
PERSPECTIVES

An Interview with the Director, DSAA

By

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Lieutenant General Michael S. Davison, Jr., USA, became the Director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA) on 18 August 1997. Prior to his assignment to DSAA, General Davison served in two key security assistance positions: first, as the Chief, Office of Military Cooperation, Cairo, Egypt (July 1992 - July 1994), and then as the Commander, United States Army Security Assistance Command, Alexandria, Virginia (July 1994 - August 1997).¹

The following interview was conducted on 15 September 1997 at the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) in conjunction with General Davison's presentations to DISAM Executive and CONUS classes.

DISAM: General Davison, we are pleased that you could find time to visit us, speak to our classes, and engage in this interview. Let me begin by recognizing that it has been just less than a month since you moved into your new assignment as the Director of the Defense Security Assistance Agency. But you certainly are no stranger to the business of security assistance, having served over the past five years as, first, the Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation in Cairo, Egypt, and then as the Commander of the U.S. Army Security Assistance Command. So, while it is early in your tenure at DSAA, your security assistance experience certainly provides a strong foundation for responding to the questions I will put to you today. First, in relation to your past security assistance experience, how do you think that experience will influence your tenure as the Director of DSAA?



LTG Michael S. Davison, Jr., USA
Director, DSAA

Gen. Davison: Well, first of all, I think that my past experience has allowed me to understand the nature of the security assistance business and its overall importance to U.S. foreign policy goals. I also think that

my past positions, both in the field and at one of the services, enhanced my understanding of those things asked for by the field and by the services. In that regard, it is kind of a push-pull situation where I can understand the perspectives outside of the DSAA environment.

DISAM: DSAA was significantly reorganized late last Spring, and I am interested in your views on how the reorganization will impact on the worldwide security assistance community.

Gen. Davison: Well, I think it is going to help. Before the reorganization, my predecessor, Lieutenant General Tom Rhame, was basically a single Director responsible for providing oversight and execution of security assistance around the world. We had functional organizations that were involved in very specific areas which included excess defense articles, commercial sales, legislation and policy, FMS pricing and drawdowns. Through reorganization, General Rhame was able to increase the number of country desk officers from 19 to 32. We now have two regional directors: one responsible for Europe, Africa south of the Sahara, Latin America and the Caribbean; and the other responsible for the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia-Pacific. I think that is a good organization. We still have people performing specific functions, but they are embedded within those two operational regions. We have retained our weapons people who furnish assistance in the area of technology release and so forth, and reporting directly to me are the Policy and the Legislative Liaison people. Finally, we have retained our Comptroller organization, which remains in charge of resources, financial management, and the DSAMS PMO [Defense Security Assistance Management System Project Management Office]. I expect the reorganization to provide much improved service to the security assistance community.

DISAM: Now, turning to another subject, in view of the major post-Cold War adjustments and dynamic changes which are occurring throughout the U.S. armed forces, do you anticipate any significant changes will be made in DSAA's mission?

Gen. Davison: I think the U.S. security assistance mission will continue to exist as long as we have a foreign policy for the United States with a complementary national security policy. Security assistance aids both areas. It supports U.S. foreign policy through the various programs in which we are involved, such as humanitarian relief, demining, and peacekeeping. Moreover, it contributes to regional stability through initiatives such as the drawdowns of defense equipment in support of Jordan and Bosnia. Security assistance also supports our national security policy because it contributes to building military coalitions that are important to the unified commands. So, our mission continues to exist. What is changing is the external environment that the United States faces and the internal dynamics at work here in our own country, as we work with a downsized defense establishment. The changes in the external environment essentially mean that sales are going to level off, and, as a result, the size of our effort will shrink. As the amount of FMS cases we manage decreases, the workload and resulting man-years will decrease. I don't think that the change will be felt so much at DSAA, because there is a certain basic cost of doing business; i.e., whether you have fifteen thousand cases or five thousand cases. I believe, however, that the same kind of pressures imposed on the defense establishment will be felt in DSAA in terms of doing our job more efficiently, making sure that we have the right mix of managers to employees, and seeking out areas where there can be savings in the area of overhead. We are taking a look at all of those issues which may impact DSAA. Fortunately, DSAA is self-financed through FMS-derived administrative funds and does not require any appropriated funds for our operations.

DISAM: With respect to the future, let me now ask if you have any specific new goals for Security Assistance? And related to that, what do you think about the DSAMS project?

Gen. Davison: One of my goals is to try to do more in the area of strategic planning. Understanding the direction of the future of the Agency requires articulation of a vision, and

networking with our “stakeholders” as well as with our customers. Our “stakeholders” include the services and U.S. industry. Our customers are the foreign purchasing countries. So, we need to think about a plan and put it in perspective with Department of Defense overall goals. DSAMS will be a part of our strategic plan because it is an area where we can save resources by going to a standardized security assistance management system. I am pushing to move us in that direction.

DISAM: For my next question, I am interested in the relationship between DSAA and the U.S. defense contractor community; namely, how would you characterize that relationship, and do you contemplate any agency initiatives that will impact on industry?

Gen. Davison: I think that the relationship is good. You could call it a “Team America” approach—industry and the government working together to serve the general interests of the country. An area where we can provide more assistance to industry is highlighting our own insights about regional assessments and identifying the policy issues that must be worked, in terms of approvals for licenses, approvals for technology release, etc. We should tell industry what can be done within “the art of the possible,” and what cannot be done, and we should give them an objective assessment of the political realities. Once we are involved in the execution phase, we can often be the honest broker—making sure the program is going in the proper direction, making sure that the customer’s concerns are being addressed by industry, and that the concerns of industry are being reviewed by the customer as well. Finally, I think that industry and DSAA can work together in the areas of policy and legislative initiatives. We have already seen the results of this cooperation in new legislation which includes a provision permitting FMS waivers for nonrecurring charges. Additionally, the “fruits” of our cooperative efforts can be found in other legislation.

DISAM: Now, let me ask you this. Previous DSAA Directors have made visiting host countries an integral part of their leadership. Do you intend maintaining an active travel schedule?

Gen. Davison: I will travel where I need to go, based on either the concerns of the customer or the nature of the customer’s account and the attention it warrants. In addition to my own travel, I will be part of many bilateral working groups between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the foreign defense ministries of our key allies and friends around the world. Whether or not I am present in the host-country, or one of my representatives is there, DSAA will be at the table whenever security assistance matters are on the agenda. At the same time, I have to spend time back here in the United States, as one of the most important things I have to do is to appear before Congress from time to time. If we are going to truly have a “Team America” approach, it is very important that we work to keep Congress informed, answer their questions, and make sure that their concerns are addressed within the Administration.

DISAM: General, in looking back at your experiences, do you have a personal philosophy that has influenced your military career and that may be applied to DSAA during your tenure?

Gen. Davison: First of all, I believe that people are important. No organization is any better than the people that make up the organization. In fact, the organization can become better than the sum of its individuals if they are all working as a team—so I believe that the kind of environment established within DSAA is very important. We can take advantage of the good ideas among all our folks working in the Agency. Of course, the Agency now includes not only the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, but also our DSAMS design facility at Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Essentially, the Agency has “grown” by half already as a result of bringing these two elements together. As I see it, we must articulate our goals and then implement them by harnessing the energy and insight of everybody. Additionally, from time to time we must make periodic assessments of our efforts so that we can accurately

measure our performance and reset our goals. These are some of the things I will be working to achieve.

DISAM: Finally, General, is there anything else that you wish to add for the benefit of the readers of *The DISAM Journal*?

General Davison: Let me say that I believe there is a lot of potential here at DISAM, in terms of thinking about initiatives and new directions through which we can improve the process of executing security assistance. We have already seen quite a bit here in the development, for example, of the Security Assistance Network. Vast improvements in security assistance management have been made since I was a security assistance officer, and there is great potential to do even more for the customer in terms, for example, of allowing him to manage his training business. So we will capitalize on the good offices here of DISAM, as well as the DSAMS design facility, to try to position ourselves for the twentieth century.

DISAM: Thank you very much General Davison.

¹ Earlier key posts held by General Davison include: G-2 operations officer, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), Vietnam, and rifle company commander, 5th Battalion, Vietnamese Airborne Division (1967); Commander, 3rd Battalion, 64th Armor, Schweinfurt, Germany (1979-1982); Commander 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, Kitzingen, Germany (1985-1987); Chief of Staff, 3rd Armored Division, Frankfurt, Germany (1988); Assistant Division Commander, 5th Infantry Division, Fort Polk, Louisiana; and Deputy Commanding General for Training, Combined Arms Command, Fort Leavenworth Kansas (1989-1991).