Joseph P. Harahan retired as senior historian of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) in 2010 after 32 years of federal government service. He had previously worked as senior historian at the On-Site Inspection Agency, Department of Defense, 1989–1998; as special assistant to the chief of Air Force History, 1983–1989; and as a historian at the Strategic Air Command, 1977–1983. He has written numerous articles and made international presentations on the topics of technology and warfare, arms control policies, nuclear treaties, and post–Cold War peace. His books include Creating the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (2002), and most recently, With Courage and Persistence: Eliminating and Securing Weapons of Mass Destruction with the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Programs (2014).

Interview by Benjamin Guterman

What were your work duties as a historian at the Air Force?

I began working as a civilian historian at the Strategic Air Command. It had a national mission, more than 100,000 personnel, and strong Air Force leadership. I worked at Headquarters, SAC, as one of the historians writing chapters in a classified top secret history. Later, I went to Washington, DC, working at Headquarters USAF, Office of the Historian. There, I coedited with Richard Kohn a series of books about the history of the Air Force (13 books, Warrior Studies). At that time, I joined the AHA and SHFG, becoming active in their committees, boards, and meetings.

How did you gain a position at the On-Site Inspection Agency; was it something you sought?

The On-Site Inspection Agency was a new Defense Department organization established in 1989. They sought a chief historian; I applied and was selected. The agency’s mission was exciting, inspecting a new international arms control treaty with the Soviet Union. Inspection teams traveled to military missile sites in the USSR and Central Europe where they monitored the elimination of intermediate range nuclear missiles. I went on several inspections at Soviet missile bases; conducted research in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, and in Washington; interviewed key personnel; and then wrote and published a history.

What were your major contributions at the On-Site Inspection Agency?

That history, On-Site Inspections Under the INF Treaty (Washington, 1993), was published with illustrations, appendices and index. In the 1990s, there were other major international arms control treaties with weapons reductions, inspections, and escorts. In 1997, I coauthored a history, On-Site Inspections Under the CFE Treaty (Washington, 1997), with illustrations, maps, charts, tables, appendices, index. Both of these histories were translated into Russian, published, and distributed. For the agency’s Arms Control Treaty Training Courses, I became the lead lecturer for more than 10 years in classes on the INF, CFE, START, CWC, and Open Skies Treaties.

In addition, I was invited to lecture on the treaties at U.S. universities and foreign arms control institutes: Harvard University, Ohio University, Ohio State University, University of Virginia, Dartmouth College, Fletcher School of International Diplomacy at Tufts University, Wilson Center, U.S. State Department, U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, and the U.S. Naval Academy. I was also invited to speak at the Norwegian Defense Institute; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; the Verification Research, Training, and Information Center, London; the Carnegie International Peace Research Center in Moscow; and the Institute of World History, Beijing, China.

In 1997, the director of the Russian General Staff’s arms control organization invited me and an American inspector team chief to come to Moscow and lecture in Russian on the CFE history book and the treaty. We spoke and presented a treaty briefing at the International Division, Russian General Staff (250 officers), Fruzne Military Academy (450 officers), Senior Military Academy of the General Staff (200 senior officers), and the Vystral Peacekeeping Academy (1,000 officers and men). They were very interested and asked many questions about the treaty and the inspections.

When you started at the DTRA in 1998, what were your main responsibilities, and how did they change over time?

In 1998, the Secretary of Defense reoriented the department’s focus on nonproliferation and counterterrorism by establishing the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. The new agency conducted detailed force protection analysis; developed new programs and technologies for detecting and mitigating threats of WMD attacks; pursued international nonproliferation programs, including the Nunn-Lugar program, and conducted arms control inspections under international arms control treaties. The agency’s history office expanded, adding one civilian historian, Dr. Bianka Adams. At that time, I became active in the U.S. Commission of Military History and the International Commission of Military History.
What were some of your major activities in those commissions?
In both the U.S. Commission of Military History and the International Commission I worked to make connections with military and diplomatic historians in many nations. I became editor of newsletters, served on selection committees for paper presenters, and served as an officer in both organizations. In 2002, the U.S. Commission sponsored an international congress in Norfolk, Virginia. I worked on the program committee and presented a paper. More than 250 historians participated in the congress. Subsequently, I participated in international military congresses, presenting papers and serving on committees in Morocco, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Romania, and Bulgaria.

In your 2002 research and writing on U.S. government responsibilities on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) terrorism, what main insights did you gain?
The U.S. government is a very large, complex organization, with multiple parts and sometimes, overlapping missions. When the secretary of defense wanted to develop new programs, with scientists who were using advanced methods and technologies for detecting Weapons of Mass Destruction against the United States, there was no single defense organization to do it. Our agency received this new mission. It developed concepts and plans for detecting WMD threats, and outlined complex scenarios of American cities under attack. These scenarios, along with the complicated plans that would be needed to coordinate massive national assistance, were briefed to the secretary of defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, attorney general, National Security Council, and the president. As the agency’s historians, we wrote and published a history of this activity and other missions in Creating the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (2002). That history was requested by the Department of Homeland Security, as well as Ministry of Defense officials in France, Germany, Italy, and Poland. We cannot be certain of its value and influence.

How did you organize and plan your research for With Courage and Persistence given that the Nunn-Lugar program covered everything from intercontinental bombers to land-based ballistic missiles and sites, sub-launched ballistic missiles, and chemical and biological weapons?
Shortly after the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union collapsed, creating 15 new nations, all with multiple new issues. In 1991 in the U.S. Congress, Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Richard Lugar held hearings concerning the scope of the USSR’s weapons of mass destruction—its missile bases, submarine sites, bomber airfields, nuclear weapons storage sites, weapons production plants, and massive chemical weapons storage depots. The scope of these weapons systems was vast, spreading across many new nations. Nunn and Lugar established a new nonproliferation program, funded by Congress, to provide technical assistance, managerial advice, and funding to the new nations in a cooperative effort to reduce and eliminate nuclear and chemical weapons that were under treaty restrictions.
When I was asked to research and write a history of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, it promised to be an extensive project: Nunn-Lugar was a multinational, multiyear, multibillion-dollar program, and it was historically significant. I began researching the collapse of the Soviet Union and the international significance of the arms control treaties. I examined the Nunn-Lugar program’s specific commitments, and learned, rather quickly, that there was a discrepancy between American promises and foreign nations’ expectations. The Defense Department, and our agency, had the assignment to establish a Nunn-Lugar program in each new nation. In the early 1990s, the issue became particularly significant in the Ukraine. In that nation, the 43rd Rocket Army had more than 130 strategic missiles, with more than 1,300 nuclear weapons. Ukrainian leaders believed that the nation had inherited these nuclear weapons, and the Russian leaders rejected that idea. American diplomats and defense leaders worked out a complex compromise with Russia and Ukraine: the Trilateral Agreement of 1994.
When I went to Ukraine in 2002, all sides were carrying out that agreement. I interviewed Ukrainian ministers of defense, National Security Council members, senior military officials, the U.S. ambassador, and American officials and contractors. I met and interviewed Colonel General Vladimir A. Mikhityuk, commander of the 43rd Rocket Army. As the interview began with General Mikhityuk, he said, “I have been looking forward to this interview, I have a copy of your book at home by my bedside.” Not surprisingly, the interview went well. Later, we contracted with General Mikhityuk to write a historical report on the 43rd Rocket Army and its elimination. I had similar experiences with senior officers in the Russian armed forces.
Upon returning to the U.S., I began documentary research in departmental and agency files, and in congressional records. I interviewed former U.S. ambassadors to the Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan. I tracked all major Nunn-Lugar programs and interviewed critical U.S. governmental program managers. These interviews and the program records led to more interviews with major contract managers. With the volume completed in 2010, I retired from federal service. Two years later, the agency decided to publish the manuscript and invited me to review every chapter and add a new closing chapter. Next, the book was illustrated and indexed, and published in 2015. It is titled With Courage and Persistence, Eliminating and Securing Weapons of Mass Destruction with the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (2015), with illustrations, charts, bibliography, and index. If you would like a copy, send me an email at harahan@verizon.net.

How did you normally conduct the interviews? Did you use any special procedures or methods?
I conducted most interviews in the language of the person being interviewed. Therefore, for interviews with Russian generals and diplomatic officials, I would use a Russian translator and a
tape recorder. Once completed, I had the interviews transcribed in Russian and returned to the person to be reviewed. Once they approved the interviews, I had them translated and a copy typed out. Normally, I returned two copies to the interviewer. I retained a copy for research on the book. I used this same method with Ukrainian and Kazakhstani officials.

In researching *With Courage and Persistence*, were some weapons programs and sites particularly difficult to access, particularly for political reasons?

By 2007, the Nunn-Lugar program was active across Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia. I went to many sites, but not to Deglin Mountain nuclear testing tunnels in Kazakhstan, the massive chemical weapons storage site at Shchuch’ye in Russia, and the fissile missile storage facility at Mayak in Russia. These were large-scale cooperative projects that were sensitive to the national governments. Instead, I interviewed the American project managers and studied the official documents. I did travel with teams that monitored the elimination of nuclear submarines, strategic bombers, and long-range strategic missiles.

The Nunn–Lugar program was a very decisive and bold approach to the sudden vulnerability of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal. Was the program as successful as we could have hoped? Were all the dangers in the breakaway republics and in Russia satisfactorily addressed?

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the immediate focal point was on the new 15 nations. Nunn and Lugar focused on the USSR’s vast strategic WMD arsenal and the willingness of government leaders to endorse existing arms control treaties. Nunn-Lugar offered specific weapons reduction programs, with funding and technical assistance, to eliminate the inherited strategic weapons. The new governments had many, many issues: economies in transition from state economies to market-based ones, declining state revenues, corruption, rapid inflation, military reductions, and declining savings. Consequently, this American nonproliferation program was a major effort to address specific issues: reductions in strategic weapons under arms control treaties. The program was cooperative; governmental leaders had to nominate projects to be funded, and it worked. Because of lasting Cold War tensions, it took military officers and defense officials with courage and persistence. Senators Nunn and Lugar travelled to the region every year, meeting with national leaders, military officers, senior officials, American program managers, and contractors. They provided leadership and continuity.

Over time, a series of cooperative programs assisted in eliminating Ukraine’s 43rd Rocket Army and its 40th Bomber Army, enabling Ukraine to join the START Treaty and become a nonproliferation nation. Similar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programs with Kazakhstan enabled it to join and ratify several arms reduction treaties and become a leader in the international nonproliferation movement. Russia and other nations cooperated in many CTR programs, some successful and some failures.

At present, what are DTRA’s major responsibilities and activities in the areas of biosafety and biosecurity, and in which nations?

During the past decade, the Nunn-Lugar program developed new nonproliferation programs with many nations in the area of biosafety and biosecurity. Following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the Bush administration and the Congress became concerned with biological weapons, especially in central Asia. Senior Defense officials travelled to these nations and developed new biosafety and biosecurity programs in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Russia. It was a major effort, involving new equipment, new standards, extensive training, and international exchanges of scientists and data. In recent years, similar programs were negotiated with nations in Northern Africa, Middle East, and Asia. Today, it is the largest non-proliferation program against biological weapons and species in the world. President Obama spoke in 2012 on the 20th anniversary of its inception, characterizing it “as one of the nation’s smartest and most successful national security programs: Nunn-Lugar.” With all of these successes, Senators Nunn and Lugar have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize many times.

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**Interview with Sam Walker**

The Atomic Heritage Foundation has made available an oral interview with Sam Walker, former historian with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Foundation President Cindy Kelly interviewed Walker on March 14, 2016, in Washington, DC. Walker has written *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*, and is a longtime member of SHFG. Walker discusses the wartime circumstances surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb, wartime conditions in Japan, and Japanese debates and negotiations concerning surrender. He evaluates traditional and revisionist interpretations of the bombing, and also examines President Truman’s discussions on the human suffering involved. A written transcript is also provided. Visit [http://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/j-samuel-walkers-interview](http://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories/j-samuel-walkers-interview).