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Craig Geis
November 14, 2018

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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The narrator has reviewed and approved this transcript.

Audiofile: GEIS Craig 14 November 2018

Narrator – Craig Geis

Interviewer – Lu Ann Jones

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Lu Ann Jones: So usually, I just start out the interview by saying this is Lu Ann Jones and I'm here with—

Craig Geis: Craig Geis.

Lu Ann Jones: And it is November 14, 2018. We are in Page, Arizona, at the tenth anniversary Summit for the Operational Leadership Program. So, I'm interviewing Mr. Geis in the context of the origins and development of that program. Thank you so much. And just on the record, do I have permission to record this interview?

Craig Geis: Yes, you do.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. Well, I usually start out way back. If you could just tell me a little bit about where you were born, when you were born. And I know that early on you were interested in flying.

Craig Geis: Yes. I was born in New York. My dad was a New York Police Department lieutenant when he retired. Mom was a secretary. I was born May 11, 1944. I kind of grew up, went to a kind of Catholic grade school, a little school called Saint Gerard Majella in Hollis, New York, just out on Long Island, a short ways from Queens, right by the Queensboro Bridge. Then I went to high school at Jamaica High School.

Lu Ann Jones: I think I'm going to move this just down a little bit. You've got a great voice, and I think that will be good. Jamaica High School.

Craig Geis: I went to Jamaica High School. And I guess early days of high school, I always wanted to be a pilot. I always had interest in aviation. It was funny because my dad was a cop, my mom was a secretary, and we never had anybody in aviation. But I used to get the old World War Two comic books and things like that that were there. I had manuals, flight manuals, from World War Two fighter aircraft, and it just was a passion for me.

Craig Geis: My brother Ed was two years younger than me. He was always a studier, and I was always a tinkerer. You know, I fished with my dad all the time. I always told him I wanted to be a pilot. He said that would be fun, and he encouraged me to do anything. Mom was always, I want my kids to be doctors. Doctors and lawyers, that was the 1930s kind of mantras of

parents, I guess. Of mothers, anyway. My dad said, you know, "If we can just keep Craig out of trouble and out of jail, let him do what he wants. But he's not going to be a doctor." My brother did subsequently go off to medical school and is a doctor and practices in Brooklyn.

Craig Geis: I finished high school and went off to college. I started my college career in Florida. I went to Florida Southern College, and then transferred up to Florida State University. I was a sportsman and a hunter at the time, and I was involved in a shooting accident. My partner, we were out hunting. He tripped and I got shot and taken to the hospital. It had kind of nicked the pulmonary artery, and they rolled me into surgery. It's funny. It was Memorial Day, and I was 18 years old, probably about 19 years old. Everything kind of turned out fine. I guess when you're 19, you heal up pretty quick. My parents weren't too happy, so they kind of brought me back to New York.

Craig Geis: I finished my undergraduate work at CW Post College at Long Island University in New York, in the city. At that time, the draft was in full swing with Vietnam.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. So was this about sixty—

Craig Geis: This would have been, let's see, I got out of high school in 1962, three, four, five, six, so 1966 timeframe. And then I was 1A, draftable in the draft, which didn't bother me, because I wanted to go into military. So, I applied for different branches of service. The army had a program that was called college to flight school kind of a guarantee for college graduates. So, I finished up at college, and went off to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for Office Candidate School. Went to Office Candidate School, and straight from there to Fort Walters, Texas, for flight training. I trained at Fort Walters for four months, and then left Fort Walters. I graduated at the top of my class in flight school, and then had the choice of where I wanted to go. I went to Savannah, Georgia.

Craig Geis: At Savannah, I finished my primary training there. My advanced training, I had elected to go to attack helicopters. So, I got the transition into attack helicopters at the time, that was the ag1 Cobra helicopter. And 30 days leave, and back on the airplane to San Francisco. Travis Air Force Base to Vietnam. I was in Vietnam for 13 months then.

Lu Ann Jones: What about the helicopter and combat attracted you, I guess?

Craig Geis: It's a difficult question. I guess I was always, I'm kind of what I call a hardwired individual. I always needed to be doing something. I fished all the time with my dad, and I hunted. My brother kind of just, he was happy staying in a room and reading books and studying and getting a 4.5 grade

point average. To me, I didn't study much. I really wasn't interested in school. I was always interested in doing something. It just seemed that was something that was exciting that I wanted to do.

Lu Ann Jones: You have so many, I mean, boy, you're there in the thick of it, right in the height of the war. It's a good thing you got back, right? That must have been a, well, I'm putting words in your mouth. Exhilarating but difficult time, too.

Craig Geis: You know, it's funny. When you're 24 years old, there's a lot you think about and a lot you don't think about. You kind of have that veil of invulnerability and you really don't think. People ask me today or after Vietnam, what did you think about the war? And my answer was, I really never thought about it. I woke up in the morning. Somebody told me where to go and what to do. I had signed up for that. That was my kind of my deal. You didn't question things at that age. You just did kind of what your leaders asked you to do.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, when you went into the military, did you plan to make that a career? Or was that a decision that came later?

Craig Geis: I think no. The commitment is, from after flight school, was a five-year commitment. So, you would have roughly seven years in the military. My philosophy had always been as long as I'm doing something I like, then I'll continue to do it. If I didn't like it, then I would go elsewhere. So, I always had kind of one foot in, one foot out.

Craig Geis: But you know, following Vietnam, I had very a fortunate opportunity. I went to graduate school. At my first duty station I went nights and got an MBA in management. Then when I finished that, I rolled right over and got another graduate degree in psychology. I really kind of found my niche. I loved the military. I liked the benefits, being able to have school paid for at that level. I kind of buckled down and really did well at the graduate level, because I saw the need for it.

Lu Ann Jones: Why psychology?

Craig Geis: You know, it's funny. Vietnam did something to me that was really interesting. We lost probably 25 percent of our pilots over that year. Very few of them were from combat losses. They were people doing things that they shouldn't have been doing. I was always curious about, kind of the statement is, why we do the things we do. Why we do dumb things when we know what the rules are. We break the rules. But in an unforgiving environment, like combat, that leads to fatalities.

- Craig Geis: I think back. It was a young man. If you ever visit the wall, his name was Dick Hulse, Richard Hulse, and a young man named Scott Pardee. Richard Hulse and I were together and lived together in a hooch in Vietnam. He went out one day and never came back. We went out and found the wreckage of the aircraft. His copilot that day was Scott Pardee, and it was his first day. He arrived at the unit and he was going out with Richard on an orientation flight, just to show him the area that we operated in. Rich was probably one of the best pilots that we'd ever had. He was a West Point graduate. It struck me really hard that you know, as good as he was, he did something that was really stupid. It kind of tweaked my interest that I want to better understand why people do what they do. For me that was a blend of psychology and, later on, neurophysiology. Kind of understanding the way the brain works.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, do you know what he did that triggered the fatality?
- Craig Geis: We do. The type of aircraft that we flew, when you pull the nose up, you're in a positive G situation. When you push the nose down, you're in a negative G situation. That aircraft cannot take negative Gs. You have to have positive G forces on the aircraft all the time. For whatever reason, he had entered a negative G condition and the mass bumped, the big rotor blade bumped, and tore off in flight. It came off in flight. It's funny. It was typical in Vietnam. Everything was written off as a combat loss. But when we brought it back in and looked at it, it wasn't a combat loss. It was, he did something. Why he did it, nobody will ever know.
- Lu Ann Jones: Uh huh. Uh huh. Well, it seems like the seeds, then, of what became your safety and human factors career, were really planted at that point.
- Craig Geis: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, you continued your career with the military. How did that interest, or did that interest, continue to affect how your military career developed?
- Craig Geis: I took a little different track in the military. I was always a pilot. But I was very interested in other areas. So, I was selected to be an instructor at West Point. I spent five years at the military academy teaching leadership and psychology, was the Department of Behavioral Science and Leadership at the time. That really allowed me to expand my knowledge in the area. Following that, the rest of my aviation career, I was always looking for the development of training for people in the area of human factors and human performance. I spent the rest of my career, really, dealing in human factors and human performance, among other duties that officers have.
- Lu Ann Jones: I'm interested in, since the conversation about leadership is very central to the National Park Service, so what was kind of the leadership philosophy

in the military at the time that you were teaching leadership? So that would have been, what, in the 1970s, for example? And leadership philosophies change over time.

Craig Geis: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what were you teaching at that point?

Craig Geis: I guess if I go back in my early days, leadership to me, you know, when I first went in the army, I'm talking '67 now, 1967 to '70, was you pretty much did what you were told. Nobody really cared what you thought about.

Craig Geis: When I got to West Point as an instructor in the Behavioral Science and Leadership Department, it was 1978. I taught there '78 to '82 timeframe. It was a whole different change. I think the best way to describe it is more of a participative style of leadership, and very attuned to what we teach now in Operational Leadership. That we have designated leaders, but they don't have all the information. They need that information, and they get that from functional leaders. In a military setting, we have a company commander, but he gets information from his platoon leaders. And platoon leaders get it from squad leaders that get it from the soldiers that are in the field. They use that information, integrate it into the decisions they make at a higher level. I think even today that leadership philosophy has flourished in the military, that the old autocratic leadership that we kind of imagine from World War Two era, just doesn't exist, really.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what do you think triggered that shift in philosophy in the military?

Craig Geis: (coughs) Excuse me. I think the military became much, much more complicated. You know, in my early days – I call myself an aging albatross – everything was very basic. But as you add technology, you add the different types of missions that the military was asked to perform, things got very, very complicated. The old days of one person taking charge and doing everything just disappeared. So, I think it was kind of a cultural change that had to come.

Lu Ann Jones: Before we switch over to Operational Leadership and that transition, can you give me like a couple of examples of how you were evaluating human factors within the military, what particular cases there?

Craig Geis: I guess the way we kind of look at it is, we look at aircraft accidents. I looked at not only aircraft accidents in the military, but in the civilian community. In the civilian community, the National Transportation Safety Board does the evaluation and findings on large aircraft. And military we have investigative boards. I was always reading the accident reports, and I

kept seeing the same thing over and over and over again, whether it was NTSB [National Transportation Safety Board] or the military in any branch. It was always, this was due to pilot error. I would sit back and think to myself, what did he do, and why did he do it? I didn't understand. They never really got to what I call root cause analysis. So, it might be a lack of training that led somebody to not be able to do something they were supposed to do, but the reports never delved into the root causes of it. They kept pointing the finger at what we call the proximate cause.

Craig Geis: I was always bothered by that. I would write articles about, you know, we need to start looking at root cause, at the system's deficiencies. But organizations don't like to talk about management and systems deficiencies, because that starts to push things up really close to the top, and they don't feel comfortable with that. So, it's easier to push it down and say the pilot should have done this and should have done that, looking at that.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you ever get closer to the top as you continued to press?

Craig Geis: That's interesting. I developed a lot of different training programs. Went around to different military organizations. And nobody wanted to really address it.

Lu Ann Jones: Interesting.

Craig Geis: They said, "Human factor's not a problem. We don't have a problem." It wasn't until I retired in 1989, I retired from the military, and I went to work. I set up my own company at the time. The company was called Geis, Alvarado & Associates. Mike Alvarado was my partner, and he flew with me in the military. We decided to set up a company and try to do something.

Craig Geis: The first year we were in business, the army called and said, "We'd like to talk to your company about a human factors training program."

Craig Geis: When I went down to Fort Rucker and I met with the group, one of the gentlemen was a general officer. He looked across the table and he said, "You look familiar, Mr. Geis."

Craig Geis: I said, "I was here three years ago trying to put this program in place."

Craig Geis: He looked at me, and he said, "And now we're going to have to buy it, won't we?"

Craig Geis: I said, "Yes, you will." (Lu Jones laughs)

- Craig Geis: So, it was really around that time, the first interest in the program really started in the commercial area with United Airlines. They developed a program called crew resource management. It had all of the underpinnings of understanding the human factors. Once the civilian community started to embrace it, then the military came on board.
- Lu Ann Jones: Interesting.
- Craig Geis: So, our business, at that time, was almost all aviation dealing with a program called crew resource management. Really, it was human factor.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, what does that mean, exactly? Crew resource management.
- Craig Geis: It means being able to understand, if you will, the man, the machine, and the environment interface. So, if you have two people in a crew, they need to be able to communicate effectively. Okay? You need to be able to manage the resources that you have. So, pilots, we think just an airplane. But wait a minute, we've got all kinds of radio communications. We've got navigation instruments. Are you able to put everything kind of together? And the environment that we operate in, whether corporate culture, those kinds of things. So, it was the early days of human factors. It was still missing the piece that I wanted, that was kind of the way the brain operates, the neurophysiology piece. It wasn't until later on that I kind of delved off into that area. That's where we are today.
- Lu Ann Jones: I wanted to keep with the crew. So, did it also include flight attendants?
- Craig Geis: It did. Yeah. So, we kind of defined a crew as everybody that arrives at the accident scene at the same time when something happens. So, you can move the passengers out. But let's say in an army helicopter, we have a pilot, we have a copilot, we have a crew chief. In the air force, you have loadmasters, you've got, in some cases, six, seven different crew members on the aircraft.
- Craig Geis: And you might remember, recently there was an aircraft crash where the load inside the aircraft shifted, and a large military aircraft crashed. Not a pilot error. But it was a loadmaster error. But the question is, did the pilot give proper instructions to the loadmaster on the load? Was that load checked by somebody else? So, it's that integration of the crew that really is the critical thing. Hence the term "crew resource management."
- Craig Geis: But it's very interesting, that later on, that term morphed into "maintenance resource management," MRM. And then into team resource management, when you started talking about teams that work together. So, it was the same concept applied to different parts of your organization.

- Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. I mean, I can see how that model could be morphed into many different situations. That's interesting.
- Craig Geis: Yeah. Yeah. ORM, operating room resource management. We morphed it into, we trained operating room teams in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.
- Lu Ann Jones: Wow. That's fascinating. So, you're getting into the brain. So, can you give me an example of that? Of how we think. And getting to the neuroscience.
- Craig Geis: Yeah. If a lot of the accidents that we look at don't make sense on the surface, we say wait a minute, this pilot was well-trained, prepared, and something happened and they made very, very poor decisions. And that always interested me. Just from a neuroscience basis, there's a little structure in the mid part of the brain called limbic system. It's designed to assess all incoming information for its threat potential in a little structure that's called the amygdala. So just think about this. If you get caught completely by surprise and off guard in a high-stress situation, the amygdala completely overreacts. We call it amygdala hijack and the amygdala overreacts. What it does is it presses a button; we call it the fight or flight response. Everybody's familiar with the fight or flight response. Except it pushes it really, really hard. The hormones that are released in the fight or flight response can help us in some situations. But in extreme stress, they block the signal that goes from the mid brain to the thinking part of the brain or the frontal lobe. So, you pretty much have a mini frontal lobotomy in a high-stress situation. So, you know, when you look at that, it helps to explain why somebody didn't do what they had been trained to do. And very often it's because they wound up in that amygdala response.
- Craig Geis: But the question is, why were they unprepared? They got caught completely off guard. Now you go back in the system's deficiency and say that was probably a lack of planning on their part, or other kinds of things. So, we always look deeper. We know that that response in the brain was a symptom. But where did that symptom come from? What was the originating factor?
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, this is so fascinating. I guess we should get to the Park Service, though. (laughs)
- Craig Geis: Okay.
- Lu Ann Jones: But this is a great prelude to understand, you had been doing this kind of work for decades, really, before you intersect with the National Park

Service. So, if I understand correct, Scott Wanek had found, was it a training manual for the US Coast Guard that you had written?

Craig Geis: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, can you talk about what that, maybe a little bit about what that manual was. And then if I understand it was being adapted for the Park Service. How that adaptation took place.

Craig Geis: Right. Probably in 2001, we were contacted by the coast guard, that was having serious issues with accidents. They asked us if we could develop a program for them. And we did. We developed a program that they wanted to call Team Resource Management, a derivation of human factors and crew resource management. We built it specifically for the coast guard, for their vessel community and for their aviation community. But primarily the vessel community was having a problem. It consisted of different modules that we thought would benefit. It turned out over a five-year period of time; their accident rate dropped about 70 percent. So, it was a very, very effective program.

Craig Geis: It got morphed from the coast guard into the coast guard auxiliary. And they're huge everywhere in the United States. The coast guard auxiliary and the coast guard still use the program today that we developed.

Craig Geis: Fast forward a little bit and, what was the date? I forget the date from Scott. It was two thousand—

Lu Ann Jones: Maybe about six or seven? Oh, yeah, 2007.

Craig Geis: Two thousand seven. In 2007, I got a call from Scott Wanek and he said, "Are you Craig Geis?" I said, "I am." And he said, "Did you develop the team coordination training for the coast guard?"

Craig Geis: I said, "That was us."

Craig Geis: He said, "I need to beg forgiveness from you and tell you a little story." He said, "A friend of mine had given me some materials from the coast guard. I looked at it and I thought wow, this is something I want to do in the National Park Service. I started to look at it and we started to do some training classes. I got some of our rangers involved. We've been working on this for about six months just using the coast guard materials." And he said, "One day I downloaded something, and I realized that all the materials were copyrighted under a contract with the coast guard." He said, "Is that a problem?"

Craig Geis: I said, "Not a problem at all."

- Craig Geis: He said, “I’d like you to come on down to Oakland and talk to me.”
- Craig Geis: So, I went down to Oakland in October, I think it was. Scott and I met. Just a very interesting individual. A leader. Very young.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, he was the chief ranger in the—
- Craig Geis: He was the chief ranger at Pac West Region, and his office was in Oakland at the time. He said, “I really would like you to become involved in a program with the National Park Service.” I knew nothing about the National Park Service. So, I asked him why. He told me that his goal was to really help individuals, help the park employees, but also help the visitors. We talked back and forth. He told me a story about Marina Giggelman, a young lady who graduated college and went and got a degree in biology and dedicated her life to saving turtles. It’s a foreign concept for a military person to really gather his head around, you know, somebody would dedicate their life to, risk their life to save little turtles. I thought, that’s really an amazing kind of a thing.
- Craig Geis: The story was that Marina Giggelman at South Padre Island was out on an extended day on a vehicle she hadn’t really been out on. No backup, no radio. Minimum food, minimum water. She was trying to look at little turtle tracks and lost control of the vehicle. It rolled over and it pinned her underneath. She was a young girl. She died, suffocated under that vehicle alone. And I thought, that’s a terrible thing to happen.
- Craig Geis: So, I agreed to get involved with the program. So, between October and November, December, January, February, we did together, we did a needs assessment. Rather than take the coast guard program and just change the book cover, I said, if we’re going to implement this, it needs to be accepted by the work force. So, we need to, kind of in army vernacular, we need to paint it green, we used to say, and make it look like army. So, we need to paint it National Park Service and tailor it for the Park Service. And we did. And the first program—
- [End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]
- Craig Geis: —Mary Hinson was chief ranger at Lake Mead. She volunteered to run the first program. We ran the first program at Lake Mead in, I think it was February of 2008. Very, very well accepted. My goal was every class we did to get the feedback and make the program, tweak the program, a little bit each time. But after the first program ran, Scott talked to Mary Hinson, and Mary Hinson became kind of the coordinator for Operational Leadership for the Pac West Region. We ran a number of courses in the Pacific West Region.

- Craig Geis: Everything was going well. It was really, you know, a well-accepted program. Scott had accepted my recommendations of a bottom-up approach. I had never realized that headquarters, Washington, didn't even know what the program was, had never approved the program. Scott had undertaken that on his own. But that's the way it went down.
- Craig Geis: So, a few months later, we continued to do classes. Then probably about year three, we expanded out of the Pacific West Region because other regions had heard about it and said, we'd like to try that. And we did. The problem, I said to Scott, was we have no national umbrella. Okay? That nobody knows about this at the top. Scott's philosophy was slow, relentless pressure. That eventually it will work its way up.
- Craig Geis: I think it was class number five that it was at Saint Louis, at the Arch, and a very impressive participant in the class. I got to know Mark [Herberger] at that point. But then probably six months later, they made a decision to nationalize Operational Leadership. Somebody, and I don't know who, had gone to Washington and said, "This is a program, and we need to do it." They needed a program manager. Mark Herberger applied for that position and has been the program manager ever since. So, there was a short period in there of contracting, and discrepancies in contracting and problems that got resolved. So, the program shut down for about nine months until the contracts were done and then started up again.
- Craig Geis: We're on version eight right now of this program. So, it's been modified. I will just say the success of the program, without Mark Herberger, there wouldn't be a program, period. Okay? It never would have started without Scott Wanek. It never would have continued without Mark Herberger. So that's the driving force behind that program.
- Lu Ann Jones: I guess I met Mark when I took the Operational Leadership course there in Washington several years ago. I've been in touch with him off and on ever since. I am really interested in, asked one of the questions yesterday about changes that were needed in Park Service culture. Because I think you alluded to you discovered it's a very mission-driven agency.
- Craig Geis: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: And if I understand correctly, on the one hand, that can be very positive. On the other hand, it could be such a driving factor that people put the mission at all cost and can do things that make people unsafe.
- Craig Geis: Yeah.

- Lu Ann Jones: So, can you kind of explain that paradox, in a way, and how you kind of use mission-driven in a more positive way than what can lead to a negative outcome.
- Craig Geis: Yeah. I think I can compare the National Park Service with military in one way. In the military, we have a division. I was in the 101st Airborne Division. A division contains brigades and companies and everything. Roughly about the same size as the National Park Service. What I find was interesting, growing up in the military, in the 101st Airborne Division, is that everything was standardized. If you went from one company to another company, one brigade to another brigade, they had standard ways that we did things. Those were really the result of what we call in the military blood priorities. We've learned a long lesson from many, many different conflicts. So, we found the best way to do things.
- Craig Geis: Then I came to work with the National Park Service, and I found, let's call it a division, that had no standardization. Everything was decentralized to a park level, which meant it was run by a superintendent who pretty much did whatever they wanted to do. What they thought was the best for the park. It was really astonishing to me that there was no overriding kind of arch up there that said in Washington, this is the way we want the parks to do certain kinds of things.
- Craig Geis: In terms of safety, which is what we're talking about now, there was no standardization. When you asked somebody, what is your safety program, the comment was OSHA. Occupational Safety and Health. Well, what does that mean? It means we wear PPE and follow the OSHA rules. Well, safety's a lot more than that. But everybody had a different idea. So, I think for me, the other problem was a lack of accountability. That there were mishaps that were occurring, and I had seen a couple of accident reports, where it was like okay, we're going to give you a year to correct these findings. I would shake my head and say, a year? I mean, this had been going on for five years. Led to a fatality. And now people have a year to make corrective actions? How many more people can we kill in that period of time?
- Craig Geis: I think when I asked people different questions, they would say, "Well, you don't understand our mission. We have to get this job done. We're limited on resources, so we have to kind of make up things as we go along." Or, "We have to rescue people and they're counting on us to save them" thing. So, it was very mission-driven. And I think that culture had just perpetuated on and on and on.
- Craig Geis: I think one of the things I did realize was the National Park Service does have a limited budget. They have enormous backlogs in maintenance and shortages in people and everything. But we can still operate, you know,

safely, and operate well. So, I looked at that and I thought this program of Operational Leadership, if we can get it established at the national level, could kind of give them an umbrella. People early on, the safety people, said, "You're coming in here as an outsider and you're changing our safety program. You're telling us we're not doing it right."

Craig Geis: I said, "No, that's not it at all. Whatever safety program you have is often based on the rules and regulations and job hazard analysis. And that's okay. That's a good part of the safety program. What I think is missing is the behavioral part. It's why people do what they do. That's the psychological component, and that's what's missing."

Craig Geis: If you look at industry, many, many years ago, industry learned that if you don't address a behavioral-based program, it's really not going to work. So that's kind of how it morphed into that. I said, "That's going to require a culture change. You're probably looking at three to five years before you start to see a swing in your culture." So, I work on a basic principle, psychological principle, called cognitive dissonance. It basically means that you face the individual to make a behavior change that is different than their attitude. But you hold them to that standard. And that creates problems in their head. So, they've got two choices to get rid of those problems. They can either rationalize and change their attitude and say this is okay, which really is what we're looking for. Or they can say, I can't do this, I'm going to leave and go somewhere else. And that's okay, too.

Craig Geis: So, I tried to explain in the early days, we're going to put Operational Leadership in place. We're going to require people to do risk assessments and all the different components of it. In the beginning, they may not like it. There will be supervisors that are reluctant. But if we can hold people accountable for that behavior change, that it will lead to a culture change.

Craig Geis: You just think about everything in the country today. Discrimination. We forced behavior change. We said, if you don't do this, and you don't allow people in your store, we're going to put you in jail. People said, well, I don't like that. That's okay. You can either go to jail or you can change your attitude. That took a long time.

Craig Geis: I think what's going on today with inclusion and sexual harassment. All the same thing. If you look at what we're doing is we're starting to force a behavior change. And now, years later. The trouble is, people want to see that change, they want to see the attitudes to change tomorrow. We put a new law in place. Now we want the attitude to change. It doesn't happen. It's going to take years.

Lu Ann Jones: I'm fascinated in the Park Service, the idea that people at any level could say stop, let's take a look at this. If I remember my Operational

Leadership, we were looking at somebody running a backhoe. It was clearly dangerous because it was going to tip over or something. And saying you as the backhoe operator have a right now to say stop. So, one, I thought well boy, I wish it was an organization that had had that right all along. (laughs) So where, in this new attitude, where did you find pockets of resistance to that change, and where did you find, or were you able to find places where people really embraced that? You see what I'm saying? Where was that adoption?

Craig Geis: I think one of the basic principles of developing training for me has always been we're training adults and we follow the adult learning model. Adults don't like to be lectured to or talked to or philosophized to. So, the adult learning model basically says adults want to take material, integrate new material with something that they already know, and they want to use that right away to make their lives easier. Okay? For some people, it's make my career or my work better. So, we use kind of the adult learning model to do that.

Craig Geis: I think if you think about the bottom-up approach, the folks that are out there doing the job, they want to do a good job. Whether you're out there working on the dock and fixing boats, or whether you're out there cleaning toilets, okay? These are dedicated, dedicated park employees. They really are amazing people. So, we designed the program to get them to see kind of immediate results. One of them, the best thing we could do was, is to be able to empower people to participate in the different kinds of decisions that are being made. So rather than start off and say, "You're going to be on some management council," we started with doing risk assessments. We said, "You're going to be empowered to participate in a risk assessment of operations that you do." Because a lot of supervisors are not subject matter experts in the areas that they supervise. They've got a facilities manager. He's managing all stuff. Is he the guy to go down and fix wires on the dock from electrocution? Maybe not. He might not be an electrician. So, we kind of built the program so that people at the lower levels had the opportunity to participate.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did people respond to that?

Craig Geis: The workforce loved it. They loved it. Supervisors, and it's really funny. There's some supervisors that bought in right away. There were others that said, "Operational Leadership is not good because it gives employees an excuse not to do something." That wasn't the case at all. It never was designed that way. Could it result in not doing something? Absolutely. If an employee sees something that they perceive as unsafe, we can call a stop work. It doesn't mean we don't do the job. We stop the job, and we take a look at what the concerns are. It may be something really simple.

- Craig Geis: I use an aviation example of crew resource management. An EMS crew, helicopter emergency medical service crew, is flying along and they fly with a pilot and a copilot and a flight nurse and a paramedic. So, let's just say the flight nurse is really nervous about the weather. They're going out to a location. The flight nurse says, "I'm really concerned about the weather." We have a basic requirement that the pilot doesn't just say, "You sit in back, I fly the airplane, don't talk to me." Okay? Now, there may be a concern but there may not be. So, what we do is we open up the channel of communication. The pilot is able to talk to the flight nurse or the rest of the crew and say, "The weather is well within our minimums, and within my training and everything." Until you can kind of resolve the conflict, if you will. But we've empowered all the folks to speak up and do those kinds of things. I think that's a critical component.
- Lu Ann Jones: What kinds of injuries, accidents, fatalities, were, I don't know, were most critical in thinking about Operational Leadership? I mean, I guess I think about clearly there are people who are doing search and rescue. But I'm thinking again about the people who are doing electrical work. So where do you think in this kind of range of risky behaviors that people, employees of the National Park Service engage in, where do you think Operational Leadership has intervened the most? Or can you say that?
- Craig Geis: Yeah, you can. When you say where have we intervened the most, we're talking about what we call lagging indicators. Those might be accidents, injuries. You reported the DART rate, days away. So, if you look at kind of those lagging indicators, first of all, the number one mechanism of injury in the Park Service is slips, trips and falls. Number one. It's not crashing vehicles or falling off mountains or drowning or electrocution, okay? Those are what I call the one-off kinds of things. But if you think about this, I think the figure is roughly nine, in 2017 the Park Service spent \$950 million, no, I'm sorry, about 350, I'll have to check that figure, about \$350 million on worker's comp claims.
- Lu Ann Jones: Wow.
- Craig Geis: Just stop and think now. Over the past, from the start of the program in 2008 until 2016, we don't have '17 data, the DART rate, the serious injury rate, has declined by 44 percent. So, my question as a researcher would be, so we talk about variables. So that's what we call a dependent variable as the DART rate goes down. And my question is, what is the independent variable? What did you do different to cause the DART rate to go down? During that period, there was no major changes in anything except Operational Leadership. So, I think we can anecdotally say that without being a pure science, we can say that it's had a major impact in reducing a DART rate 44 percent. If you take 44 percent of whatever the workers

comp was back then, think about the savings to the Park Service, you know, in doing those kinds of things.

Craig Geis: So, I think we tend to focus a lot of times on these what I call one-off injuries. Somebody drowns in the lake, falls off a boat. But those are anomalies as compared to the other things that are going on.

Lu Ann Jones: Uh huh. Interesting. Can you make any observations about people who were more willing to embrace this way of operating than others? Or more open to it.

Craig Geis: Yeah. I think in the beginning, the biggest naysayers of the program were the safety people. Again, these are very proud people. They're very skilled at what they do. But they're very skilled at a very small skillset. So, you might have somebody that comes over from OSHA and their whole life has been OSHA. Now somebody's coming in here talking about we're going to do something different. They resented that. They didn't understand what Operational Leadership was. But I will say, the strongest proponents we have for Operational Leadership are now the safety people. So, they embraced it.

Craig Geis: The other issues that I see still today is there's a group of what I call upper-level managers and leaders that just do not accept change. They want to do things the way they've always done it. For them, we wait till they retire. You can't force attitude change, you know, on those individuals. But think of it this way. They've been successful their whole lives doing it a certain way. I call it hardwiring. They don't want to ask employees what they think. They've always told employees what to think. Again, I think part of that stems from, just as an outsider looking, people get promoted sometimes. One day you're a peer, and the next day you're managing your peers. We fail sometimes to give them the proper training, supervisory training and leadership training, in those areas. And that's tough in a big system.

Lu Ann Jones: Yesterday I was interested in the way Operational Leadership is now influencing the way we talk about, oh, these diversity issues, or sexual harassment issues.

Craig Geis: Right.

Lu Ann Jones: I mean, it becomes a bigger umbrella than talking about slips, trips and falls, for example.

Craig Geis: Right.

- Lu Ann Jones: Was it always intended that way? Or how did you, or is that something that these conversations have begun to blend in ways that you didn't anticipate?
- Craig Geis: I think my original intent was that it would cover the accidents and things like that, aviation and the National Park Service. But if you really stop and think, one of the things I always say in human factors is it doesn't matter whether you drive a car or whether you raise a family, whether you work in the National Park Service, whether you clean toilets, fly aircraft, it doesn't make any difference. Human factors are human factors. So why would it be any different for somebody that is a sexual harasser, or somebody that doesn't want diversity? They're all human behavior traits. The question is, goes back to why people do what they do. So, you've got to say to yourself, why does somebody continue to behave in a certain way?
- Craig Geis: I've been here with the Park Service now for ten years as a contractor. But I mean, I have watched, and people have asked me, Craig, we have problems in this area of sexual harassment, and what do you think? I said, what I think is, you're not enforcing the standards. Period. The bottom line to me is, I went through this in the military. It's very simple. If that's the way you're going to behave, you're gone. You're out of here. It doesn't take long for that message to filter down. To think we're going to run people through a two-day seminar on inclusion and harassment, and somebody that's been doing that their entire career? It's not going to work. You hold them to a standard. You train them. You set a standard, you train people to achieve that standard, which isn't real difficult in some of those areas, and then you enforce it. If they're not going to get on board – now I understand it's difficult in federal government sometimes to get rid of people. That's part of the system's deficiency that I see. But I think it's human behavior, it fits into all the areas.
- Lu Ann Jones: You said that you're now on an eighth version, I believe, of Operational Leadership?
- Craig Geis: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: So how has the curriculum changed over time?
- Craig Geis: The biggest change we have, it was always in the beginning we were just improving and modifying and stuff like that. But about five classes ago, Mark and I sat down, and we decided to try and make the facilitator training a little better and easier for the facilitators. What we did is we developed what's called a rolling case study. We used kind of a scenario; the scenario is called the green Mojave. That's a snake. There's eight modules in Operational Leadership. We start in module one about a team

that has to backpack out to a site to bring out supplies and equipment. They just throw a bunch of people together and tell them go out and deliver all the stuff. One of the young ladies in the scenario, Jane, is a wildlife biologist and she's a photography buff. She sees a Mojave green snake, and she wants to take a picture. That's kind of the evolution of it. Somebody else steps in and says, "Wait a minute, we're not supposed to be taking pictures of snakes." And each module, it applies. So, when they're working with like the module on leadership, we talk about designated and functional leaders. When we get into stress and performance, we let her get bit. You know, now she's stressed out. So, we add information in as it goes along. It allows us to do the case study, but it allows discussion, it allows role play where we do communications, we role play communications. So, the participants have an opportunity to do all of that.

Craig Geis: The last five classes, the facilitators really enjoy it. It really, it kind of ties things together. One of the problems I felt with the original Operational Leadership was facilitators would have one example in this module, and then they'd go find another and another and another. It was very difficult for participants to keep all those together in their mind. So now when they get done, it's like, Mojave green. I know how it fits into everything that we do. So, it's one scenario.

Craig Geis: So, we haven't fielded that yet. That's going to be version eight. Which I think Mark is looking at January/February to field.

Lu Ann Jones: The facilitators, I mean, these are people who have undergone train the trainer courses, is that right?

Craig Geis: Mm hmm.

Lu Ann Jones: What's their role in this whole evolution of Operational Leadership, and the success or failure of Operational Leadership?

Craig Geis: I started out and I facilitated different groups. But when you have 25,000 employees, you know it's not going to work. So, we decided we needed to train a cadre of facilitators. The question came up, who do we select to be facilitators? I said, you need somebody that wants to do the job. They need to volunteer. They need to, you know, that's the primary purpose.

Craig Geis: A lot of people came in the early days and said, "I really didn't understand how much time this was going to take, and I'm not sure I'm good enough to do this." We lost a lot of facilitators.

Craig Geis: Now the process is one of a really good selection process, where they go out at the regions and they seek individuals. They look at backgrounds.

They look at time that they have available. It's a very, very, really rigorous selection process, and it's really made a difference. We get some really great facilitators.

Craig Geis: So, the goal is we give them kind of the facilitation skills and the content material. Then they go back to either their park, and in the beginning, they co-facilitate. They'll work with another facilitator that's done many classes until they get comfortable, and then co-facilitate. So, the best strategy is two facilitators, if not three. Okay? Because it's difficult, 16 hours doing it. So, we've set it up that way.

Craig Geis: It's been a very effective strategy. In fact, in Washington, I think Mark uses sometimes four or five facilitators because he's got a lot of them up there to do different classes and everything. So, the important thing for me is that the facilitator interacts with an NPS employee for the first time in Operational Leadership. It needs to be a positive experience. So, if you just go back to the psychology of reward, you know, you don't want it to be a negative experience or very often a punishment. You know, "I didn't have a good time at all, you punished me for 16 hours." So, it needs to be a positive experience. So, I think that is really, really critical in the facilitative selection process.

Craig Geis: We have 45 classes. I don't remember how many exactly. But let's just average out about 17, 18 per class. So somewhere around 900 facilitators trained. But we have about 380, somewhere around 380 active facilitators right now. Retirements, people that de-select out. And that's okay. Mark's philosophy and my philosophy was, we're going to train people that they may not be facilitators for long, but they'll find themselves in superintendents' positions and leadership positions. When you walk around that room [where the Operational Leadership Summit was held] and look at those pictures [of OL classes], it's amazing how many senior leaders we have now after ten years in the Park Service. As I sit in a room and talk to the students, I say, "Some of you are going to be superintendents." "Oh, no, not me!" You know, kind of stuff. But after ten years, we see that. So that's the important thing for facilitators.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Well, are there other federal agencies that do something similar to Operational Leadership? I mean, is—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Lu Ann Jones: How has this model been – well, in many ways, this is a model that has been adapted and is very adaptable in different places.

Craig Geis: Right.

- Lu Ann Jones: Have you seen other agencies being interested in this? Or do you feel like this has been very, kind of adapted to the National Park Service and maybe isn't exportable?
- Craig Geis: It is exportable. Human behavior is human behavior. Are there other individuals interested? I hear all the time people say, "Wow, I was with somebody from BLM [Bureau of Land Management] and they think this is great and they would like to do something in fire service," or this, or that. I hear it all the time. But nobody does anything about it. So, while there is interest, it never gets elevated to a level where decision makers really kind of take a look at it. I think it's part of the nature of bureaucracies, that it is really difficult to elevate that up. It's a difficult program to understand. To explain to somebody what Operational Leadership is.
- Craig Geis: So, picture somebody who BLM attends one of the Operational Leadership classes. And they do, very often. They go back to their organization saying, "Man, you should have seen the class I went to. This was great."
- Craig Geis: "Well, tell me about it."
- Craig Geis: "Well, we did risk management."
- Craig Geis: "Well, we already do risk management, so we don't need that."
- Craig Geis: Or "It was about leadership."
- Craig Geis: "Oh, we already train leaders. We don't need that."
- Craig Geis: So, it's very hard for somebody to translate, to do that.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, are there other questions that I haven't asked you that you'd like to address?
- Craig Geis: No. I think, I think we're at the really a cusp in the kind of ledge of Operational Leadership. I think as the years go on it's just going to get stronger and more embedded in the culture.
- Lu Ann Jones: One last thing, again, we were talking a little yesterday about how, like you said, it applies everywhere. And you know these issues of stress in the workplace. Again, was that part of what you envisioned from the outset? That it would be people in the administration?
- Craig Geis: Everybody.
- Lu Ann Jones: Everybody.

- Craig Geis: Everybody. Crew resource management is everybody in the airplane. And Operational Leadership is everybody in the Park Service.
- Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.
- Craig Geis: I think some of the greatest feedback I receive, and it makes me proud, is that I get calls periodically from individuals that say, “You didn’t help me in my work, but you helped me in life. And it’s made a difference with my family.”
- Craig Geis: I had a facilitator call me last month. In fact, he went through the training program in 2010. In class, he weighed 380 pounds. He was so, he was almost dead. And after the program, he said, “I think you’ve changed my life. You’ve given me a whole different perspective on everything. On work, on family, and everything.”
- Craig Geis: Last month, or last week, two weeks ago, he came back through a class and he weighed 210 pounds. Weighed 210 pounds. It was like, holy mackerel. He talked to the class, and he said, “Operational Leadership changed the way I think about everything in my life. The way I think about my wife and my family.” In fact, he brought his wife to the class and everything with him. It was in Denver, at the headquarters.
- Craig Geis: I get calls like that all the time. People say, “This has made me a better person. It’s helped me with my family.” Periodically I’ll get, probably helped me out in my job and stuff like that. But it’s about a total culture change in the way people view themselves and the people that they work with.
- Lu Ann Jones: Right.
- Craig Geis: So, I think that’s, for me that’s the satisfying piece of it.
- Lu Ann Jones: Wow. That’s great.
- Craig Geis: Yeah. It is.
- Lu Ann Jones: How about if we end on that?
- Craig Geis: That’s great.
- Lu Ann Jones: Good. Thank you so much.
- Craig Geis: Thank you so much.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah.

[End Track 3.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]