Guidera

Web biography by Matthew Gipson

Cohen: Today is October 16th 2018. On behalf of the Pritzker [Military] Museum and Library, uh, my name is Leah Cohen and I have the pleasure of doing a phone interview with Captain Hui-Jen Shiau, a missile launch officer during the Cold War, who served from 1985 to 1997. Captain Shiau lives in Austin and I'm looking here hereward, excuse me, I'm looking forward to hearing your story. So I thought to begin with, we could ask a little bit of questions about your background.

Shiau: Sure.

Cohen: So where were you born and what was it like...

Shiau: [inaudible]

Cohen: ...growing up in Taiwan?

Shiau: So I was born in Taiwan, um, and I'm a first generation immigrant. I came over when I was three years old so to be honest, most my memories are growing up in Wisconsin, ah, and New Jersey where I, ah, spent most of my middle school and high school years.

Cohen: So...

Shiau: Um...

Cohen: Where...

Shiau: Go ahead.

Cohen: Sorry-sorry go on.

Shiau: Yeah, so, my father was a graduate student in the University of Minnesota and he brought us over and believe it or not, he was a marine engineer, so he built ships in Wisconsin in, at, on Lake Superior and from there he went to building

supertankers in New Jersey for Exxon [Mobil]. My father came from an impoverished background. He was the only child and I didn't discover this until a year ago when my whole family went back to Taiwan to visit the relatives. My grandfather was the child of the concubine of my great-grandfather. So that branch of the family was treated horribly by the rest of the family, because he was a child of the concubine versus the child of the wife and growing up with that, my father was very impoverished, he was the only child. So this was back in the 1950s and '60s and you have to realize back then Taiwan was not as prosperous as it is now. So he brought the whole entire family, on a gamble, to the United States and make sure that we can have a better life and when he came over, he sold the house that my mom and him lived in and that was what funded the, our flight to America. So sort of like [Hernán] Cortés where he burnt the ships. There was no going back to Taiwan for us. We either had to make it or not in the U.S. [United States] and that was one influences of me going to the military because this country has been very good to my family. All four of my siblings and I have all gone to excellent schools; we've all done well in life. All six of the grandchildren have done really, really, well and I felt like I wanted to get back to this country. So I didn't join because I needed the money, my dad was actually doing very well financially. I joined because I wanted to pay back the U.S. for taking my family and giving us the opportunity to succeed.

Cohen: Wow and did your father bring all four of you and your mother or some of the children born at the United States?

Shiau: No, he brought all four of us? So there's a picture, I'll share that with you, it's at the Taiwan Airport and it's my mom and the four of us and my mom didn't even speak English at the time. My dad had to give her flashcards in Chinese and English and that's how she ordered a taxi, [Shiau laughs] that's how she ordered food for us and everything else. She would go to the flash cards.

Cohen: Wow, how-how did she eventually learn English?

Shiau: So she worked at a pie restaurant and she learned English just by talking to people. My mom's always been a very intelligent woman. She was a schoolteacher in Taiwan and so for a period of like three years my mom baked everything that's possible into a pie. So we had every permutation possible.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Some were excellent, some were, let's just say experimental, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs], and where in Wisconsin and where in New Jersey were you and your family based?

Shiau: So we lived in Superior, Wisconsin. Right across from Duluth, Minnesota and then we moved in the third-when I was in the third grade to New Jersey to New Providence, New Jersey and then my high school years, my parents decided buy an even bigger house and so they moved to Morristown, New Jersey and that's...so I went to two high schools. One in New Providence and one in Morristown.

Cohen: Did you like high school, like what were your interests at the time?

Shiau: Honestly, high school was a mixed bag for me. I grew up, surprisingly, I grew up in a very American upbringing. I mean, I did Little League baseball, I did Boy Scouts, I did, you know, sports. I got a varsity letter out of perseverance, not from actual athletic prowess.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: Sorry.

Shiau: And...but I will admit that I was a, I was a, I was a relatively small kid at the time so, I got bullied a lot [when] I was growing up and growing up was the only Chinese kid in the Polish-Italian neighborhood, you learn to stand up for yourself or else you got mowed over. So I guess part of it for my father and part of it was growing up with that upbringing is either you folded or you stood up to yourself. So I mean, I didn't get into fights left and right, but, you know, people knew that I would stand up for myself and so after a while the bullying ended and but it was part of my upbringing, because now most Chinese that come in, they...there's larger Chinese communities and can join in Chinese community and feel not as alienated in a new country. At the time, it was like one Chinese families per town. We were the one Chinese family for New Providence. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And then, and the next town had another Chinese family. We kept in touch with them but going to high school, I didn't really have a Chinese identity perse, I just knew myself as another American kid because that was the upbringing I had at the time.

Cohen: How did you stand up for yourself, like physically or otherwise?

Shiau: Well, you know, the fourth grade, you know, you stand up and you basically...you have to get into a few fights.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: To be honest.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: But by the time its sixth or seventh grade, it's more posturing than there was actual fighting. I mean, lost this fight I got into. It was in sixth grade and that was [Shiau laughs] actually one of my best friend. It was kind of **Lord of the Flies** type situation where even if you made up, as soon as you challenge somebody, all the other kids would know about it and you would have to go to the back of the school library and they would form an arena and you had to at least fight three rounds. [Shiau laughs}

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And even if you made up, even if you were the best of friends, as soon as you challenged somebody it was like, forget about it. You have to you, [Shiau laughs], you had to duke it out [fight].

Cohen: You had to go through this ritual, [laughs].

Shiau: It was, [Shiau laughs] and so, yeah, so a long time, so when I went to Texas A&M [Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas], in the Corp of Cadets, I was like, literally, one of the first Chinese people that guys, from my cadet company, ever met. So a lot of them would always go like, "You're not passive. We'd always assume you'd be like a passive type of guy". I go, "Dude, I grew up in Jersey".

Cohen: [laughs]

Shiau So, that always car-, kind of carried me through life.

Cohen: So-so I know-, I know you're saying before and you also mentioned on the questionnaire that you felt that you wanted to give back, so is that why you decided to go to a school that had an ROTC Reserve Officer Training Corp program?

Shiau: Yeah, so what happened was...being a first-generation immigrant was actually kind of tough. My father did not want me go to the military. He wanted me to go, you know, banking, engineering, or law.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: And I actually went to another university called Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and he wanted me to go there and I didn't really want to. So I didn't do well academically even though in high school, I was always near to top of my class.

Cohen: Mm-hmm

Shiau: So I didn't have the motivation [to do well at RPI]. So we came to a mutual agreement [at the] end of year. I didn't like the major of electrical engineering and they didn't like my GPA, so we came to mutual agreement to part ways.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And I decided to enlist in the Army, which is why my service started 1985. so I joined the Army...thinking that I would, you know, spend a few years as an enlisted man and then go back to school eventually.

Cohen: Mm-hmm

Shiau: When I was in basic training, my first sergeant goes, "Which one of you guys can type"? I said, "I could type", and I said, he goes, "How fast"? I go, "fifty-five words a minute" and so the first sergeant had a slow smile across his face and he goes well, you're my house mouse, you're going to be my orderly. [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And so during basic training I never had to do any of the guard duty or KP [kitchen police/patrol] or whatever, because I, the first sergeant protected me and, and then one day in the middle basic training, he calls me in, he goes, "Private Shiau you're an awful enlisted man. You'd probably be a better officer. Sign this", and then I go, "What's this"? He goes, "It's your applications for Texas A&M and here's an application for a ROTC scholarship. So he, as a first sergeant, knew almost everybody in the Army and he pulled some strings and got me admitted to Texas A&M based on my high school records and SAT scores.

Cohen: How, what was your first, what was his name, this, the lieutenant that...

Shiau: The first sergeant?

Cohen: Yeah, the first sergeant, sorry.

Shiau: Yeah, I would have to get his permission for his name before I release it, okay.

Cohen: Sure, no-no, sure. Okay, no problem.

Shiau: But I'll get back to you. I lost contact with him after that, so it'll be, it'll be a challenge but I was trying to look for his name to to, on the internet. See if I can reach out to him.

Cohen: That's okay.

Shiau: So my day at Texas A&M was my first day in the Corps. The first day in Texas and the first day A&M. I knew nothing about that school, like nothing. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: As you know, Texas A&M is a very...a school with a lot of school spirit. Okay, and...

Cohen: I didn't know actually, yeah.

Shiau: Yeah, so it's-it's well known. It's actually a senior military college. So it started out as a military school and then 1965 the ROTC split off from the rest of the campus, in terms of the rest of campus were civilians but the corps was roughly about 2500 students is full-time ROTC. It's a senior military school and it one of six in the country that has a full-time Corps of Cadets. So we had cadet dining halls. We had cadet dorms. We wore uniforms seven days a week. We have room inspection twice a week. We have physic-physical training and, ya know, it, it was the basically a military academy with the exception that we got to interact with civilian students on a regular basis.

Cohen: So-so you would have, what you mentioned, full-time cadet involved, like physical training. So was that like on a, almost like on a daily basis, like an addition to your coursework?

Shiau: Yes, so every Tuesday and Thursday was morning PT [physical training] formation. So we would do, you know, a[n] outfit run. Cadet companies would do physical training and running and then as a freshman and sophomore you did a lot of push-ups because that's a meted out punishments for infractions.

Cohen: [Laughs] Okay.

Shiau: And I did a lot of push-ups.

Cohen: Wh-what were, what were your main type of infractions?

Shiau: Stuff like they'll ask you terminology. It was like basically trivia that you had to remember and it was to teach you attention to detail, which helped me a lot later in life. Your room may not be made up to standards. When I talk about

standards, I'm talking about, like the top of the bed roll was five and three-quarter inches versus six inches.

Cohen: [Laughs], Geez.

Shiau: And so, you had to clean your room every day and my mom, she saw my picture, she was astonished and goes, "Your pic- your room was never this clean".

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And it was, so you go to that and your junior year, you have the option to go contract ROTC [inaudible], which means you're obligated to the military at that point or you can go what's called, "Drill and Ceremonies Cadets", where you're part of the Corps of cadets but you're not obligated to go to the military.

Cohen: C-could you, sorry, could you repeat that again? I didn't catch the names of the two options.

Shiau: One was, what we call, "ROTC contract", which meant you're obligate the military at that time.

Cohen: For how long?

Shiau: Four years on average and then if you're a pilot or nuclear weapons officer, it can be up to seven to eight years after pilot training. So and then the other option is if you didn't want to go in the military but you wanted to stay in the Corps, you could be a drill and ceremonies cadet.

Cohen: Hmm.

Shiau: And the drill and cadets were part of the corps and the outfits but they didn't go into the military after the graduation from college.

Cohen: Okay, and what was your major at Texas A&M?

Shiau: It was political science with a minor in history. There's, the funny thing is that I wanted to get away from electrical engineering because I was tired of technology at the time and I wanted to go to political science.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Ironically, now I work in Information Technology as a IT Manager, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: [inaudible] technology

Cohen: That's funny. So-so you graduate from college and what do you choose to do next?

Shiau: All right, so after I graduated from college, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant through [United States] Air Force ROTC and because I had prior enlisted experience in the Army National Guard, I got my first choice assignment, which was ground-launched cruise missiles in Sicily [Italy].

Cohen: Oh.

Shiau: And that is a joint Army-Air Force, well it's not that so much joint Army-Air Force but more, more of an [United States] Air Force unit running an Army assignment. When they first started to deploy intermediate-range missiles [Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile, IRBM], the Army was given the Pershing II [Weapons System] and they were given the options to have the ground launch version of Tomahawk Missile [Tomahawk Land Attack Missile, TLAM]. They opted not to have that and the Air Force took over that mission. So in, in the nuclear weapons world there's types of weapons. There's...localized tactical weapons [Tactical Nuclear Weapons], which is like the backpack nukes that you've heard about or even our nuclear artillery shell.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: And those are within, you know, twenty to fifty mile range on the battlefield. Then near the Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles, which is what GLCM [BGM-109G Ground Launched Cruise Missile] was and those were all based in Europe and they had, you know, they could reach most targets within in the former Soviet Union and then you had Strategic Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles [ICBM] and these are the Minuteman Missiles that you see and hear about in North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana.

Cohen: Hmm, um-hmm.

Shiau: So I went into the missile career field, there are small missiles and big missiles. I was in small missiles and GLCM and then when I went to ICBMs, I was in big missiles. So that was a terminology that we used.

Cohen: Okay, sort of, just back up a little bit. So just to maybe recap. So first you were a part of the Texas Army National Guard. That was when because you knew how to type you were basically doing a lot of work for this first sergeant, then later he thought you would do well in ROTC and was able to get you to admitted to Texas

A&M based on your high school records and after you graduated you expressed a wish to work with GLCM and you, that was, you got that request right-right away.

Shiau: Yeah, so like when you're a senior ROTC cadet, you get what it's called a "Dream Sheet" and you put in your first three choices of career fields and first three choices of bases that you want to be assigned to. This was there era of **Top Gun**, so I actually wanted to be a navigator but then they took a look at my eyes and they said, "Not a chance". [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So I chose missiles because I, in the military, in the Air Force, there's operations, which is like fighters and missiles. There's combat support, which is like maintenance, squadrons, communication squadron and so forth and then there's combat service support, which is like the finance and personnel units and as any organization there was a hierarchy and in general if you want to make rank, operations is where you want to have a start because you can, later on, going to other career fields to cross train], which is why I went into computers and communications and the Air Force, but it's always good to have an operational background because then you know what you're supporting.

Cohen: True.

Shiau: And the military encourages that. That's why back in the Army they would have military intelligence guys detail to the infantry or a signals guys detail to armor. So they know what they're supporting. Okay.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: So that was the same thing. That was my motivation for going into missiles.

Cohen: To missiles, I see. Like your saying, to get the operational experience. Another thing I was wondering about was why, during your junior year at college, you switched from the Army ROTC to the Air Force ROTC?

Shiau: So what happened was that at the time it was starting Gramm-Rudman [Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985/1987] cuts and the Army was having a surplus of officers and they were cutting back and they were stating that the majority of us would go to the [United States] National Guard or [United States Army] Reserves instead of active duty after college. And to be frank my personal motivation at the time was that if I was gonna I put up with four years of military school, I wanted to go active duty.

Cohen: Yes.

Shiau: So I knew that if I went in the Air Force, and I got accepted, that I would be guaranteed active duty.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: The Army could not guarantee me that and that's why I went in the Air Force.

Cohen: Okay, make-makes sense.

Shiau: Yeah.

Cohen: So-so where did you begin your training with the GLCM? Like was-was it right away in Italy or was it in the States?

Shiau: No, so what they do is they send you to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona and the basic Initial Qualification training squadron for GLCM. So GLCM was unique in that with Minute-Man, you already trained with the other officers on the Minute-Man system and you go straight to the base. Our training was two part. The first part was all officers and it's all training on the weapons system and how to launch the missile and troubleshooting, you know, problems with it and learning how to decode messages and so forth. The second half, which was unique, was that they brought in the officers with the enlisted and we were all trained together for the last phase of training at Fort Huachuca [Arizona] for the field training. To learn the work as a unit. So in a GLCM light there'll be the GLCM commander, which is a flight commander, was usually a captain or major. The deputy commander, which is another captain and then you would have the launch control officers, which is what I was.

Cohen: Okay.

Shiau: And then you would have maintenance and the security police element.

Cohen: So two questions...

Shiau: [Inaudible]

Cohen: Sorry, go on, go on. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

Shiau: No, go ahead.

Cohen: Where is Fort Huachuca and the other one is could you explain a little bit the responsibilities in your role as a launch control officer?

Shiau: So funny thing about launch control officers is that we weren't in a direct chain of command. So the way the chain of command will go is the flight commander, deputy flight commander, the security police officers, the senior launch control officer, and down there are four of us in the flight to be two crews, a commander and a deputy, okay.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: And then...in our training, the commanders were all captains who were former ICBM guys transitioning over to GLCM.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: So they would pair a captain with a brand-new second lieutenant and I was fresh out of college, and that there would be a maintenance unit to maintain the flight. So they were about half the unit, the other half in the end was the security element, which is, providing security and that was the other half and then we would have a small section of communications people to help us with our communications equipment. And what was the first question you asked?

Cohen: Oh, just simply, where Fort Huachuca, I think the name is..., the place where you trained as a whole group, as a unit, where that was.

Shiau: So we would, yeah, so the second phase it was actually divided also in other phases. So we would actually meet for the first time and in Davis-Monthan [Air Force Base], Arizona, in Tucson Arizona.

Cohen: Yes.

Shiau: Then we would do one exercise were they teach us how to be out on the field. Being prior Army enlisted, this was sort of like a rehash for me, but for other people, this is the first time they ever carried a M16 [M 16 rifle], pitched a tent, be out the woods, eat a MRE [meal, ready-to-eat, is the package for service members to eat in the field], that type of stuff.

Cohen: And that was...

Shiau: Then we would... that was in Tucson-Tucson, Arizona, in Tucson, Arizona. Then we would go out for a three to four-day exercise and that was not in combat conditions. It was, basically, so you would learn how to pitch a tent, how to, you know, survival in the field, how to put on camouflage, all that type of stuff. Then

we would prepare for Fort Huachuca, Arizona, which is like right on the Mexican border and we will go there for a two-week graduation exercise where we would be out under simulated combat type of experience and then the instructors and the, and the, and the Army guys, on Fort Huachuca, would sometimes act as aggressors later, an opposition force and they would attack us and so forth. We did have one funny incident once where the Arizona National Guard was on maneuvers and they didn't know we were on maneuvers too, so we ran into each other and we started a mock firefight and all the instructors were on the base camp going, "Wait a minute, we're all here. Who are they firing at"?

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So it took a while for us to realize that we weren't each other's opposition force. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs] Oh my goodness.

Shiau: Yeah, we had another incident. This one captain, who was our crew commander, he's a little bit excitable type of guy and we're set up a perimeter-perimeter and usually where the enemy attacks, it's usually right before daylight. So the other thing where everyone mounts their foxhole waiting for an attack. So we hear on the radio, "There's wild pigs near the perimeter. They're not the opposition force. Do not fire on them". And the guy next to me goes, "Sir, do you think the captain knows about it and suddenly hear, "God-damn it! Son of a-", and a full auto and ~~he~~ goes, "Yeah, I think he heard about it".

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: But apparently, what happened was he got overrun by three wild pigs. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs], oh my

Shiau: That's the stuff that doesn't make the movies.

Cohen: No, but part of, part of the training.

Shiau: Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: And so after that training, we got a month of vacation leave. I went home to New Jersey to meet up with my family for my last Christmas before I went overseas. And we all went over to Philadelphia where there's, at the Philadelphia

airport [Philadelphia International Airport], there's a Military Airlift Command Terminal. Where you fly a charter flight to Europe and so what they do is just load everyone on and it's, it's a regular commercial airliner but you're wearing, the only difference is you're wearing your uniform aboard the flight and it's all military families and their dependents and they would do the grand tour in Europe. So it was like one of the longest flights I ever had my life, because we would stop in England, then we stopped in Spain. They we stopped in Germany, then we went down to Italy before I finally got off. Let's go with Sigonella Naval Air Station [Naval Air Station Sigonella], which was the air terminal near Comiso [Air Station in Sicily].

Cohen: So was this like a courtesy for like the family members of the servicemen, like to travel?

Shiau: No. If your, certain bases overseas, you are authorized to bring dependents. So the military then is, will pay for the dependents fly over. So it's not courtesy, it's part of their benefits.

Cohen: Oh, oh.

Shiau: Now Comiso was considered a remote base, so...I while I was single, so I went by myself. There were families on Comiso, but in general, most people opted to go there for a one-year remote tour. You had the option of go one year unaccompanied or go two years with your children and family.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: And, and it depended on the age of the kids. A lot of, a lot of guys, a lot of senior officers, especially the ones with kids in high school, opted to go for one year without their families because they don't want to disrupt their kid's education back home.

Cohen: Sure, sure. Yeah.

Shiau: When, but Comiso was a brand new base. Every, all the housing was brand new. In fact, all the way to the closure, they were building base, building brand new base houses and then boxing them up because they were contractually obligated to pay for the houses when they, when they contracted. The-the base was going to last for quite a while. And it was a former German Luftwaffe base during World War II.

Cohen: Oh, no kidding.

Shiau: So we had a, yeah, so we had a runway that was not in shape, but the base itself was car-carpet bombed several times during the invasion of Italy, Sicily by the Allied forces. Ironically, my squadron in North Dakota, when they were there, during World War II was one of the squadrons at carpet-bombed that base.

Cohen: Oh, so was this squadron, like, part of the 487th Tactical Missile Wing [487th Air Expeditionary Wing] or the four...?

Shiau: Yeah, so when they're in the missile wing, the 487th Missile Wing can encompass everything. So it either will be the 487th Missile Maintenance Squadron, 487th Security Squadron but an operation squadron, where all missile launchers, were...

Cohen: Yes.

Shiau: ...was the 302nd Tactical Missiles Squadron.

Cohen: The 302nd, okay. Was the, where the- where the operations, so that would- that would have been you?

Shiau: Yeah, and so here's the unique thing about Air Force operations. In the Army company, you would have six officers or about roughly ninety enlisted. In the missile operation squadron, you would have sixty officers and four enlisted.

Cohen: Oh, it's true. Very, like they're reversed.

Shiau: Yes.

Cohen: Is-is it because...

Shiau: So...

Cohen: Sorry, go on.

Shiau: Go ahead, what was your question?

Cohen: I was wondering if it's because of the very sensitive, precise nature of the missiles that you need more people of higher level of rank or responsibility or training.

Shiau: It is. Well, two things. One is that, in the Air Force, unlike other services, officers fight, enlisted support. Whereas, in other services it's flipped.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: So if you go to, like F-15 [McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle] Squadron or to a B-52 [Boeing B-52 Stratofortress] Squadron, the pilots are all officers. Likewise among missiles, by law, you have to have two commissioned officers to do a nuclear release.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: So, so that's why a missile operation squadron was more heavy on officers than there was on enlisted. See, so the people that maintain the missiles were actually organized into a maintenance squadron with their own officers. Okay, and that was organized similar to Army unit where you'd have five or six officers and about 100 to 200 enlisted. So it was different and the other thing too is, remember I said we had GLCM flights?

Cohen: Yes.

Shiau: So the, so the wing...was on base was the wing, so when we deployed, we had up to eight flights. So what happened was...when we were off base, we report to our own parent squadron. So when we were going out to the field, operationally, we would have Alpha Flight, Bravo Flight, Charlie Flight, etc., and they would bring in the maintenance guys and the security guys and missile launch officers together.

Cohen: Okay, yeah, like it's required several, what you did you say, several squadrons would be the right word, like several?

Shiau: Yeah, yeah, so parent squadrons would send their people and then you would be organized into the flights. So the GLCM flight commander, operationally, had commanded the people out in the field, but in terms of, like fitness reports, promotion recommendations, or whatever, that came from the parent squadron.

Cohen: Okay, wow.

Shiau: So it was a unique leadership experience because, you know, even though I trained to lead as a, as a missile deputy commander. I lead I, myself, and me. I-I was only responsible for myself and my thoughts. So and then because we were in Italy, a third of the security element were Italian Carabinieri [national Italian military police] and this is why I mentioned to you before, during my previous interview, that the American military has a very big irreverent streak. Talk about many things, so they call the "Carabinieri as "Care Bears", and so it was a tiny Air Force base, Comsio, that we were guests on and the Carabinieri is so like the French Gendarmerie [national Gendarmerie]. They're actually a military branch out of the Italian Armed Forces, but they're, in addition to being military, they

are also police officers. Well, it was kind of unique situation and it's kinda nice 'cuz once you got to know them very well, they would cut a lot of red tape for us, like if you want your car registered and something like that they would cut a lot of red tape for us and stuff like that.

Cohen: How did people get along in general from the, like from the U.S. Air Force and the Carabinieri?

Shiau: Among the officers, it was pretty good because all their officers spoke fluent English. That was one of the prerequisites. For the, for us with enlisted, there was a language barrier because their enlisted, not many of them spoke English and our enlisted, not many of them spoke Italian when they first go there. So we did a lot of Pidgin English and Italian when we were communicating with them on the field.

Cohen: Did you feel they were well qualified?

Shiau: Yeah, I mean, they were...they were pretty, they were better on the field exercises but their discipline was not as...I would not say as good as American military was.

Cohen: Interesting.

Shiau: And because...in Italy it feels a little more laid-back, especially in Sicily, being even more laid-back than the rest of Italy.

Cohen: Right.

Shiau: So, so you had that little problems every once in a while, but in general, I-I thought that they were, they were good. We never had a problem with them and their officers were very competent and I became friends with a couple of them and they were, you know, they were actually, in some cases I thought they were more, their officers were more qualified than us. They spoke multiple languages, they had a lot of experience doing the police work, and so on, so and also it was a choice assignment for them to be assigned to-to our unit.

Cohen: Interesting.

Shiau: So they only-the best of their officers got to come...

Cohen: Got to come

Shiau: ...work with [us].

Cohen: Do you speak other languages other than English?

Shiau: Well, I speak Chinese. I'm decent on French and I can read German and a decent amount of Spanish.

Cohen: Did-did any of these languages come into play when you were in Italy?

Shiau: Well, because it's a Romance language, my background in French from high school and college helped a lot because I couldn't speak the words but if I saw an Italian newspaper, I could actually get it a gist of it and also when they were speaking, as long-as long as they didn't speak too fast, I could actually understand the gist of the conversation.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah.

Shiau: And also, after a while but the end of my year I could, I could get by. I mean, my Italian has floundered because I haven't spoken Italian since I left Italy but by time, by the end of my year, that I was there, I could go to a restaurant and order food without a problem. I can ask for directions and stuff like that.

Cohen: Wow. So, like I was reading a little bit about like some sites you suggested, and it said basically, the GLCM State and Alert Maintenance area, GAMA [GLCM Alert and Maintenance Area] shelter and what was a GAMA shelter like?

Shiau: Okay, so the GAMA shelter was basically an alert facility where it has one of the flights and it's called the "Alert Flight" in there and that was a very high secure area and these weapons were designed to launch within minutes of an authorized launch message.

Cohen: Hmm.

Shiau: So what you'd do is, you would have these-these large concrete bunkers, okay. This is where they stored all the GLCM vehicles and it, basically, be one flight per-per shelter. These shelters are big. They're solid concrete and it would have huge massive doors that would rolled down and the vehicles will roll out and then they can launch from that point and then within the GAMA you had living quarters there where the alert main-maintenance guys alert launch officers would sit there and then we hear the alarm bell. You would, you had, you know, minutes of rush down, roll the vehicles out, power them up, and decipher the messages to determine whether you were gonna to launch or not and then which targets.

Cohen: Oh.

Shiau: And this, this was a high-security area, so there'd be guard towers surrounding it, it was regulating patrol by security police, and stuff like that. So it-it was a very high secure area.

Cohen: H-how did you learn the code that was involved as your you're saying is to know which missiles to launch and where? Was it complex?

Shiau: Well, you would, you'd get a coded message and then that coded message you would decipher and there are other books you would then match it to, and they will tell you what options you had to do.

[Pause]

Cohen: Oh. So let's say, so...let's say like an alert went off and there was a code message to send, like, let's start again. Like was there a code that would tell you to-to launch a missile?

Shiau: Yes, there was.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Shiau: There was-there was an authentication code, and you had to authenticate the code to make sure it's a valid message. So it's not just like, it's not like the movies where someone hits the button and all the missiles launch off or Skynet [**Terminator** franchise] doesn't tell the missiles and everything goes. The military has always put a human factor in it. I mean, the technology has been around since the '60s to automate everything.

Cohen: Yes.

Shiau: But they deliberately made sure there was always a human factor throughout the whole process. All the way from the president deciding to launch to the higher command sending out the orders to the units to the units' doubting to ensure if it's a valid order to launch.

Cohen: So this...

Shiau: So...go ahead.

Cohen: So this required, like human inter-intervention to decipher the code correctly?

Shiau: Yeah, absolutely. So what would happen is you'll get an alarm and it was like this blaring klaxon and then you don't know what's going on, so you go out there, and then lower the doors, roll the vehicles out. You power up the

communications and then you wait for the message to come through. Once the message comes through, you go to your commander, "I have a message", you read out the message to your commander, he validates it. You compare it to your code books and then you compare to your-your authenticators and then that's when you know what they want you to do.

Cohen: Hmm, how-how many...

Shiau: Now, realize I'm speaking in generalities because most of it still highly classified.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah, no, no, I-I...ma-makes sense. The, how-how vehicles would be in the GAMA shelter, typically?

Shiau: All right, so a GLCM would be two launch control center vehicles, one primary [and] one back up and then four launch vehicles, which we call, "TELS" transporter, erector, [launcher] and each one of the TELS have four missiles, so on a GLCM flight would have sixteen missiles.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: Yeah, and so, when they created GLCM, they had two bases in UK [United Kingdom], one in Belgium, one in Holland, two in Germany, and one in Sicily. [Shiau coughing]. I came in the, near the tail end of everything I was in the second to last class to graduate from GLCM. By that time, the INF treaty [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty] had been signed and those weapons were all to be eliminated. Now, the historical part of the INF treaty is that previous treaties reduced the number of weapons. This was the first treaty that, actually, eliminated a whole entire class of weapons. So all the Pershings [Pershing 1a and Pershing II] and all the GLCMs and the Russian equivalent were all gonna be destroyed with verification from both sides.

Cohen: So-so when you were...

Shiau: [Inaudible]

Cohen: Like, I don't know how to put it, like at what point was the intermediate nuclear, you know, treaty signed? Like-like-like, were at, were you still training in Arizona or were you already in Sicily, at the base, like when did you first learn about the I-, the nuclear force treaty?

Shiau: The INF treaty was actually signed in 1987, so even as a cadet, I knew that those weapons were going away. So I was trying to get in on a good thing while I still could because it was considered a premiere assignment and it was considered a much coveted assignment because, you know, I was in Sicily, [Shiau laughs]. So

by the time I, by the time I had gotten to Italy in 1989, there was only like one base in UK and one base in Germany. By the middle of my tour, those two bases closed and those launch officers, some of them opted to come down to our unit, so we had an influx of officers from those units coming into our unit in Sicily because we were the very last base to close when we closed at '91. So at the height of the Cold War, we manned the GAMAs twenty-four/ [seven]. By the time I was there, we were manning it on occasion, to make sure that they still worked and then it got down to all the launch control officers had to show up in the squadron every morning for four hours. So we would do the **Stars and Stripes** cryptogram every day and put it, we had a pool where one won the pool for that day, that would go for what we called, "the NATO lunch", which was a three-hour lunch. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs].

Shiau: And [inaudible] there was a guy, we called, "the chicken man". He had a food truck right up at the front gate and it was right next to a vineyard and he had outdoor seating. So we would go there and we would have our chicken sandwiches and just sit there and shoot the breeze that afternoon.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And for the last two months of my time there, they got down to only one officer had to be on duty to answer the phones and the rest could do whatever-, just had to be within the local area. So the last two months of-last two months of my time I was out at the beach. [Inaudible], we would all rent out beach houses.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So it was-it was a fun assignment. I mean, you have to realize I was twenty-three years old at the time. I was fresh out of college and those were my first introduction in the military. So I was like, "Hey, you know the Air Force is not that bad".

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Military tells me my next assignment was North Dakota. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]. Yeah, that's interesting. Before we go on to North Dakota, I think you mentioned, when we spoke on the phone last night, that when, I guess the, I guess when the GLCM was still being used or-or, you know, or trained, that there were sometimes were exercises where you would need to go to the countryside and set up the operations and you'd have to like, dig in the flights, [and]

camouflage them. I think you referenced that earlier today, as well. Could you describe that a little bit more, like what it was like?

Shiau: Sure, so when it was going full board, okay, when GLCM was going full board, here's what the-the cycle would be. You would have one flight - would be at a GAMA, maintaining alert.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: And then the next flight would be ramping up for training out on the field.

Cohen: [Coughing]

Shiau: Third flight would be out in the field on exercises and this, anywhere from two weeks to three weeks. Sometimes, even four weeks, depending on...what they wanted to do and then the last flight would be standing down because he just came back from maneuvers and then they, when they-when they stood down, they would be cleaning the vehicles, doing the maintenance because when you're out in the woods, you know, out on the field--

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: Those vehicles took a lot of beatings. They-they were, you know, they're out of woods the whole time and there's not paved roads and they-they took a lot of beatings. You would go out and you would, what we call-we'd call them, "Dispersal". So you'd go out and there'll be a full field exercise and you'll park the vehicles and as you were at war. Only difference was the TELs that we took with us were emptied. They were training TELs versus the operational TELs. The operational TELs had actual missiles. These did not, so we would use simulators to, to simulate the launch. We would not actually launch out in the field, but then they would, one of the things that was unique about GLCM was that, they would bring in other countries' militaries to act as opposition forces sometimes.

Cohen: Hmm.

Shiau: And they would also have volunteers from the other flights active act as or for, you know, attack the unit in-in mock battles and so forth. And then-then you were evaluated during that whole time on your performance and then...and that was very vital to your career and so then the one year I was there, I went out in the field three times.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: When I was with cycle one, but towards the end they stopped sending us out in the field because they...the money was being cut and also they didn't feel like it was necessary, at that point. One other thing too was that when a GLCM flight came back from base, you would do a victory lap. So all the vehicles would drive around the outer perimeter road and the dependents would actually be waiting on the side of the street cheering, you know, the GLCM flight as it came back.

Cohen: Oh, that's kind of fun. Were-were you involved in all four phases of the cycle at different times? Like you say, one of them is guarding the GAMA, the other one was training for the field, the third one, I think is dispersals, and the fourth one the return and the, I think it's called the, "stood down", but like the kind of cleaning of the equipment.

Shiau: I did three out of the four. By the time I was there, the GAMA was prepped and ready and the difference was instead of actually staying in the GAMA for, you know, for the messages, the alert crews would carry our radios what we call, "bricks", and you would just have to have it during them. So you would be on alert on a rotational basis and so on a day that you're on alert, you just carry the radio with you every-everywhere you went.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: It didn't matter if you went to the gym, didn't matter if you went to the movies, whatever. You had the brick with you all the time.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: The funny part was, and so flight commander, alert flight commander would have a brick, the alert maintenance commander, so on, so on would all have a brick and there's one time we were all playing poker and the only person that was not at the poker game was the alert missile crew commander. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And so she calling us [on the radio] and all of us, there the six of us are on the poker table passing the radios back and forth because back then, they didn't know which radio was "talk" so we would just say, "Roger, that's a positive contact", and she was going through every person's name and we all played poker just passing the radio among the six of us.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So, then, [Shiau laughs] she didn't know that, and I told her later and she got mad at me and she's now a Air Force major in the [US Air Force] Reserves.

Cohen: Oh, wow.

Shiau: And so it was...

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: But it was kind of, it was kind of funny at the time when we did that, [Shiau laughs], 'cause we're all looking at each other like, "We're all here", [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So the other thing too about it was that because all of us were away from our families and we were – it was a remote base; it was a very tight group of people. Like, we did a lot things together, we would have, you know, weekly barbecues, squadron barbecues. We didn't have anyone else besides ourselves, so like, you know, it was not uncommon like every day there'll be a group of six or eight of us go out to dinners for restaurant and, and sit inside a restaurant for three or four hours for meals and so towards the end, they start putting the single officers in the base housing because they just had more base housing than they had people. So I was living in the house with another roommate and the whole street was all single officers. So every night we would just, and we didn't have cars, so we would just go in front of our driveways, park our hibachis and grilled and have a barbecue every night and just sit around with our lawn chairs. So it, it was, like I said, it was a fun assignment. It was...we got to be good friends and then, with a lot of people and well, ya know, in the woods you need a lot of work. So the field exercises was a lot of work and on average, because you're burning a lot of calories, I would lose like fifteen to twenty pounds per exercise.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: And I would gain it back at an Italian restaurants when they got back to the base but y-you would lose that much because yo-. Even though like the MREs have 3000 calories, you're burning about like five, five to 6000 calories per day.

Cohen: So...

Shiau: And you only living on, like one or two hours of sleep.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: At night.

Cohen: How-how long were you typically out in the field?

Shiau: Usually, around two weeks and so by the time I got back, your, you are so filthy. You get back to your, bachelor office quarters and everyone was, just kind of got in the habit, just like stripping down to their t-shirts and boxers and leaving their dirty uniforms outside.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: The uniforms were so dirty, it would actually stand up by itself.

Cohen: Geez.

Shiau: And then you would go in and take a shower. It would take you like seven lathers before you would have any lather for shampoo, because, and, you get all this dirt and you always knew when people come back from the field because for like about week or two after it, they would always have a little bit of camouflage, like underneath of their ears that they forgot to get rid of and stuff like that.

Cohen: I was going about to ask if you wanted to talk a little bit about the camouflage, both of the GLCM command and of the people, of yourself?

Shiau: Yeah, so the funny thing is the Ar-, we got surplus Army...camo[flauge] sticks and they're, they just tear your face apart. So one of us discovered that LL Bean had a camouflage that was cold- cold creamed based, that hunters use.

Cohen: Oh.

Shiau: So we just ordered them, so we just got used our surplus funds when we ordered that and that's what we used our camouflage and we used to call it a, "Gucciflage", because it was not military camouflage. The other thing, too, though that was nice about the Air Force was that the Army, when we went on maneuvers with them they would have their World War II pup tents. The Air Force ordered a bunch of tents from LL Bean and other outdoor providers and our tents were nice. They were, they would fold into like a small pouch. Literally, it could fit in your backpack but their pop up [tent] you would have mosquito netting and there's even a thing on the top where you put in a battery powered fan for ventilation and so it was-it was, it was not bad. It was not... [Shiau laughs] situation.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So that was the difference between the Army and the Air Force. The Army said like, "No, no, no, no, we're not doing that. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs] Oh my. So-so, so what was necessary to camouflage the people, as well? Like, I can see the equipment but would people really be that visible from...?

Shiau: Yes.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: [Inaudible] a pale face, okay, and even an African Americans face will be, if he's not camouflaged, will be clearly seen...at night. Especially with the oils reflecting off your face. [Shiau coughs]. Oh, when we were out on maneuvers, we would camouflage almost the whole time.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: And the only part was those camouflage would clog up your pores, so you would have massive acne when you came back on one of these. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And that was one of the things they don't show in the movies. They always show the Special Forces and the Rangers, and they're all camouflaged they don't tell you what it does to your face.

Cohen: No, I never, I never knew that. Although, I do hear more and more about diseases or sickness that affected people in different areas that I didn't know about.

Shiau: We weren't out long enough to get, for that to be a factor. Also, we had excellent medical care and the other thing too that was unique about GLCM was that because we're operational squadrons and we were nuclear duties, we were considered on flight status. So we would have a flight surgeon instead of a normal surgeon.

Cohen: Oh, good!

Shiau: On base to service the missile crew and their families. So it-it was a nice perk because we went in for sick call [or] whatever, you didn't have to deal with the general practitioners, which has everybody there. You just had small community working with the flight surgeons.

Cohen: Oh, that's true, so no wait times or that type of thing.

Shiau: Yeah, but also really low [ratio of doctor to patients?] and also flight surgeons tend to be the cream of the crop. So you can tend to get the very best doctors.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: Okay, in fact my dentist was my next-door neighbor in that street. One of the things that we were big on was playing racquetball because there's nothing to do. So we would just burn our energy by playing racquetball. So I would play racquetball almost every day and I knocked out my front tooth in a racquetball game and thank God my next-door neighbor, who was a dentist, so I just knocked on his door and took care of my tooth.

Cohen: So you mentioned that you and your crew pulled the last nuclear alert in Europe.

Shiau: Yes, so by that time the Army Pershing missiles had all been demobilized. They were no longer on alert. [The GLCMs were the last on alert.] My crew commander and I were on the radio for the last alert and so I checked the schedule and we were the last crew to be on alert and we were the last base to have alert ready. So we pulled the very last alert. His name was Craig Bomberg. I already got his clearance to say his name, so he retired, he and his wife both retired as full colonels and he was my crew commander and we pulled the last alert and it was kind of anti-climactic because you would think with all the drama that went with the INF treaty and the Cold War and the falling of the Berlin Wall, the last alert was, "Roger that, positive com check", and that was it. That was the last alert. It wasn't any ceremony or anything like that. It was just, "Roger, positive com check".

Cohen: Why do you think that was that? That was so low-key.

Shiau: I think it's because we were young at the time and we didn't really realize the significance of what we were doing. You know, to us it was just like another day at work and there's another chore that we had to do. So it wasn't until like a week later when I go, "Well, what's, when the new alert schedule"? They go, "No that was it. You guys were it". And that's when I realized, we pulled the last alert.

Cohen: Okay like, it wasn't clear beforehand that this was the last one or...yeah.

Shiau: Yeah, It was basically an end of the week, so I just figured that there will be someone else the next day. So it wasn't, there was no ceremony to it. There was no big hup to do. Not even the senior staff kind of realized that. "Hey, this is the last alert."

Cohen: What was your view or people who you interacted with? What were their views of the nuclear force treaty? Did they think it was a folly? Do they think it was a great idea, like was there any discussion?

Shiau: Yes, there is actually. I would say, in general, that a lot of it is quiet pride. That because of GLCM and Pershing missiles, we brought the Soviets to the bargaining table. We helped end the Cold War because the Soviets realized, with the advent of the GLCM and the Pershing II, they couldn't counter it and not only that, but we were literally spending them to death. And so as a result, we brought [Mikhail] Gorbachev to the table. He realized that he couldn't continue the Cold War because of that. So we helped to bring it to the end of the Cold War and so there's a lot of quiet pride that we were a part of that and we're a part of history.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: We also felt that the INF treaty, even though it ended our bases in Europe, it kind of validated our mission because our mission helped to end the Cold War and it helped bring the Soviets to the bargaining table and so there is a lot of very deep pride among the GLCM community of being a part of that unique opportunity. Because the ICBM world, totally different from the GLCM world, totally different.

Cohen: Inter-interesting, wh-wh- why do you think me the GLCM world is totally different than the ICBM? I remember you told me, earlier, it's a long-range missiles but why do you think there was such a big difference?

Shiau: Oh, it was a different mission and also, like, quite frankly, when you're on ICBMs, you go from base to a launch control facilities. They have a bed in it and you're not out on the field, you're not on, in, you know, you're not carrying M 16. You're not being camouflaged, you're not worried about being a target of Spetsnaz [Soviet Special Forces]. We were the number one target for Soviet Spetsnaz, forces in Europe. If there was ever, the balloon went up. We were one of the first targets to be attacked.

Cohen: Do you want, do you want to talk about that a little more? Like about being...

Shiau: Sure...

Cohen: ...first tar-target.

Shiau: So, so, as you know, Spetsnaz is a Soviet Special Forces and we were the number one target. So the difference was stateside, yes, you know you have a mission

and yes, you know it's important but you not under the constant threat of attack. We were under constant threat of attack in terms of vigilance. We would constantly, you know, if you had a car you would look under your car to make sure there's no bomb attached to it. When you drove out in the countryside, even when you're not on military duty, it was always advised to go in groups. Never going by yourself. Okay, you are always constantly, you had that in the back of mind. Whereas, in ICBMs, you really don't have that and they also it's different mentality because it's more of a stateside, by-the-book mentality and GLCM's mentality more of just, "Get the job done." So we were kind of viewed as cowboys by the big missile, meaning, the fact when we went to ICBM, being GLCM was actually...there was a lot of jealousy from their part because they said, "Well, you guys got to party in Europe, while we did the real work", and they didn't understand that, what the work we did.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: Because now, there's f--ing North Dakota and you see a bunch of guys out in Italy and Germany having fun. Well, we did real work and...and don't get me wrong, I'm proud of my ICBM experience too and we could have another discussion about my time at ICBM but in terms of GLCM, it was a unique, it was a very unique experience. That was not, that has not been replicating since.

Cohen: Do, do you, think that there was like such a strong camaraderie because, in addition to the fact that this was the people who could socialize with each other, it also, there's also involved a lot of, I don't know, cooperation and, and, I don't know, and, and, I had to face the same potential threat?

Shiau: I would-I would say so, yes because as a very junior officer, I had to integrate with other organizations, okay, on a day-to-day actual basis out in the field. In ICBMs, yes, there's a maintenance squadron, there's a security police squadron, but they had their own chain of command and they didn't really...you interfaced with them, but you didn't really work with them. They had their own thing, okay. Whereas in GLCM, it was, you had to integrate and also you were, we were away from our families. So, yeah know, it's different and, like, I travel a lot on business now and to be honest when I go overseas, it's no big deal because I have instant messenger, I have my cell phone. I have text messaging, [and] I have FaceTime. I have all these other stuff that, where I can keep communication with my family. Back then, letters were nine days each way.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: Okay, a phone call was five dollars a minute and there was no such thing as instant messaging or email back then. So, as a result, you were very isolated and you only had each other.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: I, quite frankly, feel that if GLCM was now, guys there would not be as tight as when we were there because we had nothing but each other and I think that's why we became tight.

Cohen: Interesting, hmm, interesting. Yeah, I can relate to what you're saying, because I lived in Israel as a teenager and in my early twenties and also, like as you're saying, phone calls were expensive and-and, and in Israel, sometimes hard to find a phone where you could be, like a public phone. Yeah, were-were not so easy to find and letters took, you know, sometimes up to two weeks and it, it's-it's quite true. It was, it was much more of a challenge to keep in touch with people at home.

Shiau: Right, it was-it was a...it was a different world and so, as a result,... we, we hadn't, we had, you know, be with either other and so even though I was in ICBM for four years, I'm still tighter with the people from GLCM that spent one year with.

Cohen: Yeah, so it was a very close...

Shiau: To this day I'm still friends with all of them.

Cohen: Did-did you, did you have the opportunities to travel within Italy or elsewhere in Europe during the year that you were based in Sicily?

Shiau: Oh yeah, a lot. So rental cars were cheap. So a lot of times, we would do like trips all along the island and then on my twenty-fourth birthday, a bunch of us rented a minivan. We went to a Rome and spent the weekend of Rome and I also went to Malta couple times and so, and, then I had yet, space available flights. Back then the military's bigger, so there was a lot more flights. So I used to, I got to go to Germany a few times too and also to Spain. So I-I [inaudible]... for a twenty-three year old straight out of college that was a great experience and the funniest thing was that we had a perverse contest to see who could drive the most beat-up car and it would still work.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So I bought a Lancia from another captain who was going back to the States and the first trip out the key breaks in the door. So here I am, I don't speak a word of Italian, I'm in Palermo [Italy], and I have a key that's broken in the car, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So I got the hotel to give me a pair of pliers and pulled out the key from the insert and then went to a local Lancia dealer and I go, "Lancia", and they sold me the keys and they were really nice about it. They made a brand-new key for me and I asked him how much and the guy goes, "No, thank you, you guys have done enough for me", and showed me his arm and there was the concentration camp numbers. He was a survivor of the Holocaust.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: And I told him like, "You realize, you know, I wasn't even born then. I'm just..." you know, and he goes, "Yeah, but Americans helped me after the war and this is my way of thanking". So I said, "Well thank you very much".

Cohen: Oh, wow.

Shiau: And...so we went back to the car and the coast, the, Palermo was about four hours away from Comiso and the engine gives out and the only way we can run it is if one person pulls on the choke [valve] and other person drives. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So, all the way, for four hours, my buddy and I would drive. He-he's a better driver than me, so he drove and I would just pull at the choke [Shiau laughs], every-every five seconds and we did that all the way back until we got back to base.

Cohen: [Laughs], wow, wow

Shiau: And then when we got to base, the car died in the parking lot. So I left it there for the whole year. It got so bad the tires had deflated. It was just dead.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And then when I was leaving, I, they go, "Sir, you gotta get rid of that car". I go, "But it doesn't run". They go, "All right, you just sign it to us and we'll junk it. So I signed it over to 'em. Next day, I look over and I see a forklift lift my car and pull it out of the parking lot, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Yeah, those are the memories that stick with you and...

Cohen: You, sorry go on.

Shiau: Go ahead.

Cohen: I was just thinking, I was just thinking like, it seems to me that there, that there will be a part two, but I'm wondering, if we, if we want, if you want to say something more about the year in Comiso, you know, for today or-or if you wanna return to something you brought up earlier that you said would, I think when you first joined the Texas Army National Guard, like you were the first Chinese that many of the people had met. So I wondered did that follow through, you know, after the National Guard or was...

Shiau: Well, even then there was only a handful. Yeah, even then there was only a handful of Asian officers. I visited some of the bases and there's a lot more now, but at the time, there was only one other officer and myself. He ended up retiring as the one star, no, no as a full colonel. He...very brilliant man. He, he, myself, and one other buddy, we were very tight and [Shiau laughs]. So this other Asian officer and I, on the last day, that last weekend we were there, we decide to rent a car and just drive around at random and we go to this small Italian village and we go into this restaurant and apparently, it's like some peace organization is having their anti-nuclear seminar in that university town. And here's two nuclear weapons officers having lunch there. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And so, so we're eating lunch and in the end, I go to pay the bill. The guy goes, "No, you must sign here", because he thought that we were students and he thought he had to find the registrar so they could bill the university and I go, "No, no", as I explained to him, "We'll pay in cash", and the guy, "No sign". So my buddy next to me goes, "You heard the man, Jen. ~~Pay~~-sign the bill". [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So we sign the bill and left and we're just thinking, you know, the peace, university guys would be going, "Who the hell are these guys"? [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And there were these students who [had] Air Force Weapons Officers at their conference with us signing our names.

Cohen: [Laughs], Oh my.

Shiau: And the funny thing is you can't, you can't make this stuff up. I mean, it's just stuff-stuff that happened and it was, it, it was just kind of funny because, [Shiau laughs], situations like that just happen. I still remember that and we have that picture. You know, it's just funny because my friend just said, "You heard the man. Sign the bill".

Cohen: [Laugh], you're trying...so, did-did...

Shiau: Yeah, so...

Cohen: Did you ever meet people who discussed their anti-nuke point of view to you either in Italy or, or back in the United States?

Shiau: Yeah, over the years and I'd say a lot of times there's a lot of misconceptions and a lot of myths out there and so what I try to do is best, I try to engage them on a logical point of view and try to tell them like, that's not the case and try to educate them on the people I served with. One of my friends assumed that all military people are uneducated and only went into the military because they couldn't get a job. He was astounded to find out that all military officers have bachelor's degrees and it was in the Air Force. Almost ninety percent has master's [degrees] or more.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: I mean, he was astounded by that and then among the enlisted force, almost all the senior enlisted have...they all have associates and almost all...a good portion of them have bachelors and I even met a chief master sergeant who had a doctorate.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: So that's one of the myths I try to dissuade and try and try to tell them that, you know, we joined for a lot myri-myriad of reasons. Okay, I mean, there are people who do join because they wanted the college benefits. There's other people who join because it's family tradition. There's other people like me who joined because of patriotism. Maybe people just kind of joined because that was, they just kind of went along with the flow, but it doesn't mean that our service is any less valid or-or the fact that...that the-that the people I served with were some of the finest people I ever served with.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: In terms of co-workers and integrity and stuff like that. So I try to educate people on what they are and I feel like, you know, I don't know too many people that get paid \$35,000 a year and they're out at two o'clock in the morning maintaining a missile in minus sixty degrees Fahrenheit weather.

Cohen: Yes, that's a good point, [laughs], yeah.

Shiau: Okay, and they do it. On-on a day to day basis, and so I, they do it because they take pride in what they do and you don't see that, okay, in the-in the private sector. So I try to educate them that, you know, don't look down on those people in the military because they are actually some of the finest people you'll ever meet. And I mean that from the bottom of my heart. I mean, I come from, I'd say, from, actually, a nonmilitary family. I was like the first one in my, my father was drafted but he only served for a year. So he wasn't really military in that sense.

Cohen: Did he serve in-in Taiwan?

Shiau: In Taiwan, yeah. He was in the Taiwan Navy [Republic of China Navy]. My nephew, on the other hand, he served as an Army captain and he's, he's my pride and joy and... where I was kind of a goof ball, he was the, the stellar officer. He was head of the ROTC detachment and he was first in his Officer Basic Course.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: And now he's at Georgetown [University] on, for his master's program. So he, he's a good kid and I'm very proud of him.

Cohen: Well, so, so maybe you're starting a military tradition in your family, in a way. Did you...

Shiau: Maybe and, go ahead, did I...

Cohen: Did your parents come around like when they saw you succeed in the military or- or even at college in ROTC? Did they come around and think it was, maybe, a good idea after all or?

Shiau: No, they never did. That was one of the things I had learned to deal with. Now the funny part is my nephew went into the military, they were all fully supportive, so I think in a way. My dad was very old school Chinese, so I think what it is that he would never tell me that I did fine. So his way of doing that was supporting my nephew when my nephew went into the military.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah.

Shiau: It's...they somewhat, they partially come around when they realize that they could've been more supportive, but the way I look at that, that's history. I mean, I left the military '97. So, you know, it's been over twenty-one years since I put on the uniform.

Cohen: Yeah.

Hui-Jen Shiau

Nov. 6, 2018

Part 2

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Transcribed by Matthew Gipson

Edited by Leah Cohen

Produced by Brad Guidera & Angel Melendez

Web biography by Matthew Gipson

Cohen: Today is November 6th, 2018. My name is Leah Cohen. On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. I have the pleasure of continuing our phone conversation of October 16th with Captain Hui-Jen Shiau, a missile launch officer during the Cold War who served from 1985 to 1997. So it seems to me that we ended our last conversation with the description of your service at the Comiso base [Air Station] in Italy. Was there something that we did not discuss that you would like to discuss about that period of time?

Shiau: No, I think we discussed a lot. Well, there was one last thing, so, uh, so we, what happened was when they closed the base, okay.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: We had, a, um, an assignment night similar to what they had the Academy and, ah, we organized it at the officer's club. Now, the officer's club, the grand title for the single-wide trailer that we used as the O Club [Officer's Club], [Shiau laughs] and, um, I organized that party and what we did was...our wing commander, put up the names of all the, the ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile] bases up and then he would unveil each person's name and post it on the bullet, onto the whiteboard of which base they were going to and which weapon system. There was [two types of ICBMS], minute man two and minute man three at a time. So in different bases and so that was kind of like a fun, final farewell and what happened was it was kind of unique in that most times, when you leave a base, everyone kinda goes in dribs and drabs to their next assignment, so you kind of like don't see these people again for years. In our

case, 'cause our base closed down, everyone in our unit went from Comiso to Vandenberg Air Force Base [California] for retraining into ICBMs en masse. So we all showed up at the same time at Vandenberg Air Force Base and that was kind of unique and that was kind of unique experience for both sides, because the instructors at Vandenberg were used to brand new second lieutenants who didn't know anything about the Air Force and, in comes, you know, bunch of senior second lieutenants, first lieutenants, and captains who already were in another weapon system, who had a different way of doing things and they didn't, it's kind of a challenge for them because they always go, then we'll go like, "Why, why are you doing this"? And then they're not used to that, they're use to, "You do this", and all the second lieutenants would go, "Oh yes, that's great", and then they'll go from there. Whereas our group, we came in and we would go, "Well, that's not the way we do it. We would do, something else", and we'd point it out a different way and so it was a challenge for them and it was also a challenge for us, because they were used to having a bunch brand new second lieutenants. We weren't a bu-bunch of brand new second lieutenants. We didn't want to be treated like that, but they didn't know how to treat more experienced officers coming through their training and at the same, all at the same time. So it was a challenge to Vandenberg compared to other classes. Other missile classes, which are all brand new lieutenants that are commissioned literally weeks before showing up for training...

Cohen: W-would you say that the GLCM group, the-the group that had been in Comiso, Italy, in addition to working on a different system and having had more experience also had a more of a culture of debate and questioning methods?

Shiau: I would say so, yes, because these [ICBM] missileers came from Strategic Air Command, which was, the mentality was read a step, do a step, eat a banana. Whereas GLCM was more on a tactical aspect and another thing too was the weapon systems was, even when we closed down, it was still relatively new, so they were still making up procedures all the way to the end and so people had to be adapted, they had to be to roll with the circumstances. Things are constantly changing and so there's a different mindset. So when you went from that environment, to a more rigid environment, that SAC [Strategic Air Command] was, it was a, it was an adjustment period for all of us and not only that but for us, one minute we're on a beach in Italy and next minute we're told we're going to North Dakota, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [laughs]

Shiau: So that was a challenge there.

- Cohen: You-you probably talked about this the last time, but would you mind talking again about how you pulled the last nuclear alert of Europe, like what exactly you had done?
- Shiau: Yeah, so it really was kind of, like I said, it was kind of anti-climactic. It wasn't like, I didn't pull like any strings to be the last person or whatever. It was just my rotation. It just turned out that I was on that rotation and that was the last alert and it was actually at the end of the month, so we were just kind of expecting a new schedule. Then we didn't see it so it was kind of like...I won't say anti-climactic, but all we did was we just went through normal routines and then that was it. There was no more nuclear alerts after that, because we were last nuclear weapons system, still in Europe at the time, maintaining alert status. So it was...as I mentioned before it was very-very anti-climactic. It wasn't, there's no ceremonies, there was no notations, it's just okay we did the job and let's move on and that was kind of, like what GLCM was like, it was like we did a job and we moved on. And so that was kind of interesting how it went like that and as I mentioned before, I didn't think much about it at a time and there's only now, with the passage of time, that I've thought more about that. How, like we should have made more of it. We shoulda had more of a ceremony, but it wasn't. It was just kind of like, "Okay we did it."
- Cohen: How did you or your peers react to, let's say the political aspect of the Intermediate Nuclear Force [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty at the time, like once you were alert about the treaty? What were people's opinions of it?
- Shiau: It was mixed. First of all, we thought we had a good thing going, so no one wanted those bases to close because on a personal basis, it was some of the best assignments any of us had.
- Cohen: [Laughs]
- Shiau: But, on the other hand, we were proud that we helped to bring the end of the Cold War and that we had a sense of like mission accomplished. That we did our job.
- Cohen: Hmm.
- Shiau: And you have to remember, like, most of my peers at the time we're lieutenants and captains. We were very junior officers, so, you know, we didn't have much a way of saying in terms of policy. We implemented the policy, but we didn't have any much influence on the policy.
- Cohen: O-okay.

Shiau: I'm sorry, so...

Cohen: So-so now...

Shiau: And like I said, you have to realize at the time I was twenty-two years old. Most my other peers were twenty-three, twenty-four and I thought the, the first lieutenants were old because they were twenty-five. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And you don't realize that's just like how young, like the [United States] military tend to put a lot of responsibility very quick and very early and so, you know, you think you're mature and you're old but, you know, now that I'm fifty-two and I look at these pictures, I mean, we look like children. We look like we're out, in high school. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs], do you think it influenced your life, the fact that you had to take leadership at younger ages than the average?

Shiau: Oh absolutely, I mean, even now in the workforce, like the attention to detail that I was taught in the Air Force, still very much part of my job as a technology manager. I also...like as an officer, you're always accountable for your actions because the buck stops with you. So that influences me very much in the way I work in life -- is that, you know, I'm accountable, it's-it's, you know, I can't put the blame on someone else. You know, it's I did it or I didn't do it and so that, that was a very strong influence on the rest of my life to be honest and it also 'cause over time, like from of my friends from high school who never went into service, it caused a, for me a little bit of a chasm, because they didn't go through the same experience I did. So they never had to be serious until much later in life, whereas I had to be serious at twenty-two.

Cohen: Hmm, hmm.

Shiau: You know, so it does-it does color your perceptions and, and one of the things that I will admit that sometimes, I don't know if it's less forgiving than I should be, because I was, I was kind of going like, you know, you, like hearing someone living in their house, their home when their twenty-eight and I'm going like, "Hey, when I was twenty-eight I was a captain", [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So, so it, it does affect how you look at things.

Cohen: And also helps take on a...like it does seem to make people more mature, you know.

Shiau: It does. I mean, don't get me wrong, there was still a lot of growing up for me that I had to do, [Shiau laughs], but I think it did make me grow up and also even my failures within the system taught me lessons in life too, because it taught me that..., you know, you have to own your own mistakes and you have to learn from your mistakes to move on and, and in the private sector, in civilian life, a lot of the time people don't have to deal with those consequences.

Cohen: No, no. G-getting back to Vanden-, Vandenberg, in [California and Grand Forks AFB in North Dakota], what were some of the other differences between the, the ICBMs and the, the GLCM missiles? Like-like what were some of the technical differences that might have affected the way of operations?

Shiau: Well, for one thing, the minute men missiles were built in the early 1960s using 1950s technologies. The GLCM missiles were built in the '80s using early '80s technology. So in a GLCM missiles capsule, we were using touch screens to work, interact with the system and minute men were using rotary dials and switches, so it was like a step back in time when we went from GLCM to minuteman. Things were, here's an example. I had a weapons systems computer in the minuteman capsule that was about the size of a small dorm refrigerator and it had sixty-four K in memory. [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: That was, that was the, that was the memory for the [launch control computer], the data main for the ICBM. One of the things I always laugh about is you hear about Skynet [from the **Terminator** Film Franchise] is taking over the missiles. Well, unfortunately, those missiles are too stupid to be networked and they're not... [Shiau laughs], there's no way that Skynet can never take it over. So that-that is of the things that I was most amused by.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: So, it was a step back in time and also SAC was more rigid and because you weren't going out into a field deployment situation or what we call the real world type situation, they had different methods, measures of performance that [inaudible] that we had in common and some ways it was less stressful, in other ways it was more stressful because, in fact, you had three major tests per month. You have one that was on weapons systems, another one on the codes, and another one on the classified procedures. They were thirty question test. Ninety percent was passing, so you could-you could only get three wrong. However, if you got one wrong and got ninety-seven and you got that more than once, more

than twice, okay, in two months, you would actually be talked to [by your squadron] commander going, "Why, what's wrong with you? Why aren't you...you know, why aren't you performing"? And so it's a very high level performance and so that causes a lot of pressure because you're expected to be perfect 100 percent all of the time every time.

Cohen: Wh-what really is the difference? Like I-I would think that there both deterrents, the, both ICBM and GLCM, so...what is the difference in terms of deployment?

Shiau: Well, for instance, when you're.... in GLCM, and you deploy, your, it's no different from then the Army. You're actually taking tents and weapons and you're going out in the woods and you're staying out there for two weeks at a time. You come back dirty and filthy and, you know, tired. In minuteman, you were in a, what we called a "three day rotation". Day one you would go to pre-departure briefing. They would give you a world situation.... update and sometimes you'll take a no notice test to verify that you can perform. Then you would pick up your maintenance chief and take a crew vehicle out to the missile site. Now, the missile field was about the size of New Jersey. So some of them, some of the missile facilities were within an hour of the base and others then there's, like Alpha Zero, which is by the Canadian border, is about three, three and a half hour drive each way and during snow it could be up to six to eight hours of driving because you're going at very slow speeds. So you go there, you do a change over with, with a security person upstairs, they verify your identity, you go downstairs in an elevator, you do an inspection and then you do a change over with the previous crew. They tell you, like if there's anything wrong, is there any maintenance going on, whatever, and then a commander would then sign for the weapons and then you'll be, you'll take custody of the nuclear weapons and the outgoing crew will then go upstairs and then go home. And then on the next day you leave for another crew and on the third day is when they use it for either training, simulator time, or office time and then we had done all that stuff and then you had the day off. So I actually had a lot of time off during that time because the training would only take about, like, three days out of the month. So you had another seven days to just do whatever you want and so we would call it, "eight and zero". So therefore I would go eight alerts and no backup or sometimes you would do six and two, which is six alerts and two backups. Now there was two types of crew. There were crews assigned to the instructure shop and they were technically the elite and there were other people who stayed with the squadrons and just worked their way up and we were the line crew and we nicknamed ourselves the "line swine".

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Okay, and so the instructors, the funny part I found was that the instructors would know the book way and some of the senior line crew would know the, the real way of doing things.

Cohen: Oh, what--

Shiau: And so sometimes that would cause conflicts, because you would do something to fix a problem, but it's not an orthodox manner and so, you-you might get in trouble for that and so there was-, but if you-if you had a solid case then, you, you can always change the procedures and they'll change procedures accordingly. But quite honestly by the time I got there, they already had like thirty years of missile time. So, they pretty much had ironed out like all the procedures. There's very, it was really very little procedures that they had to iron out anything new. So it was a very rigid system that they had in the, in the ICBM.

Cohen: Wa-was your line crew mostly made up of the former GLCM group?

Shiau: No, so when we went to-, after Vandenberg, they, then they kind of split us off among the different bases so, there were GLCM guys at each base, but we weren't, like the majority. In fact, we're the very small minority and the...people there, there were two types. There were ones that thought what we did was really cool and wanted to know more and frankly, there were some that are just, you know, jealous, saying, I don't know, "Hey, welcome to the real missiles", or, "Welcome to the real Air Force. You know, you guys are out there [on vacation] and in Europe and playing around while we're doing the real work", and so, there was a little bit of that, but I tend to find the majority of people were more of the former than the latter.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: But I did encounter some of that. The other thing too, was there's a difference in operation style, so both sides had to get used to each other. And it wasn't like a us versus them, but it's more of like...I guess the best analogy is like you have two high schools and you take one high school and broke it up and then separated them on four different high schools. You know, each high school has its own culture, but so when you go to the new high school, you're bringing your own culture but they already had their own culture in place. So therefore, it takes a while for both sides to get used to each other and that's pretty, that's pretty much similar to what we had in GLCM, going to, back to ICBMs.

Cohen: So, so after, you're saying, when the- when the GLCM group returned to North Dakota and split up to four different bases, which base were you at, in particular?

Shiau: I was assigned to Grand Forks, North-North Dakota to the Grand Forks Air Force Base.

Cohen: Okay.

Shiau: We used a nickname, “El Grando Forko”, south of the border, just the wrong one. And that actually, that was part of the, the humor you used to, you know to pass away time.

Cohen: How else did you, like, pass away time when things were quiet at Grand Forks?

Shiau: Well, I used that time to get my master’s [degree]. So they had a program called, “Minuteman Education Program” which was actually a very good program. It was that if you were on missile crew, the Air Force would pay for your master’s and they would fly in professors from a choice of four different university degree programs. So you get your choice of which university you want to do. I went to a local university, the University of North Dakota for their MPA [Masters of Public Administration]. And the Air Force Institute of Technology, it was paid for 100 percent by the Air Force. That included books, tuition, fees, lab fees, everything.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: Yeah, so it wasn’t, it wasn’t a bad deal and so when you’re on the missile field, ninety-nine percent of it, of the time it’s quiet and boring. So you can be bored out of your skull or you could go there and use that time productively to get your master’s and a lot of people did.

Cohen: Yeah, it sounds like you did too. Wow.

Shiau: Yeah, and so when you’re out on the field, we actually had a satellite dish there and then we would watch cable and it was tied to one channel changer, which is up in a security police console upstairs. So for some reason, the security police like to watch cops. [Shiau laughs], cops watching cops.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: [Shiau laughs], it was little bit of a battle. The, the missile crew ended up fighting with the security police upstairs [for the channel choice]. The security police wanted to watch cops, we wanted to watch HBO, so therefore there’ll be a little bit of a back and forth going on.

Cohen: [Laughs] That’s funny.

Shiau: The other thing to was, they would have magazines and paperback books. So the Air Force had a program where the different paperback publishers would send a box of paperbacks every month to missile field. So, you know, you would share with the upstairs crew. So the missile guys would be underground and, you know, you get to do a lot of reading that way. They also fixed a car cassette stereo to the sound speakers downstairs, so you could play a tape deck to play some music when you worked.

Cohen: [Laughs], that's funny

Shiau: Yeah, that's the stuff that doesn't make it in the movies. The other thing we would do, we would do a thing called, "run silent, run deep". So when you first go in, the lights all are full on. So what a lot of guys would do, they would unscrew some of the light bulbs to get it a little bit darker. Just so it'll be a little bit, not as harsh of a light and then that's what, you know, so that was what we called, "run silent, run deep". The other thing that we, they would do is...each missile site-, so there's fifteen per base, okay? Five first squadrons. There's three squadrons, each one has five missile launch sites called missile launch control facilities. Each missile launch control facility would have ten missiles assigned to it, so it'll be a total of 150 missiles in whole wing.

Cohen: Okay.

Shiau: Okay, and...so each squadron was semi-autonomous. One capsule of each five capsules would be the squadron command post and then there-, that one will be, in wartime, would be the one that's in charge of that squadron. In terms of dictating which launch and so forth and which options you're launching with and then there'll be one capsule among all of the 15 designated as the alternate command post and that would be taking over should the main basis command post go out. So, that was...that's what we did and...so that was one of the things we had to do. Okay?

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: The other thing too, was...let's see what else. Each missile capsule had its own personality. For the flight commander, like the-the senior missile crew for that particular capsule would decorate it according how you want it. So, For instance, [Missile Alert Facility] Oscars-Zero had a big picture of Oscar in the missile suite; the Oscar from Sesame Street in a missile flight suit, okay.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: The...the capsule I went to, Lima, the flight commander and I were both **Star Trek** fans. So we would stock it up with VHS [Video Home System] tapes of all the "**Star Trek**" episodes.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: It's-it's, it's stuff like this, it's easy to have a normal personality, okay. And so, it wasn't like totally interchangeable. One of them, [Missile Alert Facility] Alpha-Zero, was rumored to be haunted. Supposedly during its construction someone fell into the concrete and was buried in the, in the concrete of the missile capsule.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: I since then, then did some research and found that was kind of like an urban legend that it didn't really happen, but it made for a good story.

Cohen: It is. It's kind of intriguing that each capsule for the missile had its own character, story or music or... [Laughs].

Shiau: Yeah, and then, you know, they had their own different characteristics of it. And so, you know, the parts were mostly the same. Like I said, each one of them had a little bit of different nuances.

Cohen: You know-

Shiau: Go ahead.

Cohen: Oh, So sorry, you go ahead.

Shiau: No, no, no, that's okay.

Cohen: Okay, I-I have a little note here. I don't remember if I asked it before or not, but just in case I'd liked to ask it again. I think you'd mentioned, on the pre-interview questionnaire, that during a time of instability, you were called in the middle of the night to double man the ICBM. Like could you talk a little bit about it and-and what exactly does it mean to double man the ICBM?

Shiau: All right, the thing is, normally, you would have a bed down stairs and once the door is closed, one crew member can be asleep while the other one's awake.

Cohen: Okay.

Shiau: But a normal shift would be... You both have lunch, then the crew commander will go take an afternoon nap. Then he would walk up around dinner time and he and the deputy would both have dinner and then the deputy can then go to sleep and the commander takes the night shift. Now it depends on which commander. Some commanders, like me, were nice and I woke up my deputies at six thirty or seven. There were other, other commanders that woke me up, when I was a deputy, at two o'clock in the morning. You know and so... and you can't do anything about it. You just basically say, "Okay", and get up and you, you know. So it depends on-, each commander was different. So, for me, I woke up my deputies, when I was a commander, at six thirty or seven and of the others that, that would be listening to me going, "Oh my god, you're way, you're way too soft on them". I was like, you know, the reason, the truth of the matter was that, those paperbacks I mentioned. Every once in a while, I would get a good paperback and I would just start reading and I would lose track of time, so [Shiau laughs], I'll looks and go, "Oh, crap! "Okay, now, now time to wake up the deputies". So, they lucked out, because I, I like to read a lot.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Okay, so, I'd just, I would just lose track of time. Truth of the matter was, wasn't really because I was a nice guy. It's just 'cause I like to read a lot of books. [Shiau laughs], and I would lose track of time.

Cohen: [Laughs], that's funny.

Shiau: Okay, and then the other thing too that-, so you've seen the movie **War Games** [1983 film]. You see them, they-they wear these blue flight suits with coverall and that's what we wore coming in, but they don't show is that soon as the door was closed, you would change into civilian clothes. Some people wore sweatpants. I wore, I would put on, like khakis and a polo shirt and that's how we pull my work. And then when the crew from next day comes out, we would just change back into the uniform before they, they came down 'cause, usually, what will happen is the security chief upstairs will say, "Sir...you know, they're here". So then they'll take them about ten, fifteen minutes upstairs to do, you know, all the changeover and inspections. So, during that time, that's plenty of time for us to...to get changed back into our flight suits.

Cohen: Yeah, yeah.

Shiau: So, so that's my thing, like I said, in the movies everyone wants always wearing a uniform but quite honestly, if there was a third world war, I'll be in my chinos and polo shirt.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And so, yeah, so we would, there was a different life there and well, what'll happen too is that each crew would do what they call the-, they have a little signatures, like people would-, the capsule would be mounted on these four shock absorbers.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: So there's the outer capsule and there's the inner capsule. And so, people would, would sometimes crawl out to the outer capsule and find some obscure place using magic marker and write their names.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: They usually do that on their last alert. We call that last alert the LFA, the last f'in alert and so tradition was if you-, on the-, on your LFA, you got to go up and speak and have carte blanche to say anything and get away with it. Some people go up and say, "Thank you, I had a great time and I'll miss you guys". Other people would start going on, "Okay, here's my rant", you know, "...Volume one". [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Other people like me I, like when I had my LFA, I decided that I was gonna go out on a positive note. So what I did was, I called a local Chinese restaurant and they gave me, they created thirty Chinese takeout packages.

Cohen: Oh, wow.

Shiau: And I gave that one, each one the other crews and I said, I said, "I'm gonna leave on a positive note because you know what, there's no sense of being negative". So that was just my mentality at the time. So I gave everyone-, my LFA was unique because I gave everyone a, a, a Chinese takeout package. The other thing too was the roads in North Dakota are elevated for, so the snow won't pile up on the road. So I was coming down a hill on my la-my last alert and we're driving these Chevy suburban SUVs [Sport Utility Vehicle]. I'm coming down and I kick in the auto...cruise control and that was a mistake because I gunned the engine and I hit that ramp and then, and then, and because I, I was hitting another road that was perpendicular to the road I was on. Then I hit the elevation like a ramp. Next you know, there's another missile crew coming down that perpendicular road and they saw my SUV fly in front of them doing a **[The] Dukes of Hazzard** [TV series]. [Shiau laughs], and they spotted me out [Shiau laughs] and cut me off [Shiau laughs]. So it was [Shiau laugh], it was my last alert, so, like, I kinda got

away with it, but it was kinda funny because, you know, they just see this SUV flying in through the air in front of 'em doing a Dukes of Hazzard.

Cohen: And you weren't hurt?

Shiau: No, no one got hurt. It didn't fly up that high, but it did leave the ground and so [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: That-that-that was a way to-that was a way to say goodbye to missiles on my way out. It was, it was kinda funny and so you talk about double manning, okay? So therefore, when we get double manning what happens is, they'll bring out another missile crew and instead of one person being asleep and the other person being awake, both missile members have to be awake.

Cohen: Uh-huh, uh-huh

Shiau: So the reason it's double manned is that, you know,...

Cohen: Yeah, because they're both-

Shiau: After a while, he's needs to sleep. So what do is the relief crew will be upstairs and just hanging out with the maintenance and security people where, you know, there's a house. Basically, effectively, a house on top of the missile capsule and there's pool tables, there's a kitchen, there's, you know, a rec room with a little library, there's bunk beds, so, you know, you get to sleep and stuff like that, and then when the downstairs crew is tired, the upstairs crew will go down switch out and downstairs will go up. That only happened once when I was on crew and I can't go into details.

Cohen: Sure.

Shiau: But it happened once and it was actually kind of scary because we got called in the middle of night. Normally, you wait till the next morning at seven o'clock and you actually go to your pre-departure briefing. I got a call at eight pm that night and they said, "Hey listen, you gotta call your deputy, find out where they're at, and head out to base now". And so, it was kind of weird, because that almost never happens and so I called. I found my deputy and he's out there with some friends and I said, "Look, we got, we got a recall", so he went back to base and we went to the pre-departure room and they told us what happened and then we had to drive up [to] a missile site in the middle of the night. So then, you know, you got to realize. You're driving two to three hours in the middle of the night in North Dakota. Okay, where there's no streetlights or anything.

Cohen: Oh.

Shiau: Driving out there in the middle of the night and then you do the relief. Fortunately, what happened, cleared up later on the next day and everything was all hunky-dory, but it was kind of...I was a little bit nervous, I'll admit and I remember calling my father and saying that, you know, "I hope", you know, I just said, you know, "I just wanted to call and say, 'hi' and just wanted to say I love you", and he said, "Is everything okay"? And I said, "Yeah, everything's okay", but I was not at liberty at the time say what else going on so, I just said, "I just wanted to call and say 'hi'".

Cohen: Yeah, yeah.

Shiau: But I do remember that, because it was...the whole time I was driving out to the, to the base, I didn't know what was going on and I was wondering, you know, if the balloon [the balloon going up is a military phrase meaning a war has started], if the balloon had gone up. If, you know, this was the time when the Soviet Union had just fallen apart and they had a coup d'etat [overthrow/ousting] with Boris Yeltsin and Russia. So we didn't know what was going on.

Cohen: Huh.

Shiau: Later on it turned out that it-, everything turned out to be okay there was a reason why we had to have double manning and so when I did find out, it was a big load off my back and during that time I couldn't tell my family either.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: and was...It was a little bit stressful and it made me, afterwards, appreciate my family that much more, because that was, actually, two weeks before my last alert. And so, a few weeks after that, I turned in my own equipment and went off to my next time assignment at the Pentagon and so I got to see my family and my dad said, "So what happened"? And I said, "I can't tell, but, you know, everything's okay". So it was...That was, that was the interesting time. That was an interesting time.

Cohen: In addition to this time of instability, did you ever feel at risk because of the, you know, the nuclear technology? Like were you ever concerned there might be a..., you know what I mean? A technical failure that would cause...

Shiau: No, not at all, because one thing about the Air Force is that they had, literally, decades to perfect this system. Like, they took the human factor out of most things and so, as a result, you know, the equipment was old, but they had spare

parts. They had maintenance, [and] they had procedures. The security was very tight.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: They, they knew how to get things done. I never once felt that I was in danger from that point of view. It was more of...Part of it was, "Why were we doing it?" type of feeling, because this was this was right before 9/11 [September 11 attacks], so it's the period from Desert Storm [Operation Desert Storm] and 9/11, the military was in big period of, "What are we doing here"? 'Cause, you know, we're hearing, you know, peace is breaking out, the Cold War's over, why are we pointing nuclear weapons at each other?

Cohen: Uh-huh, uh-huh, interesting.

Shiau: And then, after 9/11, it kind of made things more serious again, because the nuclear weapons because made sure that the Russians or the Chinese behave themselves so that our forces, out on the field, could do what they need to do without excessive Russian or Chinese interference, but we provided an umbrella. So, during that period time, a lot of times we were just kind of wonder, like, "What are we doing"? "Why am I here with this weapon system"? You know, "Why am I-", you know, I mean, the Russians themselves were getting rid of their nukes [nuclear weapons]. It was later on that I realized that how much we kept an umbrella over the United States during that time.

Cohen: It's interesting, yeah.

Shiau: So, yeah, and so the thing, with nukes, is that there's no glory. We're, you know, we're not [United States] Navy SEALs [acronym for Sea, Air and Land, the Navy's special operations force]. We're not gonna jump out with a knife in our mouth and come out the water or anything. So we were just a bunch of ordinary guys going out to the field and doing their jobs, but one of thing people that have to realize about the military is that ninety-ninety percent of people in the military are not Navy SEALs or [United States Army] Rangers or special forces [There are many different special forces in each military branch]. They're just guys doing a regular job and they're doing-, and what's really heroic about that is you have a nineteen-year-old [Air Force] airmen fixing a missile in minus sixty degrees Fahrenheit without any glory, without any television shows written about him, writing newspaper articles. He's doing the job because that's his job and he's trying doing it the best he can. He or she can't quite at that point. Okay, and to me that's a hero because they're doing it without fanfare. They're doing a job because it's their duty and they're not doing for glory or definitely not for a paycheck. Okay, the paycheck was pretty [Shiau laughs], was pretty low and so it always astounded me and humbled me, because as an officer, I made a lot more

money and I was nice and warm in my missile capsule and these guys would be going out to the missiles to do repairs in minus sixty degrees Fahrenheit weather.

Cohen: Wow.

Shiau: The security guys would be going out there to make sure there's no intruders and that always, that always humbled me that these guys will be doing that type of work in all weather conditions with any fanfare. I-I was always very, personally, very grateful for them for doing that type of job.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: And a lot of people always go, you know, like I said, everyone hears about Navy Seals and you always hear about Rangers, but no hears about the people just doing their job on a regular basis and...

Cohen: It's a different type of heroism.

Shiau: Yeah, and I think more, less heroism and more of just dedication and duty. Right?

Cohen: Uh- huh, uh-huh.

Shiau: Okay, and I was very...I was very proud to have served with those guys. It's-, they were very hard-working people. They worked, they worked these long hours and definitely not-, I shouldn't-, they weren't there for the pay [Shiau chuckles]. Definitely not for the pay and you do all of that without any fanfare and I-, to me, that, that astounds me still.

Cohen: So-so...

Shiau: Okay.

Cohen: How-how did you, how were you assigned to the Pentagon or like what was the missing link?

Shiau: [Shiau laughs], all right, so I wanted, I wanted to leave North Dakota pretty badly. After three years, nine months, four days, twelve and a half hours.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: Not that I'm counting. And so what happened was, we have a thing called, "Combined Federal Campaign" and that is a charity drive that we run every year

to get people to donate to charity and I ran the campaign that, that year for that base. And that was the first year that we made the quota, whereas previously they hadn't. So I helped out the commanding general for the base and he...There's two units on the base. There's a flying wing and there's a missile wing. The base commander was a flying wing commander so, he wasn't a missile commander. Originally, they wanted me to stay there for another three to four years in codes, which is the missile code division.

Cohen: I see.

Shiau: And there's nothing-, I had nothing against codes, I just didn't want to stay in Dakota for another four years. [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: And so, by this time, the flying wing commander had got promoted to two stars and he was at the Pentagon. So I called him up and said, "Hey sir, do you remember me"? And he goes, "Oh yeah, how's it going"? So I told him my situation and he cut me orders to go to the Pentagon and then they said, "Well, the only job we got is IT [Information Technology] job supporting the Office of Secretary Defense and you need twenty-one hours of computer science". So I looked at my twelve hours of computer science and I go, "Well, you know, that's close enough. Same digits". So I go, "Absolutely, yeah, I can do this job".

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: I-I, so I went out and bought myself SQL [Structured Query Language] server book and taught myself databases that weekend and that's how I got my IT start. And-and when I went the Pentagon, they sent me to Keesler Air Force base to get trained as an information technology officer – that was very helpful and from there I got my start in information technology and that's what I do for a living now. So, [Shiau laughs].

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: That's-that's how I ended up in the Pentagon. I was [Shiau laughs], that's how I got out of North Dakota.

Cohen: And-and did you, h-how did you enjoy working in IT? Like how did it compare to your previous work with missiles?

Shiau: In a way, all right, so it was a difference. So... it was also known as [a] different community so, previously, I was always in operations. So I was the point of the spear type guy [i.e., tip or point of the spear is military phrase for first in combat]

Information technology is nowhere close. They're support guys. Okay, and they're not even combat support, they're combat service support, which is the next tier down. So, it was different and-, but I'll say this, I enjoyed my time at the Pentagon because I got assigned to the Office of Secretary Defense for Acquisition and Technology [Currently called Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions and Sustainment]. So I got to interact, on a daily basis, with a lot of very senior officers and officials. It was kind of neat that I would talk to someone and next day read about it in **Washington Post**.

Cohen: Oh, cool.

Shiau: So I thought that was nice. The other thing too was, coming from North Dakota to Washington, DC was like a thirsty man coming out of the desert.

Cohen: [Laughs]

Shiau: As an Asian, I-I did not have sushi once when I was in North Dakota and, and there was this sushi restaurant right next to the Pentagon and Crystal City Mall [shopping mall in Arlington, Virginia] and I was like, that was like the best thing in the world for me. [Shiau laughs]

Cohen: [Cohen laughs], like your, your, your, your city mouse, no longer a country mouse, again.

Shiau: Yeah, pretty much and so, like I said it was...it was a, for me it was a good experience and by that time it was like the mid-'90s. They basically said there's going to be no more wars. Things are kind of winding down and I just I felt that I, by that time, I've done my bit for king and country and I was in IT and I was-, it was a hot field at the time and so I'll be able to get a good job and I felt, at that time, that it was time for me to leave. So, I did and that's why I left in '97.

Cohen: In '97, yeah, yeah.

Shiau: [Inaudible], and you got to remember in '97, nothing was really was happening. Okay, yeah, there was Bosnia but there's only a handful people going to Bosnia. The rest of the military was pretty much on peacetime mindset, peace time level. So there wasn't, I just felt that there wasn't going to be much in the way of deployments in the future, GLCM had gone away, I didn't wanna go back to ICBM after my time in the Pentagon, so I, I just figured at time it was time, time to leave.

Cohen: Yeah, yes, it's time to move on.

Shiau: Yeah.

Cohen: Wha-what is the moment of which you are most proud?

Shiau: I would say, the one I'm most proud of...probably when I was in GLCM and during that last final alert.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: Okay, I-I think, I wasn't at the time, that I didn't realize the impact was-was happening, but looking back on it, I felt that I was very fortunate to be a part of history and be a part of things that are happening and so I'm very proud of that moment in time. Now, there's other times, other things I'm more proud of and to be honest, the most thing I'm-, the thing I'm most proud of in the world is being a good uncle. I have six nieces and nephews and I...they are, they are the thing I'm most proud of. Just being a good uncle to them.

Cohen: Do-do you share your experiences in the Army with them?

Shiau: Do you mean the Air Force?

Cohen: The Air Force, sorry, yeah.

Shiau: With my nephew, yes. The one that, the one who went into the Army, he understands. The others, I know they care, but there's really no frame of reference for them, so they don't, they don't understand. [Inaudible], so...

Cohen: What-what are-, oh, sorry go on.

Shiau: Yeah, no, but that was, so-so my military moment was the time I pulled my last alert but the, the thing I'm most proud is having been a good uncle.

Cohen: Yeah, [laughs], it sounds like they're, they're lucky to have you.

Shiau: Yeah, so...so that's-that's-that's my feeling. I feel that that was the moment that I had felt was the, that was, that was my most proud moment.

Cohen: What-what does it mean to you to be a "Citizen-Soldier"?

Shiau: I think it's more important now, 'cause I wasn't a draftee. I was a, I was a volunteer. I grew up in a[n] all volunteer military and I feel that it's, me personally, I feel that's very important that the population needs to serve because they'll understand what the people were defending them are and there's a distance between the defenders and the population. That does not bode well for society. That's what happened in Roman Empire. That's what

happened to other empires that has fallen since. When this when the military had to feel themselves separate from society. We should not be considered separate from society, we should be consider a product of our society.

Cohen: Hmm.

Shiau: But we don't have that now. You have less than three percent of the population ever serving the military and because of that, there are these misconceptions. People throw around the word, the word "hero" like it's a submarine sandwich, okay. It's, they, they, they, they either demonize the military or, or put them on a pedestal and they don't realize they're people and if they don't realize they're people, then they're, we're not real and when people, and when the military does take casualties, it doesn't hit home for them. Their lives don't change. Their lives aren't devastated. Their lives keep on going. Whereas, if they had served or they have members in their family who are serving, I honestly think that people would be less eager to get involved in foreign engagements so readily, because right now, people it's-it's-it's-it's an abstract. Okay, so they're not doing the fighting. They're not the ones that have to serve. They're not the ones out there minus sixty degrees Fahrenheit weather.

Cohen: Um-hmm.

Shiau: They're, they're going to the mall. They're gonna, they gain, they're worried about their Amazon Prime membership renewing and I really think that death and lost. My friends, I-I went to Texas A&M, which is a four-year military school. When I was there, everyone had to take ROTC in the Corps had to take ROTC for the first two [years]. Then they can opt out their junior and senior [year].

Cohen: Uh-huh, uh-huh

Shiau: I think that was good, because it taught them about the military and what the military was about, but, usually, even if they didn't go into the military, they could appreciate their peers that went into it. They've actually stopped that. Now there's freshman and sophomores who go in who don't have to take ROTC and, for me, I think that something's lost there. At that point, what's the purpose of wearing a uniform in the Corps Cadets? I mean, you lose, you've lost a Citizen-Soldier aspect.

Cohen: Do...

Shiau: And people say that, "Oh, a school teacher or someone else just as much contribute to society." Yes, they are contributing to society. How many school teachers do you know have to go to funerals of their friends for doing their job? How many of them have to worry about heavy equipment at work possibly

causing loss of arm, you know, arms and legs. Like, I didn't really face that much danger myself, but I will tell you I personally know, twelve of my friends, from college, who died in the service of this country.

Cohen: Hmm.

Shiau: Okay?

Cohen: Yeah. [Sighs]

Shiau: That's me, that's personal. That's-that's not, that's not even someone I read the name in the paper. That's people I actually had beers with.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: You know, went to school with. Yeah, and so, that is the, an abstract that most people don't understand.

Cohen: Do you think there should be a draft in the country for, let's say, one year?

Shiau: No, but I think, what I they should do is... Saying that there should not be a draft, because I think that the equivalent of the draft doesn't work in the long term. However, I do think that certain senior government positions, especially positions where there's leadership roles and responsibilities, should be reserved for veterans but that's only for me, personally. I mean, that's never gonna happen, but that's what me, personally, would feel, because I'd feel that they, veterans, actually have put a stake into the future of this country.

Cohen: Oh and so should receive a little more, let's say, compensation for that?

Shiau: Not just compensation, but more of, certain leadership positions, positions, within government, should be reserved for veterans. Okay, and yeah. That-that would take some more thought about that.

Cohen: Yeah, what would you like future generations to learn about service?

Shiau: That the people, who are in the military, are just like them and that to appreciate their service. Not because they're "heroes", quote-unquote, but because doing their jobs, the majority of them are doing their jobs because of duty and dedication and to appreciate that and not to put them on pedestals but to appreciate them as people. And that when one of them is injured or killed, it's not this hero on a pedestal and or a respawn on **Call of Duty** [video game series], but rather that, that person is a father, brother, or son or in case of women

these days, you know, daughter, mother, or wife of somebody. That there's an actual true family out there that's grieving.

Cohen: Yeah.

Shiau: Because of what has happened. Even if they don't get injured, the fact that this person is away from the family and deploying for long times away from family. That is a sacrifice that a majority of people out there do not have to experience ever and I, and I'm not saying that everyone has to experience it, but I do think everyone should appreciate it. So, [keyboard clicks].

Cohen: Is-is there anything that you'd like to discuss that we did not mention?

Shiau: Yeah, so one of the things that does upset me sometimes is that people, you hear stuff like, student debt and students, you know, can't pay their students loans or whatever. You know I never hear once, "How about joining the military? How about joining the [United States] National Guard? How about doing ROTC"? How about serving your country? You never once hear that and I think that something's lost when people don't consider that.

Cohen: That is interesting. I mean, you would think you would be like a remedy to the high student tuition.

Shiau: It would be, but you never hear that given to kids as an option and one of the things I would like, mainly for starters, is that we have a National Service Corps that, you know, and encourage kids to do that for added, like maybe, you know, if you serve three years as a schoolteacher, you can get your student loans forgiven or, or be a police officer or be an EMT [Emergency Medical Technician] or, or be a medical professional in poor areas of the country, something like that. I think the nation, as a whole, has lost the concept of service. I think people have become too much self-focus on let's do, what's in it for me and that, and maybe I'm, I apologize for preaching, but that's, that is one of the things I feel sometimes.

Cohen: No, I-I asked so, that's, that's the idea. Well, really on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, I thank you for your service and for the interv