

MONITOR

INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS

March 23rd, 2011

Volume 4, Number 2, Issue 1

On the Front Lines: Diplomatic Security in the 21st Century Interview with Wayne May

Interview by Emily Pehrsson



WAYNE MAY

Wayne May is a member of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and is currently serving in New Delhi, India. He is a graduate of Buffalo State College where he studied criminal justice. Wayne May has spent a significant portion of his career abroad, serving at posts in Thailand, Colombia, Niger, Singapore, and Greece. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security is the security and law enforcement arm of the US Department of State and is responsible for performing international investigations, cyber security, and threat analysis to help protect US Diplomats performing US Foreign Policy abroad.

The Monitor (M): Please describe what specifically you do in your Diplomatic Security position.

Wayne May (WM): Special Agents (SA) of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) are sworn federal law enforcement officers who are responsible for the security of Foreign Service personnel, property, and sensitive information throughout the world. A substantial portion of a DS Special Agent's career is spent living and working abroad. DS Special Agents are also responsible for the protection of the Secretary of State, certain foreign dignitaries during their visits to the United States and others as designated by the Secretary of State. Major activities include protective services, management of security programs for Foreign Service posts, criminal investigations, and background investigations, in addition to administrative, training, and liaison functions.

Here in New Delhi, India, I manage a staff of one Deputy Regional Security Officer for Investigations, four Assistant Regional Security Officers, two Office Management Specialists, one Residential Security Coordinator, six Foreign Service National Investigators, 10 Marine Security Guards and 400 local guard personnel.

In addition, I also serve as the liaison to Indian police agencies for VIP visits, local investigations and local security requirements. I serve as the Embassy's liaison to the American Embassy School, and as the coordination officer for the Anti-Terrorism Assistance program.

M: What is the typical education and career path for an individual in Diplomatic Security? What skills do you suggest students interested in pursuing a career in this field develop?

WM: Truthfully, there is not a typical education path which would lead to a job with Diplomatic Security, as the organization desires diverse experience among its agents. Prior to appointment, applicants must have at least a bachelor's degree from a nationally accredited college or university. Specialized experience in such areas as the administration of security programs, the conduct of investigations, threat assessments, service in a law enforcement agency, and service in the U.S. military are all highly desirable. However, it is not essential to have those specific experiences, or ability in a foreign language, to be considered for the DS Special Agent position. I have noticed in the last couple of classes that there have been a growing number of applicants who have served in the military or worked in some sort of law enforcement profession. As I stated, there are minimum requirements that must be met in order to qualify to apply for the position. As part of the application process, selected applicants will be invited to take part in both oral and written assessments. Among other things, you will be expected to have a basic understanding of current events and U.S. foreign policy. Most importantly, good communication skills, both written and oral, along with problem solving and critical thinking abilities will go a long way in the application process.

M: Based on your experience and expertise, what type of threat do you predict will be the most important for the United States in the next fifty years?

WM: For the immediate future, terrorism will remain a major transnational problem, driven by continued ethnic, religious, nationalist, separatist, political, and economic reasons. Terrorism based on extremism, especially that which is supported by designate terrorist states like Iran and organizations such as Al Qaeda, remains the primary threat to American interests around the world.

WMD and missile proliferation, especially with regard to chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons and missile delivery systems, will continue to be a major concern for the United States as well. In addition, growing humanitarian issues—which can drive extremism and conflict—will continue to concern the United States. My role as a DS Agent is to monitor and understand these trends so I can be proactive against the threats that we are facing today and ready for the threats of tomorrow.

M: Of the many countries in which you have worked with DS, which has been the most challenging?

WM: I am currently serving in my 6th overseas tour and, in addition to that, I have served in several long-term (more than 100 day) temporary duty locations. Each and every one of them presented their own unique challenges.

1987-1988: Bangkok, Thailand. The challenges had nothing to do with crime, civil unrest, or even global terrorism! The challenges revolved around the traffic and air/water pollution that contributed to overall unhealthy living conditions. It was not uncommon to have an upper respiratory infection or some sort of gastro-intestinal issue. It is hard to do your work well when you are constantly sick!

1988-90: Bogota, Colombia. The challenges were almost entirely based on keeping the employees and families safe in a country that was in the middle of a seemingly intractable civil conflict and an ongoing narcotics trafficking issue. The U.S. efforts to assist the Colombian government with aid aimed at counterdrug and counterinsurgency measures presented additional challenges. In the two years that I served in Bogota, massive bombings occurred (targeting both civilians and military/law enforcement targets), political assassinations occurred, airliners were blown up,

and kidnappings became the norm. It was quite possible to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and be victimized by the narco-traffickers because you worked for the U.S. government.

1990-1993: Niamey, Niger. The challenges there were based on the extreme weather conditions (the temperatures routinely hovered over 120 degrees), unhealthy living conditions (bad water and disease), the dire poverty, and the high level of crime. While we were living there, Niger was rated as one of the poorest countries in the world, which made the Americans living and working in Niamey inviting targets for the poor citizens of Niger. I spent a lot of time upgrading security at our residences to make it less likely that we would be victimized by crime.

1999-2002: Singapore. Singapore was one of the more “non-challenging” tours that I served in. The country is modern, efficient, and safe. Professionally it was an ideal place to work because the legal system worked and there were not any major threats to our Embassy or personnel. Some of the challenges might have been the weather (very hot and humid year round), the fact that Singapore is an island and “island fever” can develop quickly, or the fact that it would take over 26 hours to get back to the States if you needed to go.

2004-2008: Athens, Greece. In Athens, we dealt with a very real threat to our Embassy and personnel from indigenous terror groups like November 17. N-17 was a Marxist urban guerilla organization formed in 1975. The group assassinated 23 people in 103 attacks on American, British, Turkish and Greek targets. Spin-off groups such as “Revolutionary Struggle” also carry the ideals of N-17 and openly proclaim the United States as one of their favorite targets. In November 2007, RS took credit for firing an RPG at the US Embassy. The rocket missed my office by about 20 feet! Greece is also plagued by a very active anarchist movement. It is not uncommon for these anarchists to burn buildings, destroy vehicles, disrupt traffic, and even to attack police when it suits them. In the four years that I was in Greece, there were more than 300 incidents that impacted the security posture at the embassy.

2010 – Present: New Delhi India. Challenges include unhealthy living conditions like air and water pollution, the threat of disease and sickness, bad traffic and everything else that one would associate with a developing country with a population of over 1.2 billion. Professional challenges involve the threat of terrorism, both domestic and transnational, and high crime levels.

