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AMBASSADOR JOHN R. BURKE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?

BURKE: My interest in foreign affairs really grew out of my service in the Navy during World War II.

Q: What were you doing in the Navy?

BURKE: I was a naval officer serving in the Pacific in the Third and Fifth Fleets. And I led a detachment of sailors ashore on August 29, 1945 and established communications for Admiral Badger, who was the commander of the occupation force of the Tokyo Bay area. And, I guess, as a consequence of this experience and actually some other ports of call made in the Far East aboard the aircraft carrier Hancock, in which I sort of began to develop an interest in foreign affairs generally. I was then a 20-year-old ensign and had not yet finished my undergraduate degree or graduate degrees and, therefore, determined that I was going to conclude my studies in the field of US diplomatic history, which I proceeded to do.

Q: Had you known anything about diplomacy before?

BURKE: Not beyond what I read and just from that, every basic courses that I'd taken in US history.

Q: Where did you go to college?

BURKE: I went to Lawrence College for part of my undergraduate time, and I got my bachelor's degree from University of Wisconsin, and I got my master's at Wisconsin as well. I had the good fortune of having Fred Harvey Harrington as my major professor both as an undergraduate and graduate at Wisconsin, and Fred Harrington's specialty was

US diplomatic history. He's got several books in the field. And he later became president of the University of Wisconsin.

Q: Well, how did you get into the Foreign Service itself? You came in when? In 1956?

BURKE: I came in in September of 1956. I wrote the Foreign Service exam--I can't remember precisely; it must have been the previous December, passed it, passed the oral. And because I had some graduate work to finish up, I asked for a couple of months delay before coming on duty, and, therefore, there is that gap between December of 1955 and September of 1956 when I actually came in. I had the misfortune, however, to have been appointed a Class 6 officer, and by the time I came on duty, they had established the eight grades, so I came in as an FSO-8 instead of an FSO-6.

Q: That's too bad. I had come in a year before and went from an FSO 6 just to an FSO 8 It was rather traumatic. We're obviously going to concentrate on the later part of your career, but your first job sounds quite interesting. I'd like to talk a little about it. You went to Bangkok, didn't you? How did that develop, and what were you doing?

BURKE: Well, my first post was Bangkok. I had expressed a preference for service in the Far East, because I felt I knew the region and already had a basic knowledge of it and wanted to build on it. When I got to Bangkok, I was originally slotted for a political officer job.

However, when I arrived, they had worked a couple of switches within the staffing, and the job available and open to me was one as deputy chief of the SEATO section. That, in effect, was the US permanent delegation to SEATO that consisted of two men, myself and John Calvin Hill, Jr., who was my boss. And the two of us really handled the day-to-day work and representation of the US on the permanent working group of SEATO, which was the body that sat regularly in Bangkok and handled the activities of the organization on the political side. There was representation from the other six member governments as well drawn from resident embassies in Bangkok and the other member governments. So it was an excellent experience, and I got my feet totally wet right up to the hips, I think.

Q: Well, how did you and those around you at the embassy view SEATO at that time? Because today it's looked upon as being sort of an ineffective nonstart of a treaty. How did you feel about it at that time? It was brand new or almost brand new.

BURKE: It was fairly new, of course, as you say. It's kind of curious in a way in that my first job in the service was in Bangkok on the SEATO delegation, and then later I came back to Bangkok as DCM, and I was present at the termination of SEATO and sat in on the last meeting of the council representatives when SEATO was dissolved finally.

I do feel that SEATO was "bad-mouthed" by several people who didn't really understand that we got over time, I think, a great deal of bang for the buck out of SEATO. We never

spent much money on it. Our contribution on an annual basis when I was there in the mid-'"50s, I think, ran something like $300,000 a year. Plus we had a few people detailed to the international staff, and we had some military people on the military committee as well. But the total outlay from the US side was really minimal in modern terms or even then terms of what we were spending on NATO and, I guess, SENTO and the [unclear] it was. But as an organization, I think it performed some useful services particularly in terms of providing the regional
members--by that I mean, of course, the Philippines and Thailand and Pakistan--with a great opportunity to work together on a variety of projects. And I think the Thai, by their experience, gained a great deal of savior-faire, if you will, in the international realm which they built on later.

Q: This is really their first international organization, wasn't it?

BURKE: Yes.

Q: I mean, other than the U.N.

BURKE: Yes.

Q: How did your ambassador and the rest of the staff view SEATO? Did you feel sort of a stepchild, or were you--

BURKE: Well, Max Bishop, who was the ambassador when I first arrived, I think took a reasonable interest in it and did participate fully. He left the day-to-day running, of course, to John Hill, who just, by the by, is probably one of the most extraordinary Foreign Service officers I ever served with in terms of his intellectual capacity and his negotiating skills. John Hill, I think--and I say this, I'm also including comments that I received from British, Australian, New Zealand diplomats who were there present at the time--they all felt that John Hill was the guiding genius behind SEATO in the early days and in the early years, and any effectiveness they had was due to a large extent to Hill's competence and abilities.

But getting back to the question, Max Bishop was quite content to leave the running to Hill, and it was done extremely well. The successor to Max Bishop was Alex Johnson, and Alex, I think, had an interest in SEATO. I don't really have a feel for how he regarded the organization in terms of its long-term value or what we might be getting out of it in terms of national interest. But he certainly participated very actively in all the meetings of the council representatives [unclear].

Q: How did you view Vietnam from there, I mean, your personal view? Was it a problem at that--

BURKE: No. In those days, of course, Ngo Dinh Diem had just begun to consolidate his position in Saigon. And I had friends in the embassy in Saigon and used to travel back

and forth on holiday to Saigon and traveled around the country, to a certain extent, with them a lot. It was still quite easy to make that trip by road. I talked to the people in the embassy about their view of SEATO, and certainly SEATO looked at Vietnam very carefully, looked at the insurgency and looked at the threat posed by the insurgents in Vietnam and elsewhere and what had been French Indochina.

At the same time, of course, they were protocol states-- Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam--under the SEATO treaty, and there was no obligation. But it was not as clearly defined as one might have hoped.

Q: Well, really, your next assignment--we'll sort of move rather quickly--you were in Paris as a consular officer from '58 to '61. Then you're in the Department from '61 to '62 when you went into Vietnamese language training. And so to move to what was your major area of specialization, what attracted you to specialize in Vietnam?

BURKE: Well, my interest, as I said before, was in Asia and particularly in Southeast Asia even before I came into the Foreign Service. I had taken courses in Far Eastern history and especially the economy in the Far East as a minor working on my master's and then working on the doctorate, and I wanted to build on that experience. When I came back to the Department from Paris, I was in BNA as the assistant UK desk officer, whose responsibility is for Ireland and--

Q: BNA stands for?

BURKE: British Commonwealth and Northern Europe. It's an office within the EUR, the European bureau. And a friend of mine, whom I had met, as a matter of fact, in Saigon, was then in Personnel.

And he contacted me one day and said, "Would you be interested in going into Vietnamese language training? We are very interested in developing some competence among the FSOs in Vietnamese."

And I thought about it for about one day and said, "It seems to be a very sensible thing to do."

I was convinced, personally, that Vietnam was going to become more and more in the forefront in terms of US foreign policy. So I thought that this would be an excellent career opportunity and be an excellent opportunity just in terms of my own interests.

Q: Speaking a little about career opportunities, these interviews are designed for somebody who might not know too much about the Foreign Service and how people get directed. How did you see it as a career opportunity?

BURKE: Well, when an officer comes into the Department, it doesn't take him too long, unless he's terrible obtuse, to get a feel for where the opportunities lie, career officers.

Bureaus, geographic bureaus, functional bureaus had reputations that are pretty well known both by personnel and personalities working within the bureaus and by people outside the bureaus. Some of the geographic bureaus traditionally have a good reputation as being good places to serve because they have been over the years fairly well run by competent officers, senior officers. And the work they did caught the attention of the seventh floor and also the White House and, of course, Washington.

The Bureau of East Asian Affairs, I think, had a reputation as one of the strongest bureaus in the Department over the years. When I was in BNA, obviously, I was working in the Bureau of European Affairs. But quite honestly looking about, I wasn't all that interested in one of the more traditional jobs in one of the larger European embassies, which I might have expected in a BNA assignment. So I was interested in getting back to the Far East and to work within the Bureau of East Asian Affairs--it was Far East, of course, in those days. The name didn't change until 1968.

So I really jumped at the chance to take Vietnamese, going to Saigon and--

Q: What type of officer would you characterize--this is the early "'60s--was taking Vietnamese? I mean, was there a characterization would you say?

BURKE: Well, I'm trying to think of some of the people who were in the language program with me: Bill Marsh, who is still in the Service; Dick Holbrooke, who later got out of the Service and came back into the Department as the assistant secretary for the EA; Vladimir Lehovich, who had a very distinguished career in political military affairs; Jim Rosenthal, who later became ambassador in Guinea and is still in the Service; David Engle, Tony Lake, and Sam Thomsen.

Q: So it was, you might say, a high caliber type of motivated person.

BURKE: I would say so. The group that I was associated with, I would rate them all very highly.

Q: Well, you went to Saigon when, and what were you doing?

BURKE: I went to Saigon in--I think I arrived in June of 1963. The way the Vietnamese language course was set up, the first six months were Washington at FSI and with three additional months in Saigon. So my first couple of months in Saigon, I was told to bring in the language but doing some odd jobs in the political section in terms of covering things that might not otherwise get covered by the political section, which was fairly--it was a lean political section at the time.

Q: Well, the later half of '63 can be pointed to as the crucial thing and probably with the finger more pointing towards the month of November, October-November. And so you were there on the scene. Before we get to that, how did you view the situation from your vantage point as a relatively junior officer in the summer of '63 in Vietnam?

BURKE: Well, I should back up just a bit. On my way to Saigon, because of my experience in BNA, and because I had been the assistant UK desk officer and the Irish desk officer, I was asked to stop off en route in Ireland. And I was there as an advance man during the visit of President Kennedy.

Interestingly enough, Pierre Salinger announced in Dublin that the White House had decided to name Henry Cabot Lodge as the ambassador to Saigon replacing Fritz Nolting. So I continued on to Saigon after the presidential visit. And, of course, Fritz Nolting, whom I called shortly after my arrival, was already packing his bags and getting ready to terminate his mission. And Cabot Lodge did arrive in, I think, around the 23rd of August in 1963. So it was a very interesting time, a very active time in the embassy. A lot of things were going on.

Q: Well, how did the officers view Nolting?

BURKE: I would say that the officers had a regard for Nolting. Many of the officers had served with him in Paris, and he brought several people with him at that time to Saigon when he was named ambassador. You had Noel who was a political counselor. You had Bill Trueheart, the DCM. And then you had Bob Miller, who was number two, the man for the political section. So I think all of those people had a high regard for Nolting. He was certainly a very charming individual. And I thought he was a very dedicated professional, really, in his approach to the job of being ambassador.

Q: Well, what was, at that point, the view of the Vietnamese government and all?

BURKE: Toward?

Q: I mean, your view and the view of those around you, the political section and other officers in the embassy, how did you view the situation in the government?

BURKE: Well, the situation, really, in the summer of 1963 in Saigon was somewhat turbulent, because in May you had the beginning of the so-called Buddhist crisis which began at Qué, the incident of May 8 in which Tri Quang organized a demonstration demanding that Buddhist in conjunction with their observance of Buddha's birthday be permitted to fly the Buddhist flag on some of the pagodas, and also they demanded that their demonstration be broadcast over the local radio station.

An incident developed on the night of May 8th. It's also been looked at and examined and reported oftentimes inaccurately. It was a very confused moment, in any event. Because of the confrontation before the radio station, there were a number of casualties and some Vietnamese demonstrators died. And this triggered a rather turbulent period. The demonstrations by the Buddhists began to spread down into Saigon and picked up by students, the students demonstrating on behalf of the Buddhists and demonstrating against the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem.

And there were also, of course, many American journalists on the scene, some of whom made their reputations in Saigon in the summer of '63, notably, Malcolm Brown, who was reporting for the Associated Press; Neil Sheehan, who was reporting for the United Press International; and Halberstam--

Q: David Halberstam.

BURKE: Who was reporting for the New York Times. These were young journalists. I think with the exception of one, this was their first post abroad as reporters, as foreign correspondents. And they began to file extensive reports on the developing conflict between the Buddhists and the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. Their reports began to make front pages of the newspapers throughout the US, and they brought a certain amount of pressure to bear on the Kennedy Administration and on the government to do something in terms of intervening to somehow help resolve the situation between the Buddhists and the Dinh Diem regime.

We were already committed to supporting the Dinh Diem regime against the Communist insurgency, which had well begun in 1960-61, and we didn't yet, of course, have combat troops in Vietnam. However, we had a growing commitment in terms of military advisors. I think we may have had about 15,000 thereabouts in the country already. And certainly we had begun to supply important resources in the meantime, commodity import program, resources to the government of Vietnam. So it was in our interest, obviously, to try and solve this--all this regarded by some as a side show--main problem of insurgency.

Q: Did you get involved in this at all?

BURKE: Well, involved to the extent that we were reporting to the Department, to Washington, what was going on in terms of the demonstrations. Of course, the reports by the journalists were what caught the public attention, and you had that one remarkable photograph taken by, I think it may have been Malcolm Brown. I didn't know he was a photographer, but he took the famous photograph of a Buddhist, Quang Duc, who was really not well known at all. He was a gentleman who one noon sat himself down in a major intersection in Saigon, poured a can of gasoline over himself and set fire to himself. This was such a remarkable photograph; it was just flashed around the world. It was a photograph similar to the famous one during the war in China in 1937 when the baby was set--

Q: It was a baby on railroad tracks, yes. Well, now, did you have any contact with these newspaper reporters? I mean, were they cultivating you? Were you cultivating them?

BURKE: I had limited contact with them and knew them all. I used to chat with them from time to time. But their principal contacts were people like the head of USIS and John--the name escapes me just now.

Q: You can fill it in.

BURKE: He wrote a book subsequently called Mission in Torment. And he was the principal contract with the correspondents. But they did have social contacts with some of the other members of the embassy staff.

Q: When you got into the political section--you were there when?

BURKE: I'd say I was getting toward full time in August of '63.

Q: Who was the head of the political section at that time?

BURKE: Well, Mel , as I mentioned was the political counselor and Bob Miller was his deputy. And Mel has retired. He was ambassador to Central African Republic and then Liberia before his retirement. And Bob Miller was ambassador to Malaysia and the Ivory Coast and is still in the Service. But that was the lineup. There were several other officers: Jim Rosenthal was in the embassy at the time; Bill Marsh was in the embassy; Melvin Levin; Charles Bloughery.

Q: Well, looking at it, would you say the embassy was sort of one mind? I mean, this was a very "Do we support Diem or do we cut the ground out from under him?" It was certainly a debate in other areas. How did the men of the political section view the Diem regime up to November 1963?

BURKE: Well, I don't think there was any single view. There were shades of opinion across the spectrum. There were probably one or two who felt that Diem had to go, the Diem regime had to go. There were, I think, others on the other side of the spectrum who felt that, "Okay, if Ngo Dinh Diem must go, who will succeed him and how will the succession be arranged, and what will this do to the effort to [unclear] the communist insurgency?"

I'd say there was a great deal of debate back and forth that would go up and down from day to day. As far as Ambassador Nolting is concerned, on the basis of my conversations with him which were limited then during that period because we didn't overlap all that long, but I have spoken with him subsequently and read the article he had before in the Foreign Service Journal and his book that appeared recently, and his position really hasn't deviated. He felt that it would be a mistake to consider a change of administration because the presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem was still valid, that the government was capable of functioning and that the Buddhist affair was a regrettable side show, in fact, distracting people from the real problem.

There were some people in the political section, I think, who probably learned upon review that once you get rid of--it's clear now from all the documents that have been released, the various books that have been done, that there was an interest particularly in Washington on the part of then Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman, possibly to a lesser

extent Averell Harriman and others within the administration who felt that the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem had lost its effectiveness and probably should be replaced by a more effective regime, possibly the more elite.

Q: Do you think, was there a proprietary feeling within the embassy? You know, we're doing this, and we really should rather than sit back and watch events, that we felt we should get more and more, you know, not concerned but really manipulate things within this government.

BURKE: I think there were probably some people who held that view. There were others, of course, who had served abroad and appreciated the fact that regardless of the American stake in a foreign country, the number of things you can do, the amount of influence you can wield is quite limited. I think that it's--I had been through a coup in Bangkok. And I remember how that unfolded and what role the US mission was able to play in all of that scenario, and it was an extremely limited role if any role at all.

So I'm afraid that I felt that it's well and good to say, "We have an important stake here, the government must change its way to do certain things to accommodate us in view of our investment." And I think that in most foreign environments where you end up in this would be indigenous. After all, the people of the country, in the final analysis, say to themselves, "This is our country, and this is our government, and we will accept advice up to a point if it's consistent with our view."

Q: Did you have a feel for how the CIA--its role there? Did you deal with them? I mean, did they have their own policy or own line? How did it work?

BURKE: Well, I was, as I say, a fairly junior officer in those days, and I had little contact with that side of the house.

Q: Again, how did it play out for you personally, and how did you see the November situation of '63?

BURKE: Well, I think it's important to mention Cabot Lodge's arrival and the way he chose to operate.

Q: Yes, if you would talk about his method of operations.

BURKE: Yes. I think that one must bear in mind that Cabot Lodge had been the Republican nominee for vice president in the election of 1960 which John F. Kennedy won.

Q: Narrowly.

BURKE: Narrowly. And I'm sure that Cabot Lodge would be accepted to come to Saigon as ambassador. He brought thought to himself, "Why am I being chosen to come?" He's a

very shrewd political animal--he was--and he could, I'm sure, put two and two together and probably arrive at the conclusion, although he never stated this to me--although he's stated several things to me on other subjects--that possibly his selection was an effort on the part of the Kennedy Administration to make the Vietnam effort more bipartisan and get the Republican involvement.

Lodge arrived on the scene, as I said, on August 23rd--I believe that's the correct date. He arrived at a particularly crucial moment, because the Ngo Dinh Diem regime had decided to try and surgically eliminate the Buddhist problem, I think on the night of August 21, and they invaded the pagodas in the Saigon area and rounded up several of the activist Buddhist bonzes who were sort of leading the demonstrations. And Lodge arrived at a very tense moment. The American press was out in force to cover his arrival. The obvious question asked was, "What do you intend to do about this terrible thing that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime has done to attempt to liquidate the Buddhist threat?"

He brought with him two advisors or two aides. One was Herbert W. Blot, who had previously worked for CIA. He was more or less a political advisor to Lodge. The other advisor was a colonel who Lodge had met at the Pentagon named John N. Dunn, US Army. And these two people, certainly in the early weeks that Lodge was there, became, in effect, his eyes and ears and conduits to both the US military establishment in Saigon and to the mission itself, the embassy political section.

The economic section was AID. Mike Dunn, who was a friend of mine, has been over the years, I didn't know him all that well at that time of his arrival, but he was a very intelligent officer, got a Ph.D. from Woodrow Wilson School in political science and very active individual, a very effective aide to Lodge and was able to do everything Lodge asked of him. And that is the way the Lodge embassy worked, really, through those two conduits.

I'd say eventually, over a matter of weeks, possibly a couple of months, Dunn became the important member [unclear]. And he was the one that the ambassador depended on most heavily to keep the mission functioning and make sure that he, the ambassador, was being informed about everything that was going on.

Q: There is often a problem when you have put a military man in because of the training, which is, "What does the ambassador want? I'll see that it's done." I mean, we've just recently had a case of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North causing a lot of trouble in the name of our government. But I mean, there is a military mind set, no matter how intelligent. They're trained to see the objective and not often see the repercussions particularly in a political environment. Do you think this might have been a problem here?

BURKE: Well, I don't think it was a problem. Your question is a little more--I can understand what you're saying. In terms of the personalities involved, Mike Dunn is a very subtle individual as well as being intelligent in the military individual and coming

from his background. I do know on the basis of my own experience with him that he was every bit as tough on the US military side even in Saigon as he was in the embassy. In fact, I know from a couple of my military friends, they said more than once, "Wait till we get Dunn back in the Army!" However, he was able to get back into the Army and eventually made major general before he retired.

But in any event, he was out there, and I think he served Lodge faithfully and did everything Lodge wanted done. And the same time, I think he was subtle enough to provide a cushion between Lodge and the mission. Now, I do feel that Lodge arrived, he knew nobody as far as he had never served with any of the members of the staff, the diplomatic members or the Foreign Service members of the embassy staff. I think he was suspicious, one, as to why he had been appointed. Two, he didn't know the members of the staff. Three, he knew he was moving into a very, very dicey situation in terms of the relationship with the Ngo Dinh Diem regime and what he understand Washington to want.

So I think he was very suspicious throughout that entire period in that he did not accept a great deal of advice that might come to him directly from the embassy staff or from any other source within the mission. I think he was extremely cautious, kept his counsel with a very narrow circle almost consisting entirely of Dunn and Blot. And over time, I think he began to appreciate the quality of the people on the staff, but it took a while. And I'd say it wasn't until the overthrow, the coup of November, 1963, that he had begun to get to the point where he was willing to accept advice from counsel directly.

Q: Again, from your vantage point, how did the November 1963 coup play out as you saw it, and what were the feelings?

BURKE: Well, the rumors were rife in late August that a coup was in the works, something was going to happen in the very near term. Most reporters felt this. I should say this just in passing, but Cabot Lodge made a great effort to butter up the American correspondents on the scene. Almost from the moment of his arrival, he was accessible to them, and I think his press was extremely favorable throughout this period. I think he saw them individually. He gave individual background interviews to some of the more prominent members of the press corps, which was fairly sizeable even then. And I think it played very well back here.

As to the coup, how it played out. Late August the rumors were rife that it was going to happen very soon. And then the rumors began to die down. Elections were held in September for the National Assembly successfully. A new National Assembly was established. The government began to give the impression that they were on top of the situation. And things were very quiet throughout most of October. In fact, many of the journalists said to me they were a little irritated because nothing was going on. And I can't remember precisely what, but there was some sort of a story that was brewing in Djakarta and many of them got orders from their home offices to go down to Djakarta and cover

that, possibly find other things to report because things were so superficially quiet in Saigon.

And National Day, which was, I think, October 26, Ngo Dinh Diem came. A parade was held. Diem was out taking salutes of the troops. The crowd was reasonably responsive to him. So things had quieted down, and then, of course, the rumors began to circulate, things would begin at the end of the month. Then the coup erupted. I was not personally aware of the relationship which was later revealed between Lieutenant Colonel Lucien Conein and the coup group headed by General Tran Van Don, "Big Minh," and Kim. But that's been pretty well documented.

So the coup itself, the involvement of the embassy, has been pretty well documented in various books that appeared--Helen Hammer's book, Death in November, General Tran Van Don's book called Our Endless War. But there are several other books. And there appears to have been a very close contact between Conein, who was an old Indochina hand, who had been in North Vietnam right after World War II and then later on at the time the French were pulling out. He had many friends among the general group that became known as the "Captain's Majors" and whatnot of the past. But from my perspective at the moment--I was certainly was not privy to any of this--I rather doubt that the legal counsel or his deputy were privy to it all.

Q: Well, how did you feel about it? I mean, what was sort of the feeling within the political section when the word came?

BURKE: Well, there was elation on the part of a few people who had argued in favor of doing something to "get this government moving or replace this government." I'm afraid that I was rather cynical about the whole affair because I--and this was the position I took at the time in conversations with my colleagues--I felt that unless you knew precisely what was going to follow, there was not much point in replacing a government that had been, for all of its faults, functioning reasonably well and that had claim to a mandate.

One might argue that Ngo Dinh Diem's election as president of South Vietnam was clouded to a certain extent. Nevertheless, he had been in power for a considerable number of years. He had weathered other crises in that time. And he seemed, certainly on the face of it, a leader who had the best interests of his country at heart, and in point of fact, he was almost incorruptible. After the overthrow, the Military Revolutionary Council, a group of generals who lead the coup, made a great attempt to try and document evidence that the Diem regime had squirreled money away abroad in Swiss bank accounts and all the rest, and they were unable to find any.

Q: By this point, had you made any contacts using your Vietnamese in Vietnamese ruling circles even at any level?

BURKE: Certainly not within the ruling circle as such. I had several contacts at the--oh, let's say, the office director level within administrative foreign affairs, within the state

interior, knew a lot of Vietnamese business people, and met socially many Vietnamese who were connected with the government, and many people who had no connection whatever, a couple of doctors and some lawyers, people of that stripe.

Q: How did they view the situation after the coup?

BURKE: After the coup? There was a tendency on the part of almost everybody to say, "It's a wonderful thing!" There were a few people who, in quiet conversation, would express certain misgivings, what they could expect now in terms of their leadership. But generally the reaction was, "This is wonderful! Now we can get ahead and go through the problems and have a government of national union and prosecute the war against the communist insurgence without distractions, this Buddhist crisis."

Q: You were there until '67. And how were things? Was there a change?

BURKE: No. I'd say the bloom went off the rose on January 30, 1964, three months after the coup, when General Khanh mounted his what was been described as his counter-coup, and it locked up the generals who had led the first coup incidents.

I and several others had argued that once you had a coup and you got involved in a coup, the one great risk is you had to beware of is the possibility is that one coup would bring about yet another coup. So over the next two years, roughly--well, November 1, 1963 to mid-1965--you had a succession of probably 11 coups and coup *manqués*, and every one of them brought about a certain change in government.

The real problem here just from a managerial point of view, it seems to me, is that--let's say that if you were a firm that rates the efficiency of an institution, and you say that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime is 40% efficient, and you look at it two years later, and you find that you've changed province chiefs, maybe, six or eight times in every province, you've replaced directors general in all the ministries, you replaced ministers in all ministries, and just for arguments sake you've lost 5% efficiency every time you have a change, by mid-1965 in terms of governmental efficiency, they're probably scraping on zero.

Q: Yes. Well, I'm hoping that we will have a series of interviews devoted strictly to Vietnam. So I'm moving ahead rather rapidly. But I would like you to talk about Maxwell Taylor. General Maxwell Taylor came in and was the ambassador for a period of about a year. Lodge only lasted about a year, and then he came back again. As far as the embassy is concerned, what did he tell you before he left?

BURKE: I got to know the ambassador quite well before he left in early '62. I did a lot of note- taking for him in interviews that he had with political leaders. I should say, he was almost four-by-four or five-by-five in French. His French was excellent. He certainly needed no interpretation. But he conducted almost all of his meetings with the Vietnamese in French.

Lodge told me the day that he announced his departure--we were going off to a meeting, and it was just the two of us in the car. And you may remember that in early 1964 with the coming political conventions to choose a presidential candidate in the United States, Lodge began to develop, without even being present, a certain ground swell of interest in various places. In fact, I think he even won a couple of primaries, political primaries, along the way--the primary in Oregon and one or two other places--and ran extremely well.

So the major contender, of course, was Senator Goldwater. And Lodge was, in political terms, diametrically opposed to Goldwater. And he said to me in the car that morning, "John, I'm going back. I feel that I have to stop this man in his effort to gain or make the Republican nomination. I feel it would be a great mistake in the party if he is nominated." And he said, "I really don't expect that I have a chance, but the fact that I have run reasonably well in some of these primaries that I didn't even campaign in, I'm going back to try and see whether I can work the nomination for someone else."

Q: Well, when Taylor came in, was there a change in the atmosphere of the embassy, how you operated?

BURKE: Taylor, of course, brought in a new team. The principal team was, of course, himself; Alex Johnson, with whom I'd served in Bangkok; and William H. Sullivan, who came in as mission coordinator.

Q: Both these were skilled people in the area.

BURKE: That's right.

Q: Lodge came in with people who worked as--well, they were knowledgeable, but they weren't as knowledgeable in sort of, you might say, embassy terms.

BURKE: They created, of course, the post, I think it's the one and only time in diplomatic practice in the world which you had a deputy ambassador. They created that job for Alex Johnson. But you had, I'd say, a very smoothly functioning embassy under these three people. Bill Sullivan was there just for six months, and it was understood that he was going to Vientiane as ambassador. He serviced as mission coordinator for the first six months for Taylor.

General Taylor I hadn't known prior to this, but I got to know him extremely well, too, and did a lot of note-taking for him during his mission. I've got the highest respect for him as an individual. He's really a remarkable, disciplined individual in terms of, not military terms, but in terms of the way he conducted himself. He has an extremely good mind, a marvelous thinker. He had Japanese, of course. He had German. He had French. I think he had one or two other languages as well. Curiously enough, he spoke excellent French but he had an American accent, so not as good as one might have hoped. But certainly his vocabulary and knowledge of the language [unclear].

I'd say the embassy functioned extremely well. But he arrived in mid- 1964. He had Nguyen Khanh as the prime minister. Khanh had overthrown a coup group in January of that year. Khanh was already running into trouble from Buddhists and northern Catholics, who were at least aware that a sizable group of Vietnamese would come south after the French had withdrawn and were withdrawing and settled in the Saigon area on lands furnished by Ngo Dinh Diem.

Let's see, there's one point I wanted to make in connection with that. Taylor, of course, knew Vietnam because he had worked on the Vietnam problem for a long time in Washington. He had made several trips to Saigon with Robert McNamara. And as he had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Special Assistant to the President, so he had very close ties with the Kennedy family, with President Kennedy and his brother, Robert.

Q: Well, at that point, how did you feel in the embassy? Did you feel that you were sort of on a roller coaster of which you had no control? Or were we trying to have some sort of control over events?

BURKE: Well, again, I think given the many changes in government by coup or coup *manqués*, we were at a serious disadvantage in trying to develop contacts. When the first coup group came in, the first military revolutionary council, they put together a group of civilians, and they named it the Conseil des Notables, the council of notables. And the idea was that this appointed group was to function as a legislature of sorts.

Now, there were some very interesting political figures in the Conseil des Notables. You had people who were members of the Die Viet Party, the members of the VNQDD Party. It was a very interesting group, and many of them had been out of the country during the last years of the Diem regime and had just come back, and the embassy didn't know many of them.

So when the Conseil was formed, I said to Mel one day, I said, "Look, why in the world don't we get Cabot Lodge to have a reception, at least?" I said, "We really don't know them well. We have a few contacts with some of them. But we almost are out of touch with this group." So he tried the idea out on Lodge. Lodge agreed to it.

I was pressed into service as protocol officer. I organized the reception. And we had it at Lodge's residence. It went over extremely well. The political section was there en masse with some other officers from the embassy. And after the party, we made a massive effort through MEMCONS, with every conversation and whatnot, and put them all together and really put together the best "book," so called, on political personalities that began to play roles in Saigon.

Unfortunately, the Conseil des Notables went out of business on January 30. But many of these same people began to resurface as political figures in these other mutations and transformations in government that we had later on.

Q: Well, you are pointing to a difficulty that often is overlooked by people who look at the work of a foreign service, and that is, often when a coup takes over, I mean, basically we don't sit back there and have a line on everybody in the country. And when a new group takes over, this often cuts out all the contacts that we have been getting. And particularly when a military coup takes over, I mean, just by its very nature, usually embassies don't have much to do with lieutenant colonels and the like. So that in a fast-moving situation, an embassy can find itself badly crippled as far as gathering intelligence in any country.

BURKE: Yes. And a coup oftentimes wipes out an embassy's entire group of contacts, and you're faced with a whole new set of faces.

Q: Well, again, I'm pressing ahead. I hope we'll come back on another occasion. But you came back in 1967, and you were working both as the director of the Vietnam Working Group and the country director for Vietnam. This is for two years, wasn't this about?

BURKE: No. First of all, I served for 12 months as Bill Bundy's special assistant.

Q: All right. You say you were working for William Bundy. Could you describe his operating style, what you were doing for him, please?

BURKE: Yes. Well, as special assistant, I was the coordinator, if you will, for the East Asian Bureau in terms of keeping the paper moving from the political desks of the various offices within the Bureau up through Bundy to the seventh floor or up to Bundy for his decision or for his action. I worked closely with the country directors at the time, and certainly worked very closely with Bundy on a six- or seven-day-per-week basis, because it was a very critical time, and I'd say Bundy was in the office for 10 to 12 hours a day every day.

I had very little substantive input in terms of paper coming up from the political desks except in the case of Vietnam. And I would participate in substantive discussions on Vietnam with Bundy and with the then country director, Robert Miller, who had been in Saigon with me. Then when Bob left to go to the Empirical Defense College, Bundy asked me if I would take over as director of the Vietnam Working Group, which was the Vietnam directorate at the time.

You asked about Bundy's operating style. Bundy is one of the most brilliant people I've ever worked with. He and his brother, of course, are both--

Q: George Bundy.

BURKE: George Bundy. Both playing key roles at the time, and he's very hard on himself and very hard on the people working for him. He was under extreme pressure, but he certainly asked as much of himself as he asked of others. He did not tolerate sloppy work. He did not tolerate missed deadlines. He was constantly in consultation with Secretary Rusk and with other high officers of the Department in terms, particularly, of the Vietnam

problem. But there were many other things going on in East Asian affairs at the time which required his attention as well.

So he, I'd say, set a very high standard for the Bureau and for himself and for the people who worked for him. The people who were not up to the mark he had replaced from time to time. But that goes with the turf, and when you're doing important work, you've got to get the work done as quickly as possible and as effectively as possible.

Q: In that time you were working for him and later when you were the country director of--what was it? Country director for Vietnamese affairs?

BURKE: Well, the official title in those days was the Vietnam Working Group, and the director of the Vietnam Working Group was, in effect, the director of the Office of Vietnam Affairs. A Vietnam task force had been established back in the Kennedy years, and this evolved into and became the Vietnam Working Group. So it's a rather curious title, but that was the title that was used.

Q: But it boils down to you were the country officer for--

BURKE: For Vietnam.

Q: For Vietnam.

BURKE: Yes.

Q: Well, these are obviously crucial years, '68-'69. What did you as the director for Vietnam do?

BURKE: Well, there was a lot of coordination with other elements of the executive branch that were involved in Vietnam, for example, AID and the aid program, the Pentagon. We were moving to establish the Paris talks and enter into negotiations with Hanoi and looking toward a settlement. We had the Tet Offensive that erupted in late January of 1968. So it was the whole panoply of day-to-day sort of crisis management, if you will.

But in the longer term, what we were attempting to do was assist--well, achieve a series of decisions which would enable our embassy in Saigon to assist the government to become stronger--well, the Saigon government, the government of South Vietnam--at the same time, to bring about the commencement of these talks, looking toward some sort of a political settlement with Hanoi and to keep the whole thing together. Obviously, any move on our part in terms of negotiating with Hanoi was bound to put new strains on the government of South Vietnam. So there was a great deal of balancing that went on.

Bundy, in those days, used to chair a group which was referred to as the "Eleven O'clock Group," and this consisted of myself; George Carver of CIA, who ran the Vietnam office

at CIA; Les Kalb, who was over at Defense; Mortimer Halperin, who was also over at Defense; and we would have a military officer sometimes, somebody like Bill DuPree or General George Signias as a member of this "Eleven O'clock Group."

It really was not a decision-making body as such, but it was an effort to keep all the elements of the executive branch informed as to what was going on. It was, in effect, a staff meeting, if you will, under Bundy's chairmanship, but just to make certain that all the agencies and departments with important interests in Vietnam knew what was going on, were informing the others about projects that they might be contemplating or working on, and just generally to review the situation that had happened overnight in Vietnam.

Q: What was your attitude towards this evolving thing? Were you, as with the others, so involved in almost day-to-day affairs that it was hard to haul back and say, "Should we be here? Are we winning? Are we losing?" How did you feel about that?

BURKE: I felt, at the time, that the situation was such that we had a reasonable chance of succeeding in Vietnam in terms of--by that, I mean, arriving at a situation where the government of South Vietnam would be able to stand on its own feet at a time when US forces were withdrawn, and that some sort of an accommodation with Hanoi could be worked out. I was personally convinced that the accommodation wouldn't work or couldn't be arrived at with Hanoi unless they were convinced that a full-scale win in the South was impossible to them and the cost was too high. But I felt in this time frame, '67, '68, '69, there was still hope that this could be achieved.

Obviously, the Tet Offensive was a great setback to us psychologically in the United States, although I knew almost immediately from the reports coming in that militarily it had been a terrible defeat for the North, that they had tried to ferment this nationwide uprising in the South, and it had failed, that they had lost a lot of their cadre as a result of this gamble on their part. But psychologically in terms of the reporting that was coming out of Saigon by the media, by the US media, and the way it was played back in the United States, particularly the occupation of the embassy compound for a brief period, the occupation of Hue for a longer period, attacks carried out within Saigon itself, it was a psychologically serious blow and probably an almost fatal blow in terms of our effort.

Q: Well, how much did you and those working with you feel the pressures from outside, from Congress, from the press and all? I mean, did this have an effect on your thinking or not?

BURKE: Well, it obviously had an effect on us. It didn't have an effect, I would say, generally, on our thinking and what we felt was possible. But we had to deal with it. We had to deal with the Congress. The main brunt of testifying for the Congress was born by Bundy himself, although on occasion I did testify at the subcommittee level in support of an aid program for Vietnam, that sort of thing.

We were getting, though, constant pressure from individual congressmen and also from the reporters on the scene and also from interest groups within the United States who would come to Washington and wanted to be briefed on Vietnam, many groups which were, in effect, opposed to our continued involvement in Vietnam.

Q: Did you have the feeling--if you can try and go back to the time that the clock was ticking as far as what we could do--maybe because, you know, we just couldn't keep up the public support for much longer, did you feel this?

BURKE: Well, there was no question but it appeared that the public support was ebbing. And when President Johnson, in his March 31st speech in 1968, chose to withdraw from the election of 1968 and devote his time, what was left of his term, to try and seek a settlement of the Vietnam War and engage Hanoi in meaningful talks, this was obviously in response to his perception of public opinion and public support.

Also, of course, the constant barrage of reporting of demonstrations, especially at the Chicago convention, the campaign of Robert Kennedy, which was essentially an anti-war campaign that he was waging, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, all of this, it was quite obviously that the "peace group" in the United States was becoming stronger and more vocal. I do and did feel at the time there was still a fairly large residue of support in the United States, if only that element of the populace could be convinced that the situation was winnable or we could achieve our objectives.

Q: There was this talk about, "Well, if we only have 50,000 more troops and then another 50,000 and so on, we could do it." And the number grew to be half a million. How did we view the American military role? Again, I'm speaking from the State Department at the working level.

BURKE: Certainly during my time, I was not conscious of any sharp division between ourselves and the Pentagon. Obviously, the commanders in the field are the ones responsible for the success of operations, and if they felt they needed more troops, then they went out to be given more resources. Certainly, we, the US Government starting with the President and others--I should mention the Tuesday Lunch. In this period, there was a command body, if you will, at the White House, which was known as the Tuesday Lunch. And this consisted of the President, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Walt Rostow and occasionally one or two others.

And in order to get decisions taken at the highest level regarding Vietnam, what you did was get it discussed and decided at the Tuesday lunch, because you had the key players right there. So whenever we had something that we wanted a decision on, it was a very--actually, it was a very efficient mechanism in many ways, and much more efficient than doing a 40-page memorandum with attachments, which would go up through the machinery of the Department to the sixth and seventh floor, then go over to the White House and eventually be chopped off by, first of all, the NSC advisor and the President. But very quickly, you could get a piece of paper up to the Secretary, and he could

introduce the subject at the Tuesday lunch and get a decision on it in a matter of 24 or 48 hours. But this group, of course, looked very carefully at propositions being made by the military regarding bombing, extent of bombing attacks against the North. And targets were approved at this level.

It didn't make--and this is a personal view, obviously--it didn't make a lot of sense to me, a former naval officer who had served in not only World War II but I was recalled for Korea and served three years there. But it seemed that the restrictions that we were placing on the military, especially in terms of actions against the North once we had decided to bomb the North, were much too restrictive. I also personally felt that it was a terrible blunder on our part not to have mined Haiphong harbor. I argued with Bundy in favor of mining early on--by early on I'm talking '67-'68--but for one reason or another, it was concluded that it was too dangerous in terms of risks of damage to Chinese, Russian or third country shipping of one sort or another.

That decision is, just by-the-by, I think it was a mistake, because essentially mining is one of the most humane things you can do. You say, "As of 12:00 tomorrow, shipping goes in or out of that port at its own peril, because the mines are there." So anybody who moves runs the risk of running into a mine. It isn't like bombing. Actually, you can give fair warning, and as long as the shipping does not move, there's no danger to any vessel.

But I do feel that the civilian side did put heavy restrictions on the military and what it was able to do. In retrospect, I think it was pretty obvious that there was a great deal of concern that they got too close to the Chinese border. You ran the risk that we ran into in the Korean War and that the Chinese would enter.

Q: *We're always inhibited by the last war.*

BURKE: Yes.

Q: *I mean, this is a continuing factor in whatever we do.*

BURKE: Yes.

Q: *It's not looking at the real situation. It's always looking at the last one.*

BURKE: That's right. We all operate on the basis of experience, and when you're fighting wars, you just conclude--it's like kidnapping situations in this age of terrorism as far as diplomacy is concerned. I've been involved in a couple of those, and it's always a mistake to try and handle the next kidnapping in a way that the previous one was handled if you handled it successfully.

Q: *You went from Vietnam in '69 to the War College for a year, and then you went as a deputy chief of mission to Port-au-Prince, Haiti where you served for two years from '70*

to '72. What was the situation in Haiti as you arrived there, and what were American interests there?

BURKE: Well, I should say that this is one of the few posts that I've actually tried to get in the Foreign Service and made an active effort to get the post. When I was finishing--well, I was in the War College. I did talk to people in ARA and said that I had an interest in going as DCM in Haiti. My interest stemmed from the fact that I've always been interested in Haitian history and the remarkable fact that it is, after all, the second republic in the Western Hemisphere and that the Haitians were able to drive out Napoleon's army in 1804 and been independent off and on ever since.

I had been intrigued by Duvalier and the role he was playing and the general reputation he had. I felt that he probably wasn't going to be around all that much longer, and it seemed to me that it might be an interesting time to be in Haiti, especially if he were to expire and be succeeded by another regime. Because as of that moment, nobody knew what would succeed or who would succeed the Duvalier government.

The situation prevailing when I arrived--you may recall that the relationship with the United States was very tense between Haiti and the United States starting roughly in '61-'62, and I'd say it bottomed out, if you will, in around '64-'65. Our ambassador was PNGed at one stage. We had cut off foreign assistance to this country, and our embassy was down to a very small size. The Haitians, the Haitian government, was almost destitute in terms of resources or income or whatever. But it was just getting slightly better toward the end of the 1960s. Duvalier had survived a couple of coup attempts, and there was some manufacturing outfits from the United States beginning to move in a very small scale.

But generally, I'd say, the relationship between the embassy and the government of Haiti when I arrived was reasonably good, although there was still tight control by the palace over contacts between Haitian officialdom and the U.S. Embassy. We were received at the various ministries, but the Haitian officials were inhibited from accepting social invitations and that sort of thing.

Q: *Could they make decisions? I mean, did you find the officials there an effective group, or did it all have to be done by Duvalier?*

BURKE: Oh, I think the palace had a control over the decision-making machinery. But you did have certain officials in the government who were reasonably effective. Several of the ministers, I'd say, were extremely well trained. Many had been trained in the United States or France. And they were highly intelligent individuals.

Q: *Could you describe a bit about the embassy, how you viewed the staff there and also the operating style of the ambassador? Was it Clinton Knox who was a career officer?*

BURKE: I'd never met Ambassador Knox before my arrival in Haiti, as a matter of fact. We had exchanged letters after my assignment, and I knew a fair amount about him. He had been in the OSS during the war.

Q: *That's Office of Strategic Services.*

BURKE: Yes, as an enlisted man. He was black, had gone to Williams College, gotten a Ph.D. in history from Harvard in 1939, and studied abroad in France, and worked under William Langer at Harvard--he was his major professor working for the doctorate--a very interesting individual, a very intelligent man. I, as I say, didn't know him before my arrival. We developed a relationship, which I think became a very warm relationship, and he treated me very well.

It took a while for me to gain his confidence, as was to be expected. I think any DCM going into an embassy has to earn the confidence of his chief of mission and has to adapt himself to the operating style of the ambassador. But once I gained his confidence, he gave me pretty much a free hand of running the embassy as long as I was careful to keep him informed about everything that was going on. But he had a very easy hands-off style as long as he was kept informed.

He was able to develop--between the two of us, we decided that, after all Haiti was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere--still is, for that matter--but a modest aid program certainly seemed the proper way to go in terms of trying to rehabilitate the relationship with Haiti. After all, we had occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and run the country for all intents and purposes--"we," the U.S. And this was of interest and somewhat of a surprise to me. There was a great residue of--I'd say affection may be too strong a word, but liking for Americans in Haiti. It was something, it seemed to me, that we could build on, and it might stand us in good stead after President Duvalier shuffled off his mortal call or whatever.

So we pushed for this very modest aid program. I think we asked for $70,000 a year--the ambassador's fund, really. But it was a fund that we could use with a fair amount of local control over what it was given for. And these were self-help projects, many of them, and $70,000 went a long way in a country like Haiti. So it was good seed money. And later on, of course, we were able to get AID to send an AID officer in and the government could begin to submit aid projects. And it developed, I think, in a very favorable way.

Duvalier did die not too long after I arrived. I think it was nine months after I arrived.

Q: *He died, I think, on April 21, 1971.*

BURKE: Yes. So I had been there just about nine, ten months. And in the meantime, of course, he obviously knew he was quite ill. He, after all, was an M.D. himself and probably could estimate his own condition as well as any of his doctors. So he, surprisingly enough to us, pushed through a referendum in February, I think, of 1971,

which established his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier as his designated heir and successor to follow the father.

In the meantime, through a series of devices, Ambassador Knox had gotten to know Duvalier. Through a series of devices and initiatives, really, we were able to establish not a friendship, but a relationship between Duvalier Père and Ambassador Knox. We had, for example, the moon rock at that time, and it came through when we were able to get an appointment with the President to show him the moon rock, and he was intrigued with the idea.

Then we were able to convince Charlie Meyer, who is then the assistant secretary for Latin America, to include Haiti during the course of a swing that he was making through Latin America. It was the first time that anybody of that rank had visited Haiti in probably close to a decade. And in conjunction with the Meyer visit, Ambassador Knox had a sit-down dinner--I think for about 50 people--and we were able to get almost everybody of any consequence in the Haitian government to attend. Now, this did not include President Duvalier, but every one of his ministers was there including people who had never been seen socially by the embassy staff in any situation.

So these series of moves and initiatives, I think, did serve us well in April 1971 when Duvalier died. And, in fact, I got a call late that evening from Ambassador Knox, who said he had at 10:00 suddenly been summoned to the palace, and he had asked whether or not he couldn't bring me with him. And the foreign minister had agreed. So the two of us went down to the palace, and he was speculating--I drove my personal car, and the ambassador and I went in my personal car--speculating as to what was likely to come up during this session. He was a little apprehensive being summoned to the palace at this late hour. He was wondering if something had developed in terms of the relationship and he was going to be PNGed or what.

But in any event, I suggested to him that perhaps we were being invited down to say adieu to Duvalier Père. And, in fact, when we arrived at the palace, the foreign minister announced to us that the president had died, and that his son was being sworn in that very evening as the new president of Haiti. And we were the only non-Haitians in the palace the night Jean-Claude was sworn in as president.

Q: *Well, did you get involved in anything, you and the ambassador, trying to ameliorate the rule of Duvalier's, say, regarding political prisoners or this type of thing?*

BURKE: Well, in 1970, things domestically had calmed down to a large extent. When I arrived, there were probably about 16 or 17 people living in asylum in various embassies in Port-au-Prince, in Latin American embassies, because the standard practice in Latin America is for Latin American embassies to accept asylees until such time as they can be given safe passage out of the country. I think there's a feeling on the part of some that if they do it for somebody, maybe when their time comes, they'll be given similar hospitality.

But as far as the internal political situation was concerned, it had calmed down to a large extent, and there was a slight bloom of prosperity on the economy. The government was participating in activities of the United Nations and the OAS and welcoming various foreign groups down, and they were attempting to put their best foot forward. So the obvious oppressive atmosphere that had persisted or existed during the period '62, '63, '64 had shifted somewhat, and the Duvalier regime was really installed. And even though there had been an aborted coup attempt by some Coast Guard officers in early 1970 before my arrival, the reaction to that coup effort was not as violent and suppressive as previous efforts had produced. So the atmosphere seemed better.

Now, obviously in our conversations with Haitian officials, we stressed the importance that Haiti begin to play a more--what do I want to say--not responsible role, but take its place in the community of the Western Hemisphere, and that aid was necessary and the only way that you could assure that Haiti would likely get aid either from the international lending organizations or banks or governments was to have a climate of investment, and you weren't going to have such a climate of investment if people were getting shot and dragged off to prison and that sort of thing.

Now, how much influence we might have had, I think the tide was moving in that direction anyway. Then when Duvalier Père died, the father died, and Jean-Claude took over, he had a small coterie of ministers who were--after all, he was only 19 or just barely 20 at the time--coterie of ministers who were advising him. And these were the younger group of ministers who were, say, a generation down from the people in the earlier period when Duvalier first came to power in '57--people like Andre Ramone, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs; Whitner Cambron. who was Minister of Interior; and Fitz Cenias, who was Minister of Information.

Now, some of them had better reputations than others, but all three appreciated the importance of Haiti and especially Jean-Claude projecting a more reasonable image than had been the case previously, and that's what they set out to try and do. And I think that they were modestly successful and that Jean-Claude in his first months and years, really, as president did project such an image, and foreign assistance began to flow into Haiti at rather remarkable rates.

Q: *How about immigration from Haiti to the United States? Was this a concern or was it kept under pretty good control?*

BURKE: Well, immigration was a condiderable problem, because every Haitian, like every Jamaican, like every Trinidadian, like every Guyanese, probably in their heart of hearts would like to come to the United States. And, of course, because of Haiti's international reputation, which was not the best, when some Haitians would try illegally to pile into a boat and make their way to the Flordia coast, they were oftentimes represented as political asylees. Quite honestly, I think that in most cases they weren't. They were economic refugees, if you will, given the fact that on one-third of the island of

Hispaniola you have roughly six million people. So the arable land is extremely limited. Its mountainous. It's eroding because of deforestation. And the prospects for any Haitian are rather limited. And if you can get to the United States, maybe you can get a job doing something. So that they were economic refugees, but almost none were really political refugees.

Q: *And you were so reporting in--*

BURKE: Well, we had one case where one of these boats got as far as Guantanamo Bay. I think there were something like 60 or 70 on board. And we had a three-way negotiation between Guantanamo, Washington, and Port-au-Prince as to what we should do with them. And we went to the government, and we said, "Look, these people on the basis of the interrogation they've undergone in Guantanamo, it does appear that these people really were attempting to enter the U.S. illegally. Now, we would like to bring them back, and the Navy would like to get rid of them. But we want assurances that they will not be oppressed in any way for having attempted to leave the country illegally. I mean, we certainly don't want them thrown into prison. Can we get that sort of a guarantee from you"

They're flown back. Their boat was a wreck. As they were flown back from Guantanamo and to the airport, they came into the airport, we had the prior assurances of the government that they would not be maltreated or mistreated for having attempted to leave the country without visas, and we checked up on them for some months thereafter to make sure that this was, indeed, the case. And on the basis of that experience, we were even more convinced than ever that so many of these who did make it to Florida and, of course, did claim political asylum were probably economic refugees in almost every case.

Q: *Because you mention a time limitation here, I think we'll make another jump, if you don't mind. You were in Caribbean Affairs from 1972 to '75. Then you were at the Senior Seminar, the Department of State's equivalent to War College, from '75 to '76. And you were the deputy chief of mission in Bangkok from '76 to '77. And I hope we can come back to some of these others. But since this is focused on your--these interviews of people who were ambassadors, I'd like to ask how you became appointed to be ambassador to Guyana. This is in 1977.*

BURKE: Well, I had, obviously like every good FSO had, hopes of becoming ambassador one day. I thought it was reasonable to assume, given the fact that I had such extensive Caribbean experience, that I might certainly be qualified to serve as ambassador somewhere in the Caribbean. When the Carter Administration came in, this panel was established, you may recall, which Averell Harriman and certain other people served to get ambassadorial appointments and look over the list of potential candidates for embassies.

I received a telegram from the Department asking me if I would agree to be nominated as ambassador to Jamaica, and I was pleased at that. I sent back an immediate affirmative

cable, and roughly ten days later I got a cable from the Department saying, "Sorry, but Jamaica is obligated. Would you agree to your nomination as ambassador to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana?" I knew Guyana, of course, from my days as director of Caribbean Affairs, but I would have been much more interested in Kingston, Jamaica. However, I agreed to go as ambassador to Georgetown.

Q: *You went there in 1977.*

BURKE: Yes.

Q: *Could you describe what was the situation? First, what were American interests in Guyana, and then what was the situation as you saw it at that time?*

BURKE: Well, the situation in Guyana was a bit strained. The Ford Administration had nominated a man to be ambassador to Georgetown who is a political appointee. He was a labor leader. This would have been in the last days of the Ford Administration. The man was never confirmed. So we had a chargé there for a considerable period. And I think that the post had been vacant for the better part of 18 months when I arrived.

Of course, our governmental interest in Guyana--goes back a considerable period. It goes back into the early 1960s in the Kennedy Administration. You may recall, before independence, there was a good deal of concern that Cheddi Jagan would become the first prime minister of an independent Guyana, and he was, actually, had been elected premier of Guyana, which was still part of the British Commonwealth. And independence was scheduled. Both Washington and London were somewhat apprehensive, of course. This was after Castro and Cuba and all the rest.

Q: *Could you explain what was the problem with Jagan?*

BURKE: Well, the problem was that Jagan was a devout Marxist, and were he to become prime minister of an independent Guyana, it was understood because he made no bones about the fact that his allegiance was to Moscow, and that he was a doctrinaire communist and that he would create what would be a communist state on the mainland of Latin America. There was, as I say, considerable interest in the Kennedy Administration to do what they could to make sure that this didn't happen. And the British government was somewhat apprehensive as well, less so than we were.

In any event, between the time Jagan was premier and before independence, there was an effort domestically within Guyana to put together a political coalition of blacks and the other ethnic elements within the country. I should say that the ethnic majority in Guyana is East Indian, and Jagan, of course, is East Indian. And the East Indians, of course, many of whom had no interest in communism, but they were certainly supportive of Jagan because he was East Indian. The blacks probably represent only about 34%-35% of the population. East Indians, of course, were brought in by the British as indentured servants after slavery had been abolished in British empire.

So a political coalition within Guyana was established with Forbes Burnham, a black, heading it. And a major effort was brought about to bring all the ethnic groups outside of the East Indian ethnic group together in opposition to the Jagan candidacy. This effort was successful. Some observers have said that there was a good deal of rigging that went on in achieving this outcome. But in any event, Forbes Burnham became the premier and then actually took Guyana into independence as head of this coalition of everybody except the East Indians. So Burnham had been the prime minister since independence. He was still the prime minister when I arrived.

Our interests in Guyana at this stage, we had certain interests in bauxite. The British, Canadians, and ourselves had bauxite holdings there, which Burnham was in the process of nationalizing. And, in fact, just before I arrived, he did nationalize Reynolds and folded into his government-owned bauxite conglomerate which included the others that he had already nationalized. That had been worked out. But, fortunately, it was a buyout and not an expropriation.

Q: *And so you didn't have legal action such as the Hickenlooper Amendment?*

BURKE: That's right.

Q: *Our policy is we don't oppose expropriation if it's adequately compensated.*

BURKE: Adequate compensation, yes. "Appropriate and adequate compensation," I believe is the wording. "Prompt" may also be in there somewhere. [Laughter]

In any event, our interests were extremely reduced, of course, when I did arrive. We were still interested in the political situation. In the meantime, Burnham had drifted leftward and many felt that he might be a crypto-communist himself. I don't think that was the case at all, but in any event, he had begun a flirtation with Moscow himself. However, Moscow still had that firm tie to Cheddi Jagan, which they were never going to renege on. But our commercial or economic interests were slight, but we were still interested in what might happen internally and whether or not the government of Guyana might become communist.

It was a cooperative republic, as such, but the economy was nationalized almost totally. I think 80% of the economy was controlled by the government. The economic condition of the country grew steadily worse in the time I was there. It had been growing steadily worse from roughly the time of the move toward nationalization. There was a great exchange problem. The foreign exchange of the government was almost nil.

And the political situation was Cheddi Jagan and his party were still functioning as minority loyal opposition, if you will, within the Assembly. But the Assembly had a blocking two-thirds control by the government. So the government could do whatever it wished and get approval by the National Assembly on the basis of its two-thirds control.

Q: *Did you feel your job was more, as it is in many countries, more a watching brief than trying to play an active role?*

BURKE: Yes. It was clear that because we had sharply reduced our aid program over the years that it was unlikely--Burnham was shrewd enough to understand it was unlikely there would be any new outpouring of American assistance or any augmentation of the small program we had, which amounted, I think, to something like $12 million a year when I arrived.

But the relationship was--I knew Burnham, of course, from my days as Director of Caribbean Affairs. I had met and talked with him on a couple of occasions when I was down there visiting. A brilliant individual, he had been a Guyana scholar. In the old days when it was a British possession, the British would choose the most gifted student and give him a full scholarship to Britain, and Burnham had been one of these and had finished his degree in England. He had gotten a law degree from Grays Inn, I believe, one of the Inns of Court. And he was a highly successful lawyer at the time he began to move in politics in Guyana.

He didn't have a great deal of interest in economics. I think that the way he perceived the country was as follows. He knew that his support was the black minority, really, and that in any free, open economic competition, probably the black minority would be overwhelmed by the Indian majority, the Indian traders and whatnot. So that was, I believe, his reason for having all of the economy, or almost all of the economy, under the control of the government. And it made sense in terms of his political interests and needs. He played a fairly important role in Caribbean councils. He had a reputation, of course. He considered himself the equal, which he was, of the prime ministers of Trinidad and Jamaica and Barbados and would meet frequently with them. He had a foreign minister who, interestingly enough, was of East Indian origin, who left to become the secretary general of the Commonwealth, which job he now holds.

But Burnham was a very interesting man to know and to talk to and he was a very stimulating interlocutor. But there wasn't a lot we could do in the country, or I think that the national interest as perceived by Washington was more or less, "Well, let's see how it goes. We'll keep our modest aid program. But there's no point in going further." Burnham had invited the North Koreans to come in. They had an embassy there. And the Chinese had been brought in very early on, as early as 1972 and '73. So these were large missions both the Chinese and North Koreans had there. And the Libyans were there. So it was a watching brief, by and large.

Q: *Well, could we then talk about the People's Temple situation, which I guess pretty well absorbed your time as much as possible?*

BURKE: Certainly I was aware of the People's Temple situation before I arrived. I was briefed on it in the Department. I knew that Jim Jones had been a prominent political

figure in California, that he had been Commissioner of Housing for the City of San Francisco, and that Moscone, who was then the mayor of San Francisco and acknowledged that without the assistance and support of People's Temple and its votes that he probably never would have been elected mayor.

I certainly had not a clear idea, either from the literature I read or conversations, just of what the philosophy of the religious orientation of People's Temple was. It seemed a little fuzzy. And in any event, I was interested in the fact that some estimates varied anywhere between 800 and 1,000 Americans had chosen to come down to Guyana and participate in the establishment of this community in a very remote part of Guyana. In fact, the area in which it was located was very close to the contested border with Venezuela, and the land on which it was situated I think Venezuela still claims, although they haven't in recent years made any effort to take it over again. But it is a very remote part of the country.

When I arrived, I asked my consul whether or not he had visited the place, how often, and I was able to get the Department to authorize the charter of an aircraft so that we could at least have quarterly visits to the site to talk to members. And we were getting letters from time to time of next of kin in the United States expressing concern about the welfare, whereabouts, of relatives. And the consul would accumulate these letters, and on his trips would ask to see and talk to the ones who were the objects of these letters. And he did very conscientious and--

Q: *Was this Dick McCoy?*

BURKE: Dick McCoy. A systematic job of doing this. The Temple had--I think it was established in '74, and they made a great PR effort throughout Guyana. They had an office in Georgetown, and this office in Georgetown handled all their shipments in and out and did their PR work with the Guyanese government and with various people who would come to visit. They made a great effort to get members of the Guyanese government, especially the minister of education, the minister of social welfare to come up and visit.

And it was a remarkable establishment. It probably had a more sophisticated infrastructure than any Guyanese community in that part of Guyana. I think there were something like 140 permanent dwellings associated with it. And they cleared over, I think, 900 acres of jungle, and had it under cultivation in the period of '77-'78. They were not self-sufficient yet. They were obliged to import a good deal of their food and the other materials and resources they needed for sustenance and whatnot. But they put on a very good show for all visitors, and they made a great effort, as I say, to--they had a weekly radio program that was aired on the radio in Georgetown, and all the prominent visitors would be invited to expand on the great experiment that had been undertaken by Jim Jones and his followers in the country.

Q: *This must have been a very ticklish situation, because I'm speaking as a consular officer, and I know the problems. I was not directly concerned, but I read the correspondence of our problem with a boatful of scientologists off Greece. But if you*

tried to talk to people who were in these things, you could be accused of interfering, and there were suits and counter-suits, and, I mean, it was a very messy business, and the Privacy Act. Did you feel yourself inhibited on what you could do? Were you getting instructions on how to deal with this from Washington?

BURKE: Well, as you know, having been a consular officer and knowing the restrictions under which an embassy operates, a private American citizen abroad, the embassy has no control over it until such time as he might come a cropper or be arrested by the local authorities. And then all you can do is go visit and make certain that he is being treated, or she is being treated, in accordance with local laws and regulations and that if a person is going to be subject to trial that they will be represented by appropriate counsel. If the individual who is arrested wants next of kin notified, the consular officer can do that. But if the individual chooses not to have next of kin notified, the consular officer is restricted from independently notifying the next of kin abroad because of privacy considerations.

As far as instructions from the Department were concerned regarding Jonestown, I had no special instructions. I certainly reported everything we were doing in terms of visitation. I, as I said, got the Department's rather grudging agreement to spend the money for chartering a plane every quarter to send the consul up there to visit. And that was really about the extent of it. Every time our man came back, he would file a report on what he had seen and heard, and it was duly submitted to the Department.

The Jonestown operation, the people immediately around Jim Jones, were well-educated people, some lawyers. They were very familiar with not only the Privacy Act but also the Freedom of Information Act, and I knew that People's Temple had filed a Freedom of Information request for every report that had been made on the Temple from the embassy in Georgetown predating my arrival. And they had made similar FOIA requests, Freedom of Information requests, to the Bureau, the FBI, regarding their activities in San Francisco and in the California region. So they were aware of the protections they had and exercised them with considerable vigor.

Not too long after my arrival, Mrs. Jones--Jim Jones, I should say, did not come to Georgetown during the period of my embassy before the events associated with the demise of People's Temple. Mrs. Jones did come to call on me one day with a couple of the people from the Georgetown office, and it was a courtesy call. She told me all about what they were trying to do, outlined in some detail just when they expected to be self-sufficient; ostentatiously showed me a handwritten letter that Jim had received from Mrs. Carter, the President's wife, thanking Jim Jones for having organized rallies on behalf of President Carter during the campaign of 1976; made a great point of the political connections that they had in the state of California.

For example, then Lieutenant Governor Dymally, who is now a representative in Congress, actually had introduced Jim Jones to Forbes Burnham. Dymally is himself Trinidadian born and knew Burnham and actually brought Jones down when he was first looking for a place to establish his People's Temple. And Burnham told me later on when

we were discussing the People's Temple that--this is after the fact--that he probably would never have agreed to the establishment of People's Temple if Dymally hadn't been the one who brought Jones down and had introduced him and had vouched for him and the whole effort.

Q: *What prompted the Ryan visit? Leo Ryan, a congressman, when there and was killed. But he went with your DCM. How did this occurrence come about?*

BURKE: Well, we'd received notification--I guess it must have been in September of 1978 or possibly August--that Congressman Ryan and Congressman Darwinski were planning a visit to Guyana, and they wanted to visit Jonestown. And there were a series of meetings between officers of the Department and Ryan and Ryan's staff over the next several weeks organizing the visit and how it was being laid out. I informed the Department, of course, that Congressman Ryan would have to enter into direct contact with People's Temple if he expected to be received in Jonestown, because I had no authority to barge into Jonestown if the administration of Jonestown didn't want my presence or the presence of anyone else. And it had been made clear to us that the government of Guyana respected their wishes in terms of how they controlled the community.

So Ryan did, indeed, or his staff, did get in touch with Jones and with the people, I believe, first of all in San Francisco--there was still an office in San Francisco or representatives of People's Temple there--and the mechanics were worked out in sort of a three-way operation. We certainly communicated to People's Temple the desire of Ryan to visit them and urged them to receive Ryan. They expressed concern because they said that Ryan had been unduly influenced by certain people in the Bay area who had defected from People's Temple and that he intended to bring these people down with him. They felt that he was essentially an unfriendly individual and would not come with an open mind, that he had already made up his mind about People's Temple.

In any event, we continued to exercise whatever influence we could on People's Temple and representatives in Georgetown and also my consul on his trip, and my DCM, as a matter of fact, to Jonestown saying that the Congressman appeared to go ahead with his visit and that it seemed to us that he should be received. So the trip finally began to take shape, and it did come to pass. I can't remember the precise date of Leo Ryan's arrival, but I offered him hospitality, and he stayed with me in the period he was in Georgetown before going up to Jonestown.

Q: *Were there any indications that the situation in Jonestown was really turning rancid, I mean, that you were getting at that point?*

BURKE: No. We knew about the acute suspicion on the part of Jones and the people around him regarding Ryan's motives. And they hadn't finally agreed to let him in, let Ryan in. And that was communicated to Ryan before he left Washington, and Ryan's staff. However, beyond that, we certainly had no inkling that the situation was likely to

turn violent. I think our feeling was that the worst that might happen is that Leo Ryan might go up to Jonestown and with the media people he brought with him and the defectors from People's Temple and the certain next of kin he had brought with him and that they'd be turned back at the gate.

Q: *Well, looking at the crowd that went there, Jim Jones may have suffered paranoia, but in this case, Ryan was out to get him, wasn't he? I mean, in a way, if you arrive with media and with defectors from a place, this is not friendly visit, is it?*

BURKE: Well, I'm certain that it was not viewed as a friendly visit through the optic that Jones was looking through.

Q: *Your DCM went up, who was--*

BURKE: Richard A. Dwyer.

Q: *Would this have been a normal thing, or did you want him to go to sort of take care of safety or--*

BURKE: Well, it seemed as a common courtesy. When you have a CODEL visiting, of course, the Department requires that a control officer be appointed. And it seemed to me that Dick Dwyer having visited the place himself as DCM along with the consul on one of the regular consular visits, he knew the people, he knew the ground, and he was a very able FSO--he's now retired. But I had absolute confidence in him in being able to handle almost any situation that might arise. So he was the control officer, and it seemed to me that Leo Ryan expected appropriate courtesies extended to him, and that's why I asked Dick to go along.

Q: *Well, they went up, what happened? How did the Department respond to all this? Were you descended upon with all sorts of people?*

BURKE: Well, you can imagine the situation that developed. Of course, this is rather a long story and I'd really prefer to--

Q: *Well, can we do it again?*

BURKE: Yes. I'd like to. I'd like to very much.

Q: *Why don't we do it again? I think it's important.*

BURKE: Sure.

Q: *Why don't we cut it off at this point?*

BURKE: All right. That would be fine. I'd be delighted to go into this, but it really deserves more time.

Q: *John, we've got a little more time now. You had sent your DCM up with Leo Ryan and this group to Jonestown. What happened then?*

BURKE: I would like to make one parenthetical remark before we move into that. When the Department had informed the embassy that the Ryan CODEL was coming--

Q: *I might just for the record say CODEL means congressional delegation.*

BURKE: Congressional delegation, right. I was concerned because of the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act and how they would play on the relationship between Congressman Ryan and the people who were coming with him and, of course, Jones and the People's Temple community. I asked the Department to send along one of the lawyers from the legal advisor's office so that if questions arose regarding any of the embassy's records or records of conversations with People's Temple or with the representatives of Jim Jones that we could get some expert legal advice as to what could and could not be shown to the congressman and those people accompanying him on the basis of the Privacy Act and how it protected the People's Temple and the representatives of the People's Temple.

The Department said that they really didn't have anyone available to send. I sent yet another telegram and slugged it for the personal attention of the Assistant Secretary for Latin America Pete Vaky and asked him to intervene with the legal advisor's office and see if he could not prevail upon them to provide this expert advice. And I ultimately got a cable from Vaky reiterating the position taken by the legal advisor that they just had no one available that they could provide to us.

Q: *But if this does give a setting for something that we really were not prepared for, I'm not talking about what actually happened in Jonestown, but dealing with a private American organization which is under public scrutiny, because of the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act. So both sides can more or less read any communication that goes from them and leaving it open for the ground rules are rather unclear--at least certainly at that time they were unclear--and leaving one in a very exposed legal position if you have aggressive lawyers on either side of this situation.*

BURKE: Yes. This relates to something we discussed earlier, and that is the limitations, really, on an embassy or a consulate in terms of what control or what sort of influence or what sort of responsibility they have relating to private citizens abroad, and that the embassies or U.S. missions have no real control of any sort over a private American citizen unless that citizen chooses to be responsive to advice or recommendations or what have you that a mission might provide.

Q: *Okay. If you could sort of give the story then.*

BURKE: All right. Getting to the visit, Ryan was still negotiating with People's Temple on the question of access after he arrived in Georgetown. He met with representatives of People's Temple and Jim Jones and reiterated his request that he and his party be admitted to Jonestown to meet with the residents there. Jones and his representatives were still reluctant to grant him the permission to enter Jonestown.

Jones brought or caused two of his lawyers from the San Francisco Bay area to come down and advise him during this visit. One of them was the rather well-known American attorney, Mark Lane, and the other--his name escapes me now, but he was the regular counsel for People's Temple in the Bay area. Lane was, more or less, on retainer with People's Temple. But the other lawyer was a full-time lawyer for People's Temple in the Bay area. These people did talk to Ryan. They made recommendations to Jones that he receive the Ryan CODEL, and I think they ultimately were instrumental in getting Jones' final agreement to let the Ryan party, or at least part of the Ryan party, come in to People's Temple.

Q: *Did you find in your dealings with them--I'm talking about Jones' lawyers--responsive, trying to be of assistance, or did they have another agenda?*

BURKE: They were very protective of Jones. They had the same suspicions of Ryan and his group that Jones had. So they were actually legal counsel and in the employ of Jones and protective of his interests and interests of People's Temple as they perceived them.

Now, the difficulties of travel to the Jonestown area I believe we touched on earlier. When the CODEL was preparing to leave Georgetown to go to Jonestown, we did arrange for a charter aircraft to take the party up to the area. There was no airstrip in Jonestown itself, and the nearest airstrip, I believe, was something like seven miles away. And the trip from the airstrip in that remote part of Guyana to Jonestown itself had to be negotiated by a vehicle provided by Jones and People's Temple. As it turned out, I believe they brought them in on a truck, but there was no public transportation of any sort that regularly went from the airstrip to Jonestown. The normal way for People's Temple to get a lot of their supplies was by river, because it was possible for coastal transports to bring supplies from Georgetown almost up to People's Temple. In any event, it's an extremely remote part of Guyana, and most of it is jungle.

The group left on Friday. They were negotiating right up until the last minute, almost up to the time of takeoff, with Mark Lane, the People's Temple lawyer, and with Jones. The question of entry or the denial of permission to enter was still being negotiated right up until the final moment. And as a matter of fact, the agreement to let Ryan and most of his party in was only given after the party had arrived at the airstrip in the vicinity of People's Temple.

The group did move in, were received at People's Temple. The citizens of Jonestown put on quite an entertainment for them on the Friday evening. And the reception was fairly

congenial as reported to me by Dick Dwyer by, let's see, I believe it was radio telephone, the linkage that we had with People's Temple, actually through People's Temple office in Georgetown. That was the only communication link we had actually furnished by Jonestown itself. But Dwyer did report to us on Friday evening that they had gotten in, that Jones had received Ryan, that the reception had been generally a pleasant one. The group seemed to respond to the entertainment and the hospitality provided by the People's Temple inhabitants.

The arrangement was, given the lateness of their arrival and all, that they would overnight in Jonestown, which they did, and they would come out sometime during the course of Saturday. Now, late on Friday evening--and, of course, this is pretty well covered by several books dealing with the episode--

Q: *What would you recommend do you think is probably the best book on this?*

BURKE: Probably the best in terms of detail of its research is one done by a journalist who accompanied Ryan. I think he was a journalist for the San Francisco Chronicle or Examiner. And the title of the book, I believe, is White knight. I would be able to add this later on. But I can't remember his name just now. He spent a fair amount--there were several quickie books that came out, but that I would say was the best research book and probably appeared about two years after the episode itself. There was one done by James Reston, a professor at the University of North Carolina, not a bad book. He's the son of Scotty Reston, and he had access to certain materials that weren't available to others. His book is all right--the two of them together. There's also kind of an interesting book done by B.S. Nipal's brother. It's a much more almost psychiatric study of the Jonestown community, and he examined it both in San Francisco and then on the basis of what he learned in Guyana later.

Late on Friday evening, apparently some of the residents of People's Temple got a message to Ryan saying, in effect, that they'd like to leave with him the next day. He talked to my DCM about it, and certainly my DCM was fully cooperative with Ryan and said that he certainly would lend his influence and authority to help these people leave. The time of departure was approximately noon on Saturday, and when the people who indicated that they wanted to leave with Ryan became known to Jones and to the inner group that advised Jones and were, in essence, the informal council within Jonestown, a good deal of animosity developed between Ryan, the defectors and the loyalists, if you will, the people loyal to Jones. And there was, in fact, one of the people actually tried to stab Ryan at Jonestown. He had a superficial knife would as a consequence of it, but several people intervened before any real damage could be done.

The group was finally packed aboard the truck and off they went back to the airstrip. And it was during the boarding operation when the party arrived at the airstrip, and they began to get into the chartered aircraft that were waiting to take them back to Georgetown that the attack occurred. The attack, again, has been well documented by television footage and also by eye-witness accounts.

A small group from People's Temple had followed the truck in from People's Temple, and when the group was in the process of boarding the aircraft, the group from People's Temple attacked the Ryan party with weapons. Actually, I believe, they were shotguns and a .22 rifle and possibly a higher caliber rifle. As far as I know, there were no automatic weapons used in the attack. Congressman Ryan was killed during the initial attack, as were, I believe, two other members of his party, and several others were wounded, including Richard Dwyer, the DCM.

One of the aircraft did take off, the larger of the two aircraft. When the attack occurred, the pilot revved his engine and without waiting to take any survivors or others just took off and headed back to Georgetown. The other aircraft, I believe, stayed on the ground. The remainder of the party, the survivors including the wounded, were huddled together on the airstrip, really. They were concerned about the possibility of a further attack by the group that had attacked earlier.

As it turned out, the group after the attack just turned around and went back to Jonestown. They did not wait around to try and ambush the rest of the party. However, the group was in some fear that they would be back, and I certainly can't blame them for that at all. When the group got back to Jonestown, they reported what they had done and reported that they had succeeded in shooting the congressman. They conveyed this information to Jones, and it was at that point that Jones ordered the mass suicide at People's Temple.

There's a remarkable tape recording of this whole business, the last hour of Jonestown, which one of my consular officers picked up right after the whole event had taken place. I had instructed the consular officers to accumulate as much information as they could in terms of documents, in terms of files, in terms of anything that might be of use in an investigation of Jonestown. And, as I say, one of the consular officers did find this tape on a reel-to-reel tape recorder within the pavilion which was a central structure at Jonestown. And what happened, obviously, was that the tape had been running, and the tape ran all the way to the end and ends in silence, actually. And you can hear the cry of the people as the suicides were taking place, and the people were being encouraged to come up and get their glass of fruit drink or whatever it was laced with poison. It's a remarkable tape, and I think it was quite useful in terms of trying to put the whole thing into some sort of perspective.

Q: *How did you--*

BURKE: I'm sorry. This takes us to about 7:00 on Saturday night. Now, the first word I got that something was very wrong, we were waiting, actually, for the aircraft to come back to the airport in Georgetown. And I had one of my consular officers out at the airport with vehicles to pick up the people when they came back. I was at my residence. I was in touch with the people at the airport. I was in touch with the duty officer at the embassy. We were still dependent upon communications through the office of People's

Temple in Georgetown. As I said before, that was the only communication link that we had available to us.

When I got a call from the prime minister's office, he asked me to come see him as soon as possible. So I went to his office and he had most of his Cabinet present with him, and the pilot of the aircraft that had taken off was there. This was obviously the first report that they had gotten about what had happened. So I got this initial report from Prime Minister Burnham and the others present including the pilot.

Then I excused myself, went immediately back to the embassy, sent off a flash cable and also got on the phone to the Director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs, Ashley Hewitt, and told him on the basis of this very preliminary report that the attack on the Ryan CODEL had taken place, that in all probability Ryan was dead and perhaps several others and that there were wounded, and that the fate of the rest of the party was still up in the air.

We hadn't at that stage any idea that the mass suicides were taking place at People's Temple. I then went back to the prime minister's office, and we discussed what could be done to rescue the survivors from the airstrip. The airstrip had no lighting of any sort which permits night operation. So there was no question of sending an aircraft up there until first light of Sunday. I asked him if they had any sort of military force in the area that might go to the airstrip and provide protection, and they had nothing immediately available in that part of Guyana. So there was really nothing that we could do until Sunday morning.

Now, it was recalled, of course, that Jones had threatened that if attacked or if his community were put in any sort of jeopardy that they might resort to something like mass suicide. And this was a matter of some speculation and certainly concern during the night. My immediate concern, of course, was getting the people in from the airstrip and getting them some hospital treatment in Georgetown. So it wasn't until Sunday that we began to get people in. We were able to evacuate the wounded and the survivors. But we still--

Q: *Who did the evacuating?*

BURKE: Again, charter aircraft that were sent up to the airstrip. This was about the only way to get in and out of--

Q: *Did any military go up there?*

BURKE: I'm trying to recall now at this remove. I believe that there were some Guyanese military who were brought up on that first day, the Sunday, and were under instructions to try to get into Jonestown and see what was going on at Jonestown. I can't remember the numbers involved, but my recollection is it was a very small group, perhaps a detachment or certainly no more than a squad, really.

Now we, of course, got the information from the survivors as to what had happened. In fact, some of the people had gotten out on the aircraft that had flown out after the attack. And, I believe, there was even a can of television film that had gotten aboard that aircraft and was actually broadcast in the United States either Saturday night or early on Sunday. This was actually footage of the attack on Ryan and the shooting of Ryan, and, I think, done by the cameraman who was himself wounded. And I remember particularly because Dick Dwyer's daughter was in college in the United States, and she actually saw the footage before she even knew, and recognized her father as in the party being attacked. So it was remarkable that that particular footage got out so quickly and was broadcast so quickly before we had ourselves firm details.

My DCM, to his credit, though wounded, was able to provide leadership to the group that was stuck up at the airstrip. Actually, they were pretty well huddled, and there was this bar at one end of airstrip in the tiny community up there. And they all, more or less, congregated there and were able to get something to eat and spent the night, really, in great apprehension as to what their fate might be if the Jonestown group came back.

That really pretty well covers the event itself. As you can well imagine, as soon as my message got to Washington and was passed around the official community in Washington, and the Director of Caribbean Affairs Ashley Hewitt had spread the word as well, we began to get all sorts of requests for amplification, for details and all the rest of it. Our very tiny embassy, really, by most standards, over the next three to four weeks was just about swamped, as you can well imagine. We did press into service the USIA team and the AID people as well and had them all standing watches, and they did, really, a most credible job in terms of supporting this effort.

When we had firm information that there was no one left alive in Jonestown itself and that there were all of these corpses in the tropical sun, the question of what to do with the remains became a matter of great urgency. Barbara Watson, who was then the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, asked me if local interment could be arranged. I did discuss the matter with the member of Burnham's Cabinet who was placed in charge of their task force, the Guyanese task force, to deal with this great tragedy. And after consultation they said that they'd prefer that the bodies be removed from Guyana, from Guyanese territory. The only way that they could have been interred, really, would be by using bulldozers and creating some sort of a mass grave up on the site.

Once the decision was taken by the Guyanese government that the bodies should be removed from Guyanese territory, then it became a problem for us as to how to deal with this. The U.S. military, of course, had had previous experience of this sort. There was a collision of two jumbo jets on the ground in the Azores, perhaps--

Q: *I think it was the Azores.*

BURKE: Yes, where many hundreds were dead, and the Army did move in and did take out all the bodies. This was a much more difficult task, obviously, because you were

dealing with a part of Guyana where there was no strip capable of taking a large aircraft of any sort, a large transport. The only jet strip in the entire country was the jet strip at Georgetown. So what had to be done, really, was to use the strip at Georgetown as the transfer point and bring in large helicopters and the graves registration team to prepare the bodies at Jonestown, lift them from Jonestown to Georgetown, put them aboard the C-141s and then transfer them to Dover, Delaware, air base.

The whole thing was put together, and it was remarkable, really, how smoothly this whole operation went. The U.S. military did things on this particular operation they had never done operationally before such as refueling the large helicopters when they were making the transit from the United States down to Guyana. Ultimately, the State Department was billed for the cost of this whole effort. In retrospect, I told the Department they should have prevailed upon the Pentagon to actually write off the cost of this operation against their training budget, because it really provided the sort of exercise that the U.S. military seldom gets in a part of the world that they knew little about.

But to the credit of the military, I don't believe there was a single injury to any of the troops involved. There was no crash of any of the helicopters during their carrying exercise. It just was a remarkable performance, really, by all hands.

Guyana, of course, became the focal point of world press attention for a matter of at least 72 hours, and swarms of journalists descended upon Jonestown, in Georgetown, really. There were, I think, at one stage 350 foreign journalists who were in Georgetown covering this whole story. There was a very difficult press relations exercise to handle because it was almost impossible for these people to get up to the scene. The Guyanese government had two briefers who were qualified to handle press. We had a two-man USIS operation, and the strain was really enormous on them.

Q: *Was there any attempt on the USIA to send somebody down?*

BURKE: No. I don't recall any extra help that came in from USIA side. The Department did send us in some consular assistance, and they also arranged for Vic Dykos, who was the DCM in Panama, to come over and temporarily replace Dick Dwyer, who, of course, was wounded.

Q: *How badly was he wounded?*

BURKE: He took a small caliber rifle bullet in the buttocks. Actually he's still carrying the bullet around with him, because the surgeon in Georgetown was unwilling to operate because of the angle at which the bullet had gone in. And even though it was not a deep wound, it lodged up in an area where there might have been complications with nerves, and actually it ended up near the spine. So the decision was taken not to operate and extract the bullet. But he was laid up for the better part of two weeks before he could return to duty.

As i had begun to say, the Department did provide certain amount of consular help, the temporary DCM, and we did begin to get representatives of the FBI down, of course, looking into the matter. And it was, indeed, fortunate that when I was able to get my consular officers up to Jonestown on some of the first helicopters going in there, and I had, as I said earlier, instructed them to scoop up everything they could in the way of documentary evidence relating to Jonestown, so that we could somehow piece together how all this had transpired. And we ended up, I think, with about five crates of materials which ultimately were provided to the FBI, made available to them for their own investigation.

Q: *What was the impact? You were completely occupied with the things that were happening there, the public relations side now. But how did you feel as far as, you know, if something happens in your district, I mean, a Jonestown or an earthquake or something, all of it becomes kind of not only your responsibility, but there's a thing about "Why did he let this happen here?" Were you feeling this sort of pressure of everybody running around trying to figure how to pass the buck?*

BURKE: Well, certainly there was no doubt in my mind that there would be a certain amount of postmortem examination for official purposes of this whole affair. And I certainly was prepared for it, and I felt that the record of my embassy in terms of our dealings with Jonestown prior to Ryan's arrival, the CODEL's arrival, were impeccable.

I had also, of course, sent a long telegram in June of 1978 outlining the particular problems that Jonestown presented to us as the consular responsibility and asking--actually making a recommendation that I be instructed to approach the Guyanese government and begin discussions with the Guyanese government about Jonestown, asking the advice of the legal advisor's office and the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, at their levels to give this matter a great deal of consideration and whether or not, given the privacy laws and the rights of private Americans abroad, that this would be interpreted as an intrusion, an official intrusion, if we were to go and talk to the Guyanese government about this community.

Q: *Did you have a feeling that everything that you wrote was going to be read eventually, through the Freedom of Information, by the Jonestown people and all?*

BURKE: We already knew that there had been Freedom of Information requests for all of our files filed by People's Temple and that they were being processed. These requests were being processed back in the Department.

Q: *Did you find that this was an inhibitor as far as frank reporting situations, particularly in this type of situation but in any type, that you had to resort either to other means or that you couldn't tell the full story?*

BURKE: Well, certainly it was an inhibition to this extent, that you could not pass back raw gossip, rumor, innuendo, that anything that reported had to be absolutely accurate in

terms of factual content. Shortly after I arrived, and I began to talk to my then consul, Richard McCoy, about People's Temple and his various meetings with People's Temple, and he informed me that his meetings that usually two or three representatives would show up to meet with him. These were people from the Georgetown office coming into the consular section to talk about this, that, and the other thing.

So I instructed him from then on he should not take on these people solo, and that he should always have another consular officer present with him in such meetings so that there would be protection to him of another witness so that he wouldn't be put into an exposed position of having people alleging that he had said something and he having no witness, no separate witness, who could contradict that story.

Q: *Irrespective of this turning out the way it did, you felt that you were having to deal with a situation. I'm speaking from a legal point of view and all, that you were almost quicksand, that you had to be very, very careful of what you worded, whether it's in talking to the people at the Temple, or writing to the Department.*

BURKE: Yes. Well, certainly everything that we filed on Jonestown was as precise as possible, and did not contain materials which could be construed as actionable by legal representatives of People's Temple or Jones or any of the people living there in the community.

Q: *Well, what about the other form of communication? In a way, this is somewhat at the heart of what we're actually doing here in recording conversation. Because there is a feeling that the official records, particularly since the Freedom of Information has come across, but is even more of an inhibition than there always has been about putting things on the paper. And so that much of what is done within the Department of State between posts, it's done by telephone call or by informal letter or by blind visits. I mean, were you resorting to any of this?*

BURKE: I have always been opposed to the idea of doing much in the way of substantive reporting by telephone, primarily because you don't have a record of what's been transmitted. You've got, in your own mind, if you've made a note or a memorandum for the file, you know pretty much what you've said. You can't be absolutely certain whether or not your remarks were misinterpreted at the other end or that you had been imprecise in the way that you had said it, or that the individual you were speaking with at the Washington end misconstrued what you had said. But primarily because in most cases there's no record of a telephone conversation. So I really never cared for this as a means of communication except in extreme situations when that was the only thing available to you. So I really did not do any reporting on Jonestown other side of regular telegraphic channels.

Now, in the period prior to the Jonestown affairs, I do know that on one occasion, my consular, Richard McCoy, was going to Washington and that this is a matter of fact. His trip coincided with the defection of one of the female members of People's Temple who

came to us for assistance--Debbie Blakey, I think, was her name. Again, I'd have to look at the file to be absolutely sure of the name and spelling. And given the fact that he was going up for a consular meeting, I told him when he got to the Department to be sure and report. We did telegraphic teleporting on her defection and what had been furnished to her in the way of support and assistance by the Assembly. But I told him to provide background to people in consular affairs about this matter.

Q: *Had any mention or had it even come to you about--sort of got into the record at all--that there was a possibility of mass suicide?*

BURKE: I'm sure I must have heard it from possibly in connection with the Blakey defection, but I certainly did hear of it. It seemed to me extraordinary, obviously.

Q: *At the time, I don't think anybody would have thought it.*

BURKE: Yes. One of the difficulties in dealing with an institution like People's Temple is that people on both sides are oftentimes extremists. I think when one thinks about People's Temple when it was originally established, that the idea of close to 1,000 people leaving the United States, coming down to establish a community in the wilds of Guyana under the leadership of a very charismatic, religious leader, it's extraordinary. And I guess my problem was or would be that I find it difficult to imagine what would cause people to do this. Certainly the charisma of the individual leader, that might have been it, the promise of some sort of an Eden in Guyana for these people. It's just remarkable.

But most people who would associate with something like this would have a tendency towards being a zealot. So, therefore, they're zealous in terms of their initial support for such an enterprise, and then when, for one reason or another, they might become disaffected with the enterprise, they become almost as zealous in their opposition to it. So with rumors associated with Jonestown and with Jones himself and charges against him and against the community, there was the absence of any sort of an objective witness to separate the fact from the fiction in terms of both stories, if you will.

Now, one thing that did not become very clear in terms of the reportage on Jonestown is that despite the fact that this was an extremely remote part of Guyana in which the People's Temple was established, People's Temple went out of its way to encourage visits by Guyanese government officials, by people from Guyana, prominent people from the diplomatic missions in Georgetown. They had a weekly radio program, for example, that was taped in Jonestown and broadcast. I think they bought time off of the local radio station in Georgetown. And they would highlight on these radio broadcasts the visits that various celebrities had made to Jonestown: the Minister of Education, Minister of Culture, the representatives of various embassies that had come to visit.

They also, of course, applied for membership in the Guyana Council of Churches, and right up until the end of Jonestown and People's Temple, the People's Temple was a full member of the Guyana Council of Churches, and the Guyana Council of Churches

included every denomination in the country--Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist. Just every religious denomination was represented on the Guyana Council of Churches. And, of course, representatives of the Guyana Council of Churches did pay visits from time to time to Jonestown. So one was really forced to conclude, at least in the eyes of many, this was a responsible enterprise.

Q: *Well, we've talked about what happened. Can we move to, you might say, the spotlight, the heat? How did this work with you? I mean, obviously Congress was enraged because one of their own was killed. Congress en masse does not understand the limitations that we have, and they have to blame somebody. And obviously you couldn't blame the Guyanese government, which sort of left you and your embassy. I mean, how did this work with you?*

BURKE: Well, certainly after the immediate problem had been dealt with and the evacuation of the remains and when things began to get back to some sort of normal, then the investigations began. The congressional investigation consisted of a visit by three staff members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Ryan, of course, had been a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and, as a matter of fact, the congressional delegation that he was authorized to conduct was under the auspices of the House Foreign Affairs.

It's interesting, in a way, that when the congressional delegation was originally announced to us, it was going to include two members--Ryan plus a minority member, Edward Derwinski. But somewhere along the line, Derwinski dropped out of the equation, and it became Ryan alone. Ryan, when he arrived and we were chatting one evening in my residence, I asked him about this, and he said, "Well, the normal situation for a congressional delegation is to have representatives of both majority and minority side," and that his CODEL had been approved on the understanding that there would be a minority member. But when the minority member dropped out, he'd pressed ahead, in any event. He suggested that the chairman, Clement Zablocki, was not too pleased with the fact that it was going to be a single-member CODEL going down there. But this is just hearsay on what Ryan himself told me. But then that's all by the by.

In response to your question. The first investigation was conducted by these three staffers from the House Foreign Affairs Committee. They conducted interviews. They brought along a stenographer and conducted interviews with me, with the other members of my staff who had been involved in any way with People's Temple. They attempted to take testimony from the prime minister and various other officials within the Guyanese government. But despite personal letters from Congressman Zablocki as chairman to the Guyanese government asking for their cooperation and participation, they were denied any such sessions.

The other investigation as such was one conducted by two retired Foreign Service officers. The two were John Hugh Crimmins, who had been ambassador to Brasilia, I believe, and earlier to the Dominican Republic; and a retired consular officer, Stanley

Carpenter. They came down sometime after the visit by the House Foreign Affairs Committee staff, and they conducted their own investigation or review of the embassy's performance. They also were looking at the performance of the Department itself and did meet, of course, with the officers in various parts of the Department that had a connection with it; for example, people in the Consular Affairs and also people in Latin American Bureau. And they duly prepared a report which was issued--oh golly, I can't remember precisely, but considerably after the event.

Those were the only two investigations as such. We had several journalists who came through working on books. We briefed them, talked to them about the whole affair. We did cooperate and work with the agents for the Federal Bureau of Investigations that came down to investigate just the whole Jonestown event with particular relationship to the shooting of Ryan and People's Temple and how it operated. But that was about it in terms of official investigation.

Now, I think it was two years after there was to be a hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and they asked me and Dwyer, my DCM, plus Richard McCoy, plus Doug Ellis, who was McCoy's successor as consul and was actually the consul at the time of Jonestown, the affair, to testify before the--actually it was a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It was a subcommittee chaired by Dante Fascell. It would have been the Latin American Subcommittee on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

I prepared a long statement, a formal statement, which I intended to give at the opening of those hearings, and I duly submitted it 72 hours in advance as you are expected to do with any sort of formal statements that executive branch officials give before congressional committees. And the hearing was cancelled one hour before it was scheduled to begin, or two hours, I think, without any real explanation. I heard later that the chairman of the full committee, Zablocki, had decided that he didn't want to pursue this matter. That was it.

Q: *Well, how about within the Department? Did you feel any subtle or not so subtle annoyance? I mean, even people who have been--it's changed a bit--but who have been taken as hostage have found that if something has gone wrong in your area that nobody wants to--at least if there's a problem, I won't say nobody will associate with you, but there is not a rallying around as much as there is almost a sense of avoidance for a while. Did you feel this at all?*

BURKE: Well, certainly. I guess the one thing that struck me as curious about the Crimmins-Carpenter investigation that was conducted, it seemed to me appropriate if there were to be a departmental investigation it should have been done by the Inspector General. The Crimmins-Carpenter mission did not come under the Inspector General. Actually, it was directed by a man named Nimetz, who I think at the time was counselor of the Department. He was a lawyer who came into the Department with Cyrus Vance, and I think after Vance left as Secretary he went back to the law firm in New York with Vance. But this seemed to me to be outside the official norms of conducting investigation.

We had cooperated fully with Crimmins and Carpenter when they came down, of course, and provided them with all the information they asked for. But it struck me as odd that this investigation was being carried out under the counselor of the Department rather than the Inspector General. That would have been the appropriate thing to send a team of inspectors and do a special inspection of the post. It would have been the appropriate way to proceed.

I think that the Department was particularly concerned about this whole matter of Jonestown for several reasons. One, because obviously the idea of losing a congressman wasn't all that attractive. And there was another aspect, too. You may recall that right after this whole matter erupted, the connection of various important political figures with Jones began to surface. Jones was, as I believe I mentioned in an earlier part of our discussion, was an important political figure in California at one time, and he had played a key role in the election of the then mayor of San Francisco, Moscone, and had himself served in an official capacity as housing commissioner for the City of San Francisco. He had connections with Willy Brown, I believe, the speaker of the California Assembly. He also had connections with Dymally, who was then lieutenant governor of California, and several other political figures.

On the national level, too, he had several letters of congratulations from various politicians whom he had assisted over the years. So the whole Jonestown affair, from the point of view of the Department, was a very sticky one and way out of the norm of usual diplomatic practice.

Q: *Well, too, was there still sort of a backlash from what had happened in Chile where there had been acquisitions, a book and a movie had come out that our embassy really hadn't done enough to help young Americans who were killed by the coup in Chile when the military dictatorship came up? I don't know whether this was part of the atmosphere at that time or not.*

BURKE: Yes. Well, I think there may have been. I never heard of anybody raise the possibility of a connection with the Chile affair. There were, in the first days of the whole business expressions of concern that the embassy had not done more to be on top of this matter. But then when people began to look at our record, the embassy's record on this, what we had done on the way of reporting on Jonestown and People's Temple well before the event, it was pretty clear that the embassy had done quite a responsible job and probably gone as far as it could given the natural and legal inhibitions that now confront us in dealing with consular problems.

Q: *Well, I was looking through a newsletter that comes out on a weekly basis called, "Facts on File," dealing with newspaper accounts. And in it there was a mention that at some point later on that the Commission that was looking at this--I guess it must have been the Crimmins Commission--said that your June long report was too carefully worded, which sounds to me being a bit factious. Because if something is carefully*

worded, everybody can read both between the lines. And they know exactly what the Freedom of Information inhibitions are on reporting on American citizens. And that certainly this is the way--I mean, again, I think the word "precious" comes out.

BURKE: Well, I must say, I was less than happy with the Crimmins and Carpenter report, because it seemed to me that they bent over backwards to try and protect the Department as far as they could.

Q: *Do you think maybe this is what they were set up to do?*

BURKE: Yes. In any event, they did make--I can't remember the exact words they used, but it's pretty close to what you've just said that somehow my June cable was so abstruse or so convoluted that it wasn't fully understood in the Department. But then they failed to reprint my cable in their report even though I had made it a LOU when I originally drafted it.

Q: *LOU means limited official use.*

BURKE: Limited official use.

Q: *Which is the lowest classification.*

BURKE: Which is no classification, it's just administration protection to keep anybody who might be intercepting our plain cable traffic from reading it. But certainly it was not classified in any way. It wasn't meant to be classified. But it had long since been made open to the public.

Q: *By the way, would it be possible to get? Do you have a copy of it, by any chance?*

BURKE: Oh, yes.

Q: *Would you give me a copy to put in this report?*

BURKE: Sure.

Q: *I think it would be interesting.*

BURKE: Yes. Yes, I'll see if I--I must have a copy somewhere.

But in any event, they did a precise of my cable in their report instead of reprinting the whole thing. So I found rather curious the fact that they'd comment on the quality of my drafting and then not give the public-at-large an effort to judge for themselves. And furthermore, if my cable were unclear for any reason, all the Department had to do was come back and say, "We didn't understand this," or "Did you mean this or that or the

other thing?" Because I certainly received no such cable. The Department did replay three weeks later and said, "No, don't go to talk to the Guyanese government."

I was so outraged by the Crimmins-Carpenter report, quite honestly, that I demanded that my cable and the Department's response to it be released to the public. And the Department said, yes, they would do this. And then a journalist friend of mine came through, Jerry O'Leary, and he was then working for the Washington Star, and asked me about the cable.

And I said, "Well, the Department has said they were going to release it."

And he said, "It hasn't been released yet."

So he went back to Washington and demanded copies of it, which he got and then did quite a good front-page story, as a matter of fact, giving my side of the debate.

Well, in any event, the Department's handling of this was curious, indeed, the fact that the Crimmins-Carpenter team had been established rather than using the regular Inspector General's teams, and the curious report that they produced which seemed to go out of its way to come down on the embassy and try and protect the Department as much as possible.

Q: *Well, in a way it's curious. But it's not curious, because this is what the special commissions are designed to do anyway. I'm speaking as an experienced bureaucrat.*

Before we go back to when you returned to Washington, I would like to ask, in Guyana did you get at all involved in something which goes back to, my God, Teddy Roosevelt's time, and that is the border question between Venezuela and what used to be British Columbia and all? I mean, this is a continually sore point particularly on the Venezuela side. Did this involve you at all then?

BURKE: The border dispute, fairly important reaches of northeast Guyana are claimed by Venezuela, and in fact, some of the maps that you see in Caracas of Venezuela they've got sizeable chunks of Guyana as part of Venezuela. It really wasn't an important issue while I was there. In fact, Carlos Andres Perez, the President of Venezuela, actually paid a state visit to Georgetown while I was there. So the relationship between Venezuela and Guyana was fairly, not friendly necessarily, but certainly correct at that time.

Now, there was the very interesting suggestion made that the reason Burnham gave that particular territory to Jones to establish his community was so that he would have a trip wire of Americans up there should the Venezuelans ever come across the border and reclaim all of that territory by force. The first thing they would encounter would be 900 American citizens. I asked Burnham about that one time, and he sort of smiled, but he wouldn't officially confirm.

Q: *I imagine the Venezuelans were rather pleased that they hadn't tried anything at that point, or they would have Jonestown in their front yard or back yard.*

BURKE: Yes. Yes.

Q: *You left Guyana in 1979. You came back and you were first with the intelligence community staff. Again, this, of course, is an unclassified interview, but could you describe, if you can, what that did and what were some of the problems in that sort of operation?*

BURKE: Well, I really can't go into much detail of the substance of the work we were doing. Under the Executive Order, the Director of Central Intelligence has responsibilities beyond just CIA. He has oversight responsibilities for the entire intelligence community which includes, of course, the Bureau of Intelligence Research of the Department, which includes NSA, the National Security Agency, which includes CIA, of course, which includes the Defense Intelligence Agency. And even though these are--his control is really that, as I said, of oversight, but he has a coordinating function and role to play under the Executive Order. And he has a very small staff which really attempts to coordinate intelligence-gathering activities amongst all these elements so that insofar as possible you don't have people prowling the same turf and using resources on the same question or the same intelligence targets.

And that really is the principle function of the small staff. You have representatives of all the intelligence community serving on the staff. It's almost like the Joint Chiefs. It's not the same thing at all, but in terms of people working for the Joint Chiefs are expected to, more or less, give up their service allegiance while they're functioning on the Joint Staff and put the common wheel above their natural service inclination. And the various people serving on the intelligence community staff really work for a very specific period on detail and usually return to their parent organizations.

The office I headed was the National Collection Planning Office within the intelligence community staff, and in that capacity I had officers from CIA, from the Defense Department, from the State Department working under me.

Q: *From your observation, how well did the intelligence services cooperate? Was there an awful lot of competition? And was the competition good?*

BURKE: Well, I was a naval intelligence officer during the Korean War, not during World War II, and I had a fair amount of intelligence experience before coming into this job and an association with the military intelligence services. I'd say that the cooperation is--there's still a lot of parochialism, but I'd say it's getting better in terms of cooperation than it was 20 years ago. But there's still a long way to go, and the problem of turf is still an important one.

Q: *Well, then to move to your last assignment, this was what? Deputy Assistant Secretary for--*

BURKE: Administration.

Q: *For Administration. But dealing with?*

BURKE: Well, head of the Classification-Declassification Center.

Q: *Could you say what this comprised of and what were the problems with this?*

BURKE: Yes. Well, as you know, the Freedom of Information Act has put a responsibility on all government agencies to provide information on request to any American citizen. If you have the price of a stamp and a fixed address, you can ask any agency to give you just any information for which they have responsibility.

You can, for example, write into the Department of State and say, "I want yesterday's cables from Moscow." And the Department--it doesn't mean you're going to get them. But the Department has to process your request, which means that they will receive your request, they'll pull out all the cables that came out of Moscow yesterday, they'll be reviewed to see whether or not they can be declassified and made available to the requestor.

And as you can imagine, the number of requests coming in to a department such as State, such as Defense, such as CIA from the public at large for official information. These requests are really enormous both in terms of number and size, and the Department established the Classification-Declassification Center to try and get a handle on this problem.

In addition to both the Freedom of Information side, the Department for years predating Freedom of Information has had this program of releasing its own files on a 30-year basis and putting out volumes prepared by the historian's office, the historian of the Department of State, on various aspects of our foreign relations. This whole series began back in 1961, and in the process you have to declassify and examine what the historian's office proposes to put in these particular volumes to see if they still have sensitivities. So the Classification-Declassification Center really functions as a filter to decide what is still sensitive and what may be released, both under Freedom of Information and under the "Foreign Relations of the U.S. Series" which is the official title for this program of releasing systematically our diplomatic files.

Also, of course, the stuff that doesn't appear in the "Foreign Relations of the U.S." volumes, as you can imagine, it's just a fairly small percentage of documents that actually appear therein, the bulk of the stuff goes to the National Archives and is kept there for public scrutiny. But again, that material has to be looked over in terms of its releasability.

So that was principally what I was. I was director of the office of the Classification-Declassification Center. I had a full-time staff, and I also had approximately, well, a pool of 200 retired Foreign Service officers who did the actual reviewing. These were people who had served in various geographic areas and had risen to the old Foreign Service Grade-3 at least and were considered qualified to review classification documents for both FOIA, Freedom of Information, and the "Foreign Relations of the U.S." series.

Also, I got involved in the drafting of the Executive Order on national security information that was issued in 1984 which replaced the Carter Executive Order and, oh, various other problems associated with the general subject of classification and access.

Q: *Did you notice a real difference between the attitude of the Carter Administration and the Reagan Administration in doing this? Or was this more a perception than an actuality?*

BURKE: Actually, I think the Reagan Administration got a bum rap. When the new Executive Order came out in 1984, many people pointed to it as being a more, really, a tighter control of classification than had been the case in the Carter Executive Order. And in some aspects it was. But the interesting thing is that the people who drafted the new Executive Order, by and large, were the bureaucrats who had been working in the various departments and agencies over the years and who were absolutely apolitical, and they just felt that there were certain deficiencies in the Carter Order that had to be corrected. And, therefore, the stricter provisions were actually all proposed by bureaucrats and not by the White House.

Q: *This is very interesting because, you know, these oral history interviews will eventually be read by mainly people who are cursing those who do the screening of the documents. These are designed to be somewhat of a supplement to the documents. So I think it's interesting then to get a flavor.*

Being in charge of this particular process, where would you put the problem? Is it inhibitions because of personnel? Or is it because of stubbornness on the part of, say, within the Department of State or the National Security Council? Where are the biggest tie-ups as far as getting papers out?

BURKE: Well, my preparation--I was a graduate student in diplomatic history before I came into the Department of State, and in my role as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Administration with responsibilities for classification-declassification, I encouraged all of my reviewers to release when possible. Obviously, there are certain things that have to remain classified for the time being. Situations change. Ongoing negotiations can be seriously upset, really, if a document is released which has a bearing on the negotiations and which comes to the attention of the government with which you're dealing. Governments oftentimes operate and react like people, like individuals. So they oftentimes get upset and they permit their upset to impact on negotiations.

But in any event, State, I think, does a very commendable job in the area of releasing documents. We have released some remarkable stuff, I think, over the years. I think the systematic review of the "Foreign Relations of the U.S." series, there isn't another government in the world that has a series comparable to that. In terms of what we release under Freedom of Information or on reference from presidential libraries, we routinely release some remarkable stuff. And I think the record of the U.S. generally and the Department of State particularly stands up under the closest of scrutiny.

Certainly there are people who want more, and I can sympathize with researchers and scholars who want more. But I think given the conflicting positions of what is still sensitive and what has to be protected and what should be gotten out, a fairly good line is walked by the Department.

Q: *You mention that this series started in 1861, and as an historical aside, the famous phrase that Charles Francis Adams used when the British Prime Minister dealing with the British permission of allowing raiders such as the Alabama and the layered [unclear] saying when the British were being somewhat stubborn with Francis Adams that it would be superfluous to add that this could mean war, was reprinted about one year later after he said it. And the reaction of the British was just what you said.*

Well, before we end this interview, I would like to turn back to your time--because we were more pressed before--when you were in Bangkok as deputy chief of mission between 1976 and 1977. We just sort of hopped over that. You worked with Charles Whitehouse, who was the ambassador. I wonder, because he's a man who has had some important assignments, could you describe his method of operation and how he worked?

BURKE: Well, first of all, I've got high respect for Charles Whitehouse. I enjoyed working for him. He's a man of many qualities. He has a wonderful sense of humor. And in terms of his managerial style, I would say it was a very relaxed managerial style in that he was quite willing to let me manage the embassy. But he wanted to be informed, of course, on all matters that he felt should come to his attention. But he would leave that up to the DCM.

I think he was extremely well-liked by all members of his staff because of his good humor, because of the way he handled meetings and the way he dealt with people on a personal basis. He had, I think, a very good way of dealing with foreign officials as well and people of the government in which he was post, in this case Thailand. There are several--oftentimes you'll run into an American ambassador serving abroad who may have been superb bureaucrats on the Washington level, but they don't always function as effectively in a foreign environment in that they don't sufficiently take into account the customs and the idiosyncrasies of the country and people in which they live. I'd say in Whitehouse's case, he was very sensitive to the local environment, and I think that's one of the reasons he was such an effective ambassador at least while the two of us were together. I think that's about it in terms of him. I guess, it reduces managerial style to wanted always to be kept informed and never wanted to be surprised.

Q: *Well, you were both there at a time when there was a change of government and a coup and all this.*

BURKE: Yes.

Q: *How did you all view--could you explain sort of what happened and how did you view this? There was an election in April of '76, and then there was a military coup in October of '76. How did the embassy respond, and how did you see the situation?*

BURKE: Well, actually, he was either on leave or on consultation in Washington at the time of the coup.

Q: *This seems to be the standard operating procedure.*

BURKE: Yes. I was chargé at the time of the coup. It was a rather remarkable coup in many ways. The government rather lost control of the situation, and it involved students, and there were demonstrations by students in Bangkok. In one case, the students hanged a figure in effigy which looked remarkably like the Crown Prince of Thailand. Now, this produced a very sharp reaction on the part of students in a neighboring institution who were really a trade school as opposed to a university. And they burst into the other campus, and the whole thing began to unravel very quickly.

The government seemed to be incapable of handling the situation. It began to get badly out of hand, rioting in the center of Bangkok, and the military moved in and took over the government almost with extreme reluctance, and that was it. At least from the point of view of the military, they got control of the situation. There was a certain amount of bloodshed but largely the bloodshed was as a result of the conflicts between the students themselves and not the military against the students or against the populace.

Q: *Well, what did you do? I mean, there you are chargé and there is a coup. What does one do during a coup?*

BURKE: What you do at the time of a coup is you try to gather as much information as possible about the contending forces.

Q: *How do you do this?*

BURKE: Well, I did it largely through the attaché office. I was really fortunate in that I had an extremely good Army colonel who had been in Thailand for at least a couple of years at that point, and he had excellent connections within the Thai military. So he was able to get first-class information on the situation as it developed. And there was also a Naval attaché, a captain, who had a social relationship with the man who ultimately became head of the coup group, an admiral. And between the two of them, I'd say we had

the coup pretty well taped from the beginning in terms of the people involved, what their purposes were and all the rest of it.

As I mentioned before, it seemed to me that there was a great reluctance on the part of the military to move in and take charge. They didn't really want to, it seemed to me. I think that's a fair judgement. They did because they felt the situation was beginning to unravel so badly and did take over and did restore order and things calmed down. The monarchy was never threatened, and, of course, the monarchy in Thailand in recent history at least provided the great stabilizing force in terms of the society.

Now, it was interesting in a way, I was quite pleased--if one can say one is pleased--that we had the distraction of a presidential election in the United States almost coincidentally with the coup.

Q: *This would have been with Ford?*

BURKE: This would have been Carter-Ford, yes. And I really felt that if Washington had not been so preoccupied with the presidential election, I would have been receiving instruction of the most detailed sort to get well involved early on and probably in the wrong direction. But as it turned out, I didn't get any such instructions. We just played it the way we saw it, and there wasn't any important U.S. involvement as such. We were monitoring the situation, and it evolved and developed. It produced a situation which was inimical to U.S. interest and regretful though it may have been that the elected government of Kukrit Pramoj was swept aside. It seems that there probably was no other way to go given the situation.

Q: *Well, you were there in Southeast Asia at a rather critical time, too, although it was only for not much more than a year when we were really disassembling what we had in Southeast Asia. Particularly, we were pulling out our bases, weren't we, at that point?*

BURKE: We had already pulled out our bases, really. We had a very, very small contingent of U.S. in the country left. So the great dismantling had gone on before my arrival.

Q: *Is this leaving any repercussions, economic or politically? I mean, were you feeling among the Thais an unhappiness or were they pleased that we were out?*

BURKE: Well, certain in the government wanted us out and had asked us to leave. The Thai, I think, the ordinary Thai, missed to a certain extent, the economic infusion that the U.S. forces had provided in terms of money and whatnot. But there was enough dynamism within the Thai economy itself so that the slack was picked up in fairly short order after our departure, after we pulled out our bases and our troops. So that the economic downturn was only a slight jolt and not anything profound or important. So I'd say it went well, and in retrospect it was probably a good thing.

Q: *Well, one last question on Thailand. I mean, again, for some years at the height of our involvement, which you were also much concerned, we were talking about the Domino Theory, that if Vietnam went, the rest of Southeast Asia would go. And at the time you were there, I mean, basically Laos and Cambodia had gone. Thailand would have been next on any domino agenda, and it was still at a time of great pressure. Would you say the concept of the domino thing was faulty from the beginning? Or had something changed between the time we were propounding this in the 1960s particularly and the mid-'70s after Vietnam had fallen?*

BURKE: Well, I personally believe the Domino Theory, always have. The difference, of course, was that we had provided the shield for roughly 12 years by our continued presence in Vietnam--the two references points being '63 and '75, really. So that in that time, ASEAN became an important element.

Q: *ASEAN being?*

BURKE: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which of course is made up of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. And the economies of those individual countries began to move smartly during this time. Certainly the procurement and whatnot by the United States in Thailand helped their economy. But the Thailand I saw in the mid-'50s when I was there the first time and the Thailand of two decades later, just remarkable the self-assurance of the Thai in both the people and the government, really, in terms of being able to handle themselves, that it would have been, say, ten years earlier. So I do feel that if we hadn't hung Vietnam for as long as we did, that the domino process would have taken place, if we had left, say, in '62, '63 or whatever. And Thailand at that stage would have been under great pressure. And of course, the events of China in the meantime and the China of the early '60s was a much more aggressive and maneuvering animal than it was in '73. After all, you already had the Nixon visit and the relationship with the United States was beginning to grow and become important to China. So that it's a completely changed situation in Southeast Asia.

Q: *There are questions we ask of all the people we catch in this program. The first one is a young person comes to you about joining the Foreign Service as a career today, how would you advise them? Is it a good career or not?*

BURKE: In my particular case, I feel it was a good career, and I was very fortunate in the series of posts I had.

Q: *But today?*

BURKE: Today to go in it's a very different situation. I certainly would not discourage anyone if they knew precisely what they were getting into. Because I still think there are great opportunities in the Foreign Service for qualified people. But they have to know exactly what they want to get into, and I would urge them to specialize almost immediately and set their sights along the way for a series of assignments they really

want. If they don't get the assignment they feel they need to build on in order to have a full career, then to get out as early as possible. If they're disappointed anywhere along the way in their first one or two assignments, they shouldn't hang on to the point where, "I feel dead-ended."

It's not as good as it was when I came in the Foreign Service. I don't think there's the sense of dedication that I detected in my A-100 course that still prevails today. But there's still important work to be done, and I think talented people can carve out nitches for themselves. I'd encourage people to go in it, but they have to go in with their eyes open.

Q: *Well, looking back on your career, what gave you the greatest sense of a feeling of accomplishment?*

BURKE: That's a very difficult question for me. I've never been a person who waxes enthusiastic one day and pessimistic the next day. I would guess the most important period was probably the period in Vietnam in the embassy from '63 to '66. I think that we did some really extraordinarily good work in an attempt to try and advise political forces in Vietnam in their efforts to try and put together a representative government. I was impressed with the quality of the Vietnamese I dealt with, their intelligence. And God knows, we had frustrations of many, and in retrospect we didn't do all that well. But it was an important period. We were working six to seven days a week, and we did have some pluses and I'd say that on balance they probably outweighed the minuses. It was an exciting period, and the people I worked with are very high quality people in the embassy in that period.

Q: *I want to thank you very much.*

BURKE: Thank you, sir.

End of interview